

...might be good

J. Parker Valentine

Supportico Lopez, Berlin

Through January 15, 2011

by Ali Fitzgerald

In writing about J. Parker Valentine's work I recall a recent trip with a journalist friend to interview a beer visionary and master malter in North Berlin. As he combed around a batch of slowly gestating whiskey and I lost myself in its surging, retreating shapes, I was reminded of an associative practice that I perfected in front of a lava lamp in a smoky dorm room. Valentine's work at Supportico Lopez leaves me equally glassy-eyed. Her pieces throb with association, are insistently open and demand a visual pluralism that brings to mind the more insightful critiques I had in grad school, the kind that disavow innate artistic hierarchy and focus on unearthing images at a slower, less determined pace.

In the Supportico Lopez space, which is located below street level in a charming and only slightly moist basement, Valentine nods coyly to the aesthetics of pedagogy, tacking elegant exercises in pattern and mark onto a large gray board. Alongside these drawings, Valentine includes photos of cacti, as well as a highly saturated video of a man skinning a deer (dog?) that reads as both instructional and disturbingly sexy. Across the room, large MDF panels are propped against each other in a lazy, knee-high labyrinth. This gesture seems especially well-suited to curious viewers who want to camp between the shapes and tease out some meaning from the moody graphite.

Valentine's work clearly recalls de Kooning, more specifically late de Kooning, when beatific senility had softened his aggressive hand in favor of a more sparse sincerity. With her own gently assured line, Valentine steers viewers through an exposed but deftly constructed world in which spatial relationships assert themselves mysteriously, if at all.

I went back to Supportico Lopez a second time in search of specificity because I was afraid this review would too closely resemble my old dream diary (purchased around the same time as my lava lamp). This time I brought my journalist friend Sabrina, who gave shape to the shapeless, literally calling out images and forms as she excavated them:

"There's a mouth."

"See? That's an animal head."

"Those are definitely teeth."

"That's lipstick."

Judging from Sabrina's catalogue of images, there is something wild, sexual and even sinister happening in Valentine's work.

Or, there's something wild, sexual and sinister happening in Sabrina.

I think if Valentine's installation at Supportico Lopez exalts one thing, it's the joy inherent in multiplicity of meaning. Like a good, meandering critique it revels in mystery.