

**New York, New York - Hannah Barry Gallery, London:** essay by Benjamin Eastman, 2010

"We need to look extremely closely at the particular things before us, because in art we do not make things any simpler by making simpler things. Reduction does not yield certainty, but something like its opposite, which is ambiguity and multivalence." (Kirk Varnedoe)

You have to get up close to Erik Lindman's paintings. Their immediate effect resides in detail – the reaction of the paint to the material to which it is applied; the play of light on texture; the variations on a pre-prepared form that ground each piece in the physical object. The viewer is compelled to look at, not through, these canvases.

Taking an aspect of the physical canvas – an imperfection, a stitch, a fold – Lindman uses the idiosyncrasies of the material as stimuli: "you articulate an accident or you cover it up." Each gesture on the canvas interacts with every other in the creation of a whole that simultaneously acknowledges and transcends the material circumstances of its production. Cut, scrap and pattern contribute to the inclusivity of work that incorporates elements from the real world without reducing the finished canvas to objecthood.

The generosity of the works extends beyond the circumstances of their composition. These works are acts of communication, establishing a reciprocal or bipartisan field between the artist and viewer for the creation of new meaning or the summoning of an emotional response associated with the personal experience of one or both of the participants.

Lindman identifies two stages in a viewer's engagement with the work: the first as the audience addresses the formal "idea of a painting"; the second occurring as the first "slips away". There is a contest enacted in these works (and our engagement with them) between the latticework of technical learning on which viewers draw in a first engagement with an artwork and the capacity of the work itself to supplant or elude these established prejudices. The status of art as purely "learned game", delimited by the corridors of the canon, is challenged:

"The work must push up against something to mean something. The work pushes up against pre-conceived notions of its meaning, aesthetic formation and context; in either failing to meet or in superseding these aggregations of beliefs the work can slip through and become new and active within the audience's experience."

These canvases encourage the viewer to cast aside the conceptual apparatus to which we are trained to refer. Lindman and I talk of how people feel obliged to stand stock-still and open-mouthed in front of a Rothko. Most must surely be awaiting, forcing or faking the quasi-religious transcendence that textbooks tell us we must encounter when confronted with these works. Lindman prefers Blinky Palermo.

The works here are determinedly non-didactic and non-prescriptive. The painting cannot be treated as a statement articulated in a specific visual language which, once deciphered by the viewer, will introduce her to a set of decreed emotional and aesthetic responses. Instead, the paintings open up a "space" for the viewer's engagement, in which her own contribution is essential to the effect.

"I would rather give someone the key to get out of hell than open the door up to heaven", Lindman tells me, and we part.

Interviewed by Ben Eastham in New York, 14.02.10