

Amy Sillman, Landline, Camden Arts Centre, London, U.K.

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Amy Sillman

← *Pink Drawings*, 2015–2016, installation view, Camden Arts Centre, London, U.K., 2018.

Photo : courtesy of Camden Arts Centre, London, U.K.

↑ *Sparbüchse*, 2016, installation view, Camden Arts Centre, London, U.K., 2018.

Photo : Damian Griffiths, courtesy of the artist & Capitain Petzel, Berlin

Amy Sillman

Landline

Kick the Bucket, *The Innies*, *TV in Bed*, *Back of Horse Costume*, *Splitville*, *Lift & Separate*. These are some of the titles of American painter Amy Sillman's latest works (2015–2018), on display in *Landline* at Camden Arts Centre, her first solo show in the U.K. *Lift & Separate* is my favourite title: the age-old catchphrase of the successful brassiere (!) and hallmark of the laconic but generous humour of Sillman's work, and the ways in which it conjures partial and ambiguous bodies. We recognize a head here, a limb there, a neck, a face, genitals, a behind. Hands press to a face; a cartoonish figure slumps to the ground, leans forward, lies down.

It's not clear what is happening in these images: the figures do not orchestrate a clear meaning; narrative is not the point. "We're committed to something scrappy but good, earnest but smart, ironic and not cynical—a strange FORM!" Sillman has written in an issue of *OG*, a slim zine that she publishes regularly. Her paintings are moving, they move. They cannot be contained. Through a riot of colour and many layers of paint, images lie somewhere between figuration and abstraction, shifting and morphing.

In *Slant*, strata of colour—turquoise, purple, mauve, orange, cardinal red, jay feather blue, murky moss green—are stacked in irregular rectangles, interrupted by thinner slanting lines of turquoise, black, and ultramarine. The blocks of colour list and tilt ever so slightly to the right of the canvas, but they also seem to hover as if they constitute an object and not just a field of colour. Layers of paint, carefully accrued, contain time—as if the painting is a palimpsest of itself, its own processes and predilections. *Pink Drawings* is a grid of forty-eight pieces in acrylic, charcoal, and ink on paper. They are arranged across one wall: black, red, pink, white, heavy lines that gesture at twisted forms, maybe bodies, in rebellious transformation.

Different mediums pick up where the paintings leave off—two animated videos depict bodies, shapes, animals

that morph into each other, slice through paper bodies to walk into other worlds, turn and turn like kaleidoscopes. In one gallery, a set of twelve double-sided silkscreens, made at the outset of the Trump administration, are suspended from a wire that runs the diagonal length of the room. These pieces are darker in nature: dark black lines and frayed, assonant colours. Sillman's paintings are funny, but they are also sad, vulnerable, endearing, forceful. They remind me of characters from contemporary literature: the short fiction of Lorrie Moore, with its knowingly lame punning; the characters of Lynne Tillman's novels, who are complex and magnificent, hilarious, self-deprecating. What does it say that Sillman's paintings seem to rise from their flatness into three-dimensional things, characters with attributes, personalities, contradictions? Sillman's paintings, in their absolute painterliness, their exquisite consideration of colour and line, gesture at an innovative painted world that beckons, from somewhere just beyond medium-specificity.

Emily LaBarge

Camden Arts Centre, London, U.K.

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