

DIANE AYOTT: BEYOND MEASURE

The Gallery at Barrington Center for the Arts, Gordon College • Wenham, MA • www.gordon.edu/gallery • Through January 28, 2011

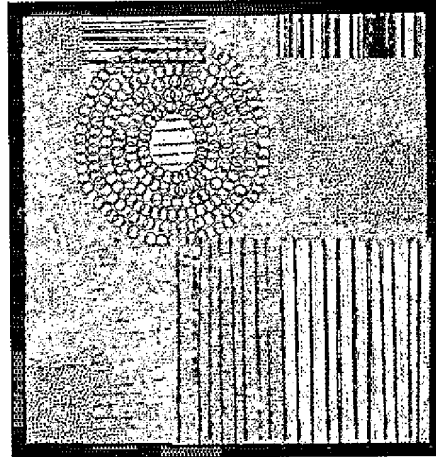
In Ayott's vibrant painting, colors are optically mixed in an abstract style that takes pointillism a step further. Assorted dots, dashes, and repeated stamped patterns are created with a variety of unconventional tools: the stub of a worn paintbrush, plastic boxes and covers, rubber chair leg caps, and, surprisingly, an oval vacuum cleaner attachment.

The exhibition includes mixed media, oil, and acrylic paint applied on panel, paper, or board in diverse sizes. *Upstream* is covered with layers of oil paint and pattern: an orange background layered with dabs of yellow, stamped circles of light blue, green dots, and red lines topped by lavender dashes. The all-over pattern is grid-like but not rigid, leaving room for variations. Edges of the stamped pattern protrude from the surface, as do the textural dots and dashes. The eye moves over the entire painting, taking in the detail and marveling how the colors work together.

Ayott's exceptional skill as a colorist is evident in the gorgeous painting *Floater*; the dazzling peacock blue and orange creates a jewel-

like opulence reminiscent of the geometric abstractions of Gustav Klimt. Also notable is the fearless use of fluorescent colors. In *Witness*, brilliant orange, pink, and green are daringly applied.

In newer works, the underlying grid composition dissolves into free-form shapes. In *Blood Lines*, the serpentine lines of colored dots keep the gaze moving across two canvases, forming a luminous diptych. In *Unpredictable Course*, green, yellow, and orange acrylic paint marks, resembling mosaic tiles,



Diane Ayott, *Snail Mail*, mixed media on paper, 20 x 18 1/2".

spiral and uncoil in circular shapes. Collage, another new element, sometimes adds biographical references. In *Snail Mail*, the novelty of a friend's precious handwritten note is layered into a painted pattern of blue and green enlivened with metallic dots. Pages cut from a teacher's grade book are layered with blue, purple, and green dashes and dots in *Captive*—a telling title, considering Ayott is an associate professor at Montserrat College.

Ayott's meticulous process of painting repeating patterns has a mesmerizing effect. This concentration on a single task becomes a meditation in paint—a focus notable in a culture obsessed with multi-tasking.

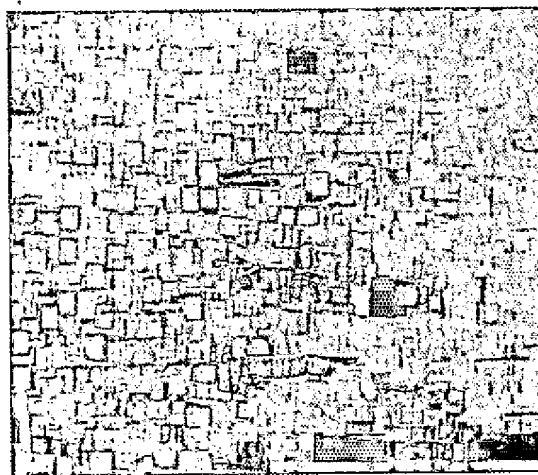
—Susan Mulski

MARK BRADFORD

Institute of Contemporary Art • Boston, MA • www.icaboston.org • Through March 13, 2011

Call them what you will. Mark Bradford calls them paintings, though he doesn't use paint. Some refer to his work as collages, but what they are called is beside the point. Bradford, whatever the end result, is an anthropologist/DJ/conservator of the inner city. His work is constructed from found materials: billboard scrapings, end papers from a beauty salon (where he once worked), and various other mixed media. His main interest is the South Central neighborhood of Los Angeles, where he both lives and works, though to define him by this small tract of geography would be a mistake.

Two paintings act as bookends for this current survey. *Strawberry* (2002) is a brooding arrangement of permanent-wave end papers and a wafting trail of smoke that alludes to the title's slang meaning. A strawberry is a female crack addict who trades sex for crack. The painting is muted and controlled with only a few bright bursts of color like neurons firing as the drug is inhaled.



Mark Bradford, *Strawberry*, 2002, photomechanical reproductions, acrylic gel medium, permanent-wave end papers, and additional mixed media on canvas, 72 x 84". Collection of Barbara and Bruce Berger. Photo: Bruce M. White.

You're Nobody (Til Somebody Kills You) uses the title of a song by Biggie Smalls (who was shot and killed). This spare painting, whether a tribute or cautionary gesture, is superb in its

understatement, masterly even. Created in 2009, this painting suggests that Bradford's talent isn't even beginning to waver.

The rest of the show is also strong. Large works like *Thriller* explode with energy and inventive composition. Here one realizes that yes, these are paintings in the traditional sense and regardless of the process involved, Bradford is a linear descendent of artists like Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning since he handles his materials with a similar deftness.

Taken as a whole, this is the most rewarding exhibition to make its way to Boston in a long time. Certainly it is the best in recent memory. What makes Bradford unique is that despite the rather tight orbit of his world, he doesn't create images to merely celebrate that fact, but rather he subverts and recontextualizes a singular experience, opening up along the way a conduit that allows the viewer in without apology or explanation.

—Robert Moeller