

Tamara Zahaykevich by B. Wurtz



harry goody, 2010, polystyrene, paper, ink, and canned foam, 4 3/4 x 5 1/2 x 4 inches. Images courtesy of the artist and KANSAS.

Mies van der Rohe’s statement “God is in the details” came to mind recently as I was thinking about Tamara Zahaykevich’s work. Her small-scale, handmade objects are all about details. However, their insistent objectness doesn’t point to a transcendental or idealized state, but to the delight of looking at something from within the context of daily life. The works are made of painted foam board, cardboard, and recycled materials such as Styrofoam chunks found on the street or even Zahaykevich’s previous artworks—doubly recycled so to speak.

Pumpkin Queen (2011) is a drumlike shape that hangs on the wall. Its front evokes a conventional flat painting, yet its deep sides are complex and sculptural, and leave us wondering what it is. Their resistance to fit into a category is part of the works’ power. We can’t name what we see and might therefore be more receptive to whatever they have to offer us. It’s not an easy accomplishment to be so squarely midway between painting and sculpture.



Lazy I, 2011, foam board, polystyrene, paper, and acrylic paint, 17 x 11 1/4 x 2 1/2 inches.

I have my own involvement with that subject and am drawn to work that straddles those boundaries. I've never been able to look at a painting without considering its edges too. Often I feel a resistance from sculptural pieces to accept paint on their surfaces.

The miniature scale of Zahaykevich's works adds to their allure and mystery. The architectural spaces they occupy are activated by the works as much as by the viewers' bodies moving up to and around them to discover subtleties and surprises. When Mies used the word God he was clearly talking about the notion of something special. To me that specialness has to do with being in tune with life and the world, the colors and forms that surround us. There is no doubt that the world is a sad and terrifying place, but it is also a place of great beauty and fascination, and Zahaykevich's art evokes the latter.



Eee, 2011, polystyrene, paper, acrylic paint and ink, 13 1/2 x 6 3/4 x 6 1/4 inches.



Pumpkin Queen, 2011, foam board, paper, acrylic paint, and glue, 22 1/2 x 17 3/4 x 23 inches.

Her work is abstract in the most generous sense. Each piece welcomes the viewer's imagination. This is not an abstraction of a 1950s kind, when reading anything into an abstract painting was frowned upon and the emphasis was on the purity of the paint and the reductive progression of art toward some ultimate goal. Today, in an age of pluralism, we no longer expect that and are probably better off for it. Zahaykevich is in the forefront of a new form of abstraction, one that takes place on a smaller scale and is of a more loose, subtle, and personal kind.

Her recent exhibition at KANSAS in New York City was installed with the same intuition and precision that goes into her artwork. She made good use of the quirky layout of the gallery, where rooms are hidden from the eye at first and one has to turn corners to discover them. I started noticing things about the space: a small red-painted wheel near the ceiling; a protruding section of a pipe partially buried in the wall and painted white like the wall. I noticed these details because of Zahaykevich's work. I love it when things like that happen.

—*B. Wurtz is an artist based in New York.*