HOLLY FAY: SYSTEMS
October 10 to November 24, 2012

Systems, installation detail, 2012, oil on paper, variable sizes, approximately 4” x 6”

Systems Branch, 2012, oil, oil stick, acrylic on paper, 22” x 30”

Systems Germination, 2011, oil, oil stick, acrylic on paper, 22” x 30”

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The focus of Holly Fay’s exhibition Systems is not the consideration of one painting in and of itself but how it operates in the space in relation and interaction with the images around it. Viewers are presented with an installation; an orchestration of multiple paintings that populate the gallery walls to create an overall large-scale work. Here the gallery operates as an activated space, a theatre or forum, where ideas play out and where meaning is created through the interplay of the works within the organization of the room. On entering the space, one first encounters paintings on paper with subtle references to landscape that are pinned to the wall or framed in conventional formats. While drawing mild associations to her previous bodies of work, these pieces act as indexes of things to come, introducing us to Fay’s aesthetic and visual vocabulary. Like a constructed symbology or visual language, Fay offers repetitive, figurative and yet ambiguous forms that float without context on layered surfaces. These painterly forms then break away from the rectangular conventions of their paper support and assert their objectness, spreading out across the gallery walls in oval-like, organic shapes, like pods, spores or cells that are clustering, regenerating and mutating. Painted on fleshly or neutral coloured grounds, these images reference both human and plant life systems, allowing viewers to free associate and draw analogies between the natural world and human biology. There is a consciousness in these clusters. Fay’s interest here is in allowing the organization of the exhibition space to communicate and engage viewers in her investigations into the interconnectedness and underlying interdependence of all life systems.

Holly Fay’s paintings are known for their visceral surfaces – like layers of earth and layers of flesh - and these works are no exception. Her particular sensibility with paint has contributed to canvases with an immediate sense of surface, allowing her paint layers to embody the visceral qualities of her subject matter. Marks, forms and textures are built up, buried and revealed, creating surfaces that are not only informed by her process but offer information or histories that are embedded within the paint layers. Her work from previous series has investigated bodily experiences of place and nature, being characterized as representing a phenomenal experience of the natural world, to explore the history that is inherent in our natural environment and our own sustainability. Fay is hesitant to refer to the work as political but there is certainly a quiet and yet pervading social consciousness that reveals itself through the myriad of visual signs presented. Trying to achieve a balance between being scientific and being emotive, Fay has suggested that perhaps this work moves away from the phenomenal realm, but I still see elements at play that disclose subjective, lived experience and consider an intuitive means of knowledge. There is a sense here that through her medium, Fay is attempting to not only communicate ideas but gain personal knowledge on the subjects of her inquiries. Allowing the work to dialogue through its encoded visceral-ness and its spatial organization within the gallery, Systems presents viewers with a compelling exchange between the conceptual nature of the work and the formal qualities of the paint medium.

Despite this more somber reading of the work, there is a clear affirmation that resonates of the innate intelligence of life systems which exist outside of or beyond the systematic control of human science. Fay is hesitant to refer to the work as political but there is certainly a quiet and yet pervading social consciousness that reveals itself through the myriad of visual signs presented. Trying to achieve a balance between being scientific and being emotive, Fay has suggested that perhaps this work moves away from the phenomenal realm, but I still see elements at play that disclose subjective, lived experience and consider an intuitive means of knowledge. There is a sense here that through her medium, Fay is attempting to not only communicate ideas but gain personal knowledge on the subjects of her inquiries. Allowing the work to dialogue through its encoded visceral-ness and its spatial organization within the gallery, Systems presents viewers with a compelling exchange between the conceptual nature of the work and the formal qualities of the paint medium.

Jennifer McRorie

The health of our bodies and that of the earth are inseparable. Since GM seeds and plants don’t have the genetic intelligence that indigenous varieties have, we do not know how they will adapt over time. Through scientific modification, are we exposing natural species to unhealthy mutation, to uncontrolled or irregular growth, and therefore running the risk of not only losing plant varieties but impacting the natural environment and our own sustainability? Interestingly enough, uncontrolled growth is the definition of disease in terms of biology. This realization certainly gives a new and perhaps more somber perspective on the overall installation.

Fay puts forward concerns that through processes like the creation of genetically modified seeds and corporate controlled food production, we may not only be losing the genetic codes that are inherent in natural species for regeneration and sustaining life, but we are also altering our environment and ultimately ourselves. The health of our bodies and that of the earth are inseparable. Since GM seeds and plants don’t have the genetic intelligence that indigenous varieties have, we do not know how they will adapt over time. Through scientific modification, are we exposing natural species to unhealthy mutation, to uncontrolled or irregular growth, and therefore running the risk of not only losing plant varieties but impacting the natural environment and our own sustainability? Interestingly enough, uncontrolled growth is the definition of disease in terms of biology. This realization certainly gives a new and perhaps more somber perspective on the overall installation.

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