

Opinion

Annette Lemieux Paces-Out Painting's Coffin

THE DAILY PIC: In Elizabeth Dee's new Harlem space, Annette Lemieux walks on a canvas – giving CPR to painting's corpse?

Blake Gopnik, September 27, 2016



THE DAILY PIC (#1643): The new Elizabeth Dee space in Harlem opened on Saturday, and this piece is from the first exhibition in its new “research series” – in this case, a focused presentation of the work of Annette Lemieux, the neglected 1980s artist. According to the gallery, Lemieux’s 1988 canvas, titled *Nomad*, reproduces the footprint of her Boston studio at the time, and is “a play on the idea of how she could ‘re-enter’ painting, which she considered while pacing back and forth across the studio. The act is replicated here, and for the duration, she never left the canvas.”

I like the idea of a painting that’s all about pacing-out the death of painting – it reminds me just a touch (a touch) of a New Orleans funeral parade.

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It also calls to mind a micro-tradition of stepped-on art that isn't well known at all. It began with Yoko Ono, whose first solo show in July of 1961, at AG Gallery in New York, included a blank canvas that was meant to be walked on, thus delegating its almost-abstract content and style to the audience. That piece was probably the inspiration for Andy Warhol's almost identical work at around the same time, in which he put a blank canvas out on the street, in a Cage-ian effort to let chance take charge of a work. (Warhol and Ono could easily have come up with the same piece at the same time by accident. The ideas behind it were in the air. Although our only evidence for the existence of Warhol's piece is his say-so – and he is art history's most reliably unreliable narrator.)

In the space of 25 years, a gesture that was all about ceding control to a crowd gets recast, by Lemieux, as a marker of one artist's lonely and deliberate cogitation. Ono and Warhol were interested in bringing painting to the brink of death as a personalized expression of an artist's intent; Lemieux wanted to see if she could revive the corpse they created.