

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Lyssa Sartori, Ian Pedigo, "Amy Sillman: To Be Other-Wise," *Artpyre*, June 24, 2024



Amy Sillman: To Be Other-Wise

6/24/2024

[Lyssa Sartori](#)

[Ian Pedigo](#)

[Review](#)



Ghost, 2023-2024

Acrylic and oil on linen

75 x 66 inches (190.5 x 167.6 cm)

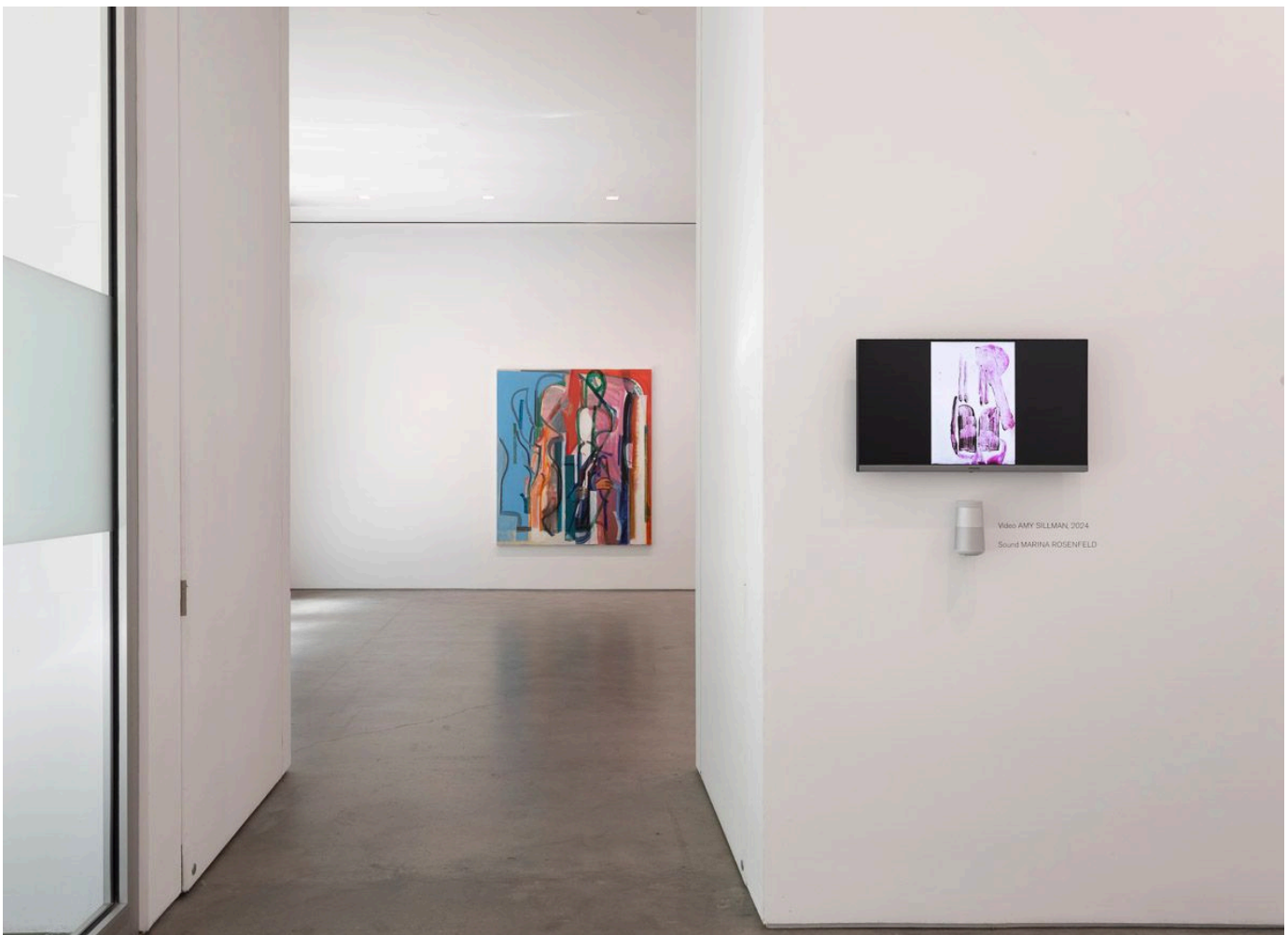
© Amy Sillman

Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery

Photography by David Regen

Sillman's recent exhibition, *To Be Other-Wise*, was on view at Gladstone Gallery, New York, from May 2, 2024, to June 15, 2024. The artist, who incorporates painting, collage, and printmaking into her practice, is also known for speaking about the pivotal role of drawing in her work. Her show at Gladstone proved to be no exception, where the viewer saw her use of the physical apparatus of drawing dissolving traditional distinctions of abstraction and form, or figure and ground.

Upon arriving at the gallery, the viewer was greeted by two collaborative works: a collection of zines made by Sillman, John Hulsey, and Lisa Robertson, as well as a video titled *Abstraction as Ruin*. The latter featured an animation of over 300 drawings produced by Sillman, accompanied by sound by Marina Rosenfeld. The video put the viewer into contact with the gesture of physical abstraction, played to the tune of a somewhat slapstick soundtrack.



Installation view, Amy Sillman:*To Be Other-Wise*, Gladstone Gallery, New York, 2024.

© Amy Sillman.

Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery.

Photography by David Regen.

In the artist's own words, as quoted from the *Washington Post* (where the video was also featured): "I want these drawings to mirror the feeling in your gut as you turn away from the news and gaze downward in anguish at your own paunch, to portray you psychically trying to get yourself together as you droop, despair and come undone." The video translated the sentiment of desperation from consuming the overwhelming news of the world, including the war in Gaza this past year.

In the larger gallery space were several paintings and a wall filled with drawings. While the paintings represented the artifactual act of layering—sequentially revised on the singular canvas, in turn re-metamorphosing each layer into another composition revealing a new form of meaning—the wall of drawings was more bare and shameless, representing a time-based, serial sequentiality of a single drawing on paper moving from frame to frame. To further this point, the drawings, titled *UGH for 2023 (Torsos)*, appeared to have been among those recorded in the video.

Sillman's paintings, of course, shared a strong affinity with the drawings, where here, they often represented the forms of torsos or fragmented, rather than full, figures. The convergence of figuration and abstraction lent to the truncated figure in a state of potential ruin. Looking more closely, one could see in the paintings gestures that attempted to reach, connect, or contradict one another, revealing transparency, definition, as well as dissolution.



Albatross 1, 2024

Acrylic and oil on linen

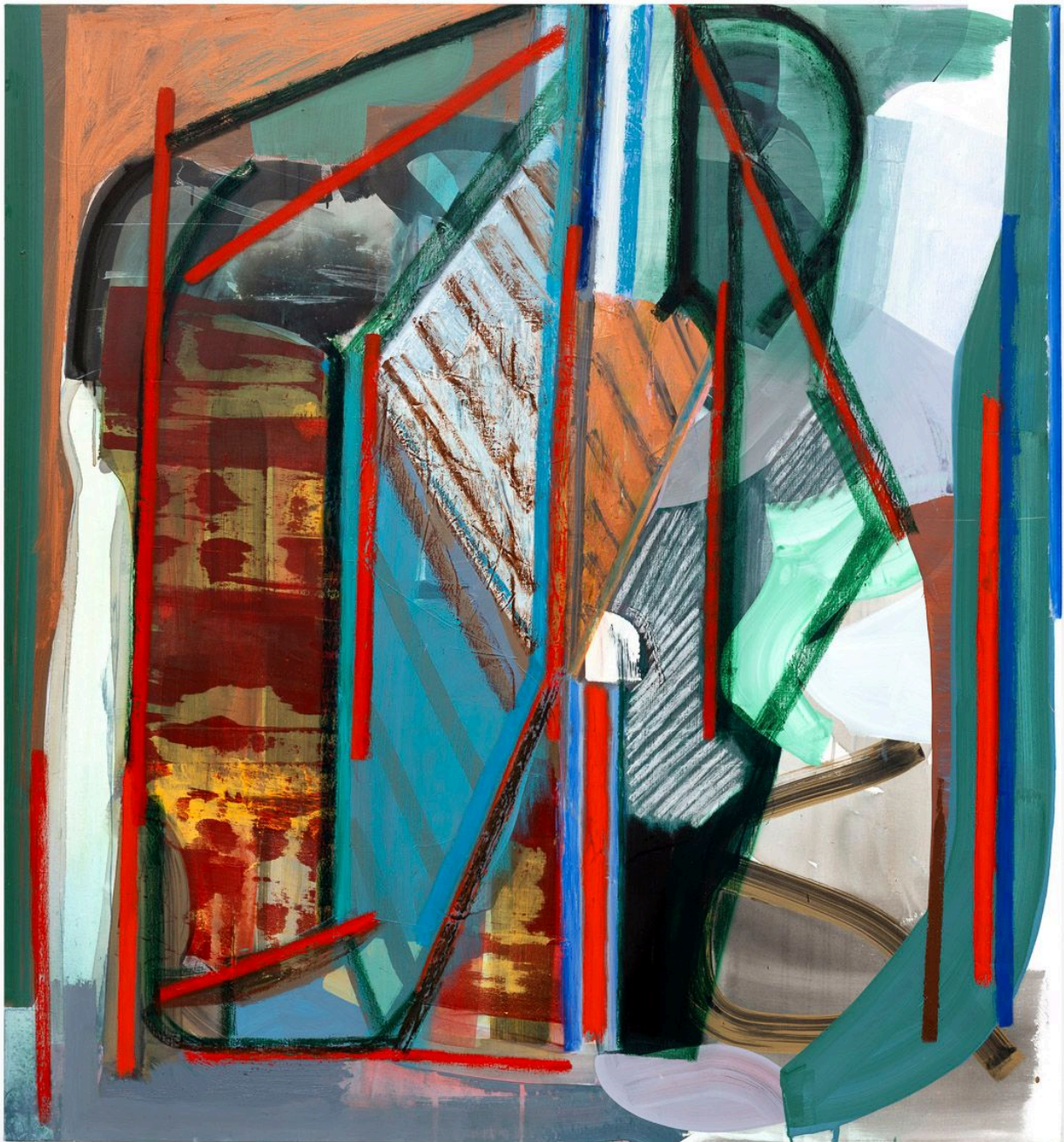
75 x 66 inches (190.5 x 167.6 cm)

© Amy Sillman

Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone
Gallery Photography by David Regen

Take, for example, the work *Albatross 1*, where a bird appeared to hang with its neck draped over a figure's shoulder. When looking at the figure, one saw its top section more defined, yet the figure became more abstract as one's gaze moved towards their mid-section. The same treatment is applied to the bird, where we saw definition to albatross' face and head, but the rest of its body became more dissolved. Dealing with the face, which is the part of the body that identifies or individuates the subject, the treatment was slightly more representational. In contrast, the core of the body was more gestural, asking the viewer to rely on a visceral impression rather than by sight alone.

Other works in the show brought to mind another subject, one that wasn't addressed in the press release, which was of vitality. In examples such as *Almost Blue*, and *Oh, Clock*, the imposition of lines in reds or blues seemed to reference veins or arteries, generating a vital pulse for the forms in composition. There is a general quality of fluidity involved, which is one way we could describe Sillman's gesture, but after intuiting the abstract figure's presence in each, it's difficult not to see these lines as giving a certain life to them; a vital color piercing through each.



oh, Clock, 2023

Acrylic and oil on linen

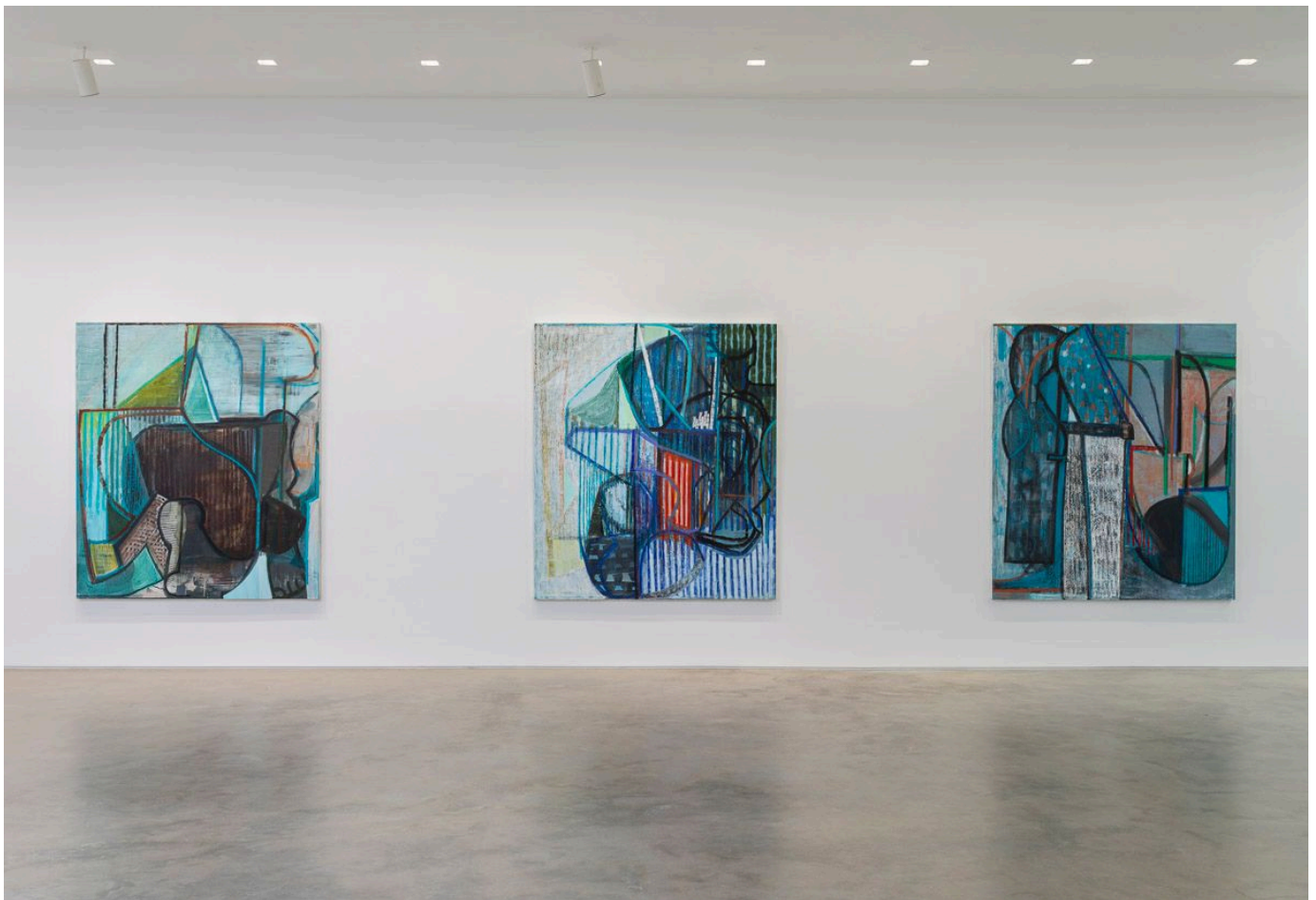
59 x 55 inches (149.9 x 139.7 cm)

© Amy Sillman

Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery

Photography by David Regen

On another wall, a series of three blue paintings were displayed. In *Minotaur*, *Harpie*, and *Clown*, a certain density of character was suggested by their titles, conjuring curious notions regarding the thought behind their creation. In two of the works, a reference to ancient mythological figures, and with the other, one that was more modern. The exercise of finding an exact definition seemed beside the point. Instead, one should approach these as impressionable entities. Like the torsos, we should consider these not as abstract forms for visual analysis, but as abstractions leading us to experiences and encounters that language alone fails to capture for us.



Installation view, Amy Sillman:*To Be Other-Wise*,
Gladstone Gallery, New York, 2024.

© Amy Sillman.

Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery.

Photography by David Regen.

Sillman's work appears to reveal the process behind the encounter, revealing things that unfold, and develop rather than through trying to analyze or know. It is in this messy zone where we find life and our humanity. Her work doesn't seem to seek ideal beauty or perfection, but rather to convey forces of construction, deconstruction, and way we get there in between. It embraces vulnerability, improvisation, and the unknown, leading the viewer towards the feel of the body rather than its appearance.

Lyssa Sartori
& Ian Pedigo