

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Edward Waisnis, "Amy Sillman: To Be Other-Wise at Barbara Gladstone Gallery," *Whitehot Magazine*, July 4, 2024



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## Amy Sillman: To Be Other-Wise at Barbara Gladstone Gallery



*Amy Sillman, UGH for 2023 (Torsos), 2023-2024, acrylic and ink on paper, 74 parts, 32 x 22 inches (each).  
Courtesy of Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York*

By **EDWARD WAISNIS** July 4, 2024

*In remembrance of Barbara Gladstone.*

Pulling out all the stops from her practice's repertoire, and capped by sixteen medium-to-large paintings, Amy Sillman presents a mic-drop of an exhibition under the banner: *To Be Other-Wise*.

Greeted by a terra cotta cherub sitting on the edge of the reception desk, head tilted up, mouth wide open, as if emitting a song, one's attention is next taken by the stack of zines (1) next to this figure, accompanied by a sign with the legend: "Zines \$1 (includes tax) Give \$ to front desk person." It is only after reading the essay accompanying the shows catalogue that one ascertains the title of this earthenware figurine—The Bored Stripper—that one gains the understanding that it is a yawn depicted. Nor is her maw to be taken as a deposit-point for a zine purchase. A real threat, as to which the signs scripted admonishment lends evidence. A subsequent diversion comes by way of a wall-mounted monitor playing a one-minute long looping animation forged from Sillman's drawings and aurally supported by a 'boing-boing' otherworldly Marina Rosenfeld soundtrack, *Abstraction as Ruin*, 2024.

Knowing of Sillman's early, and deeply abiding allegiance to experimental film, as well as a practitioner's respect for the written word (and printed poetics in general) it is fitting to be greeted by these two augmentations before entering the gallery proper.

Eschewing the moniker of painter, in an interview on YouTube (2), in favor of embracing the title of 'drawer' Sillman, recognizing her passion and focus, brings to mind another artist usually thought of as a painter par excellence (as well as a sculptor and master printmaker) whose ultimate strength lies in his foundational proficiency in line—Picasso. In fact, the specter of this giants' oeuvre, and equally those of Matisse, Guston and DeKooning preside as a canonical foundation upon Sillman chooses to build. A deep-seated repository of study and knowledge, set off by a time-worn faith in the pursuit of discovery and invention, a reverence for Modernist abstraction and aided by production of a massive quantity of drawings, have brought Sillman's work to its current state. Previously Sillman's painting passed through a different set of concerns, with a strong nod to French abstraction circa 1950, from Tachisme to Art Informel.

Sillman has spoken about being saddled with a lack of convergence (3) which inhibits her from seeing depth. As well as commenting that Matisse's inherent flatness could also be attributed to this aberration. If this is the case, I would argue that Picasso most surely shared this disorder with the only other contemporary painter he considered a worthy rival.





*Amy Sillman, Afternoon, 2024, acrylic and oil on linen, 75 x 66 inches.*

Back to those drawings: Amounting to center stage placement, the center back wall in the second gallery is taken over by a selection of seventy-four works on paper, tacked directly to the wall, in a grid five rows high. The selection is intermingled from two series, *UGH for 2023 (Torsos)*, a set of 195 drawings, and *UGH for 2023 (Words)*, comprised of 103 drawings, merged as *UGH for 2023 (Torsos and Words)* for the presentation here. This wall of heaving cells not only acts as the exhibition's anchor, but connects to the animation for which they were the source material.

Confronted by the spectacle of *Ravenna, 2024*, all sinewy movement with wisps of a figure and disembodied orange hands against autumnal passages abruptly commanded to a halt by a solid forceful plane of sky blue on the left side of the canvas. Continuing along this wall next up is *Little instrument, 2023-24* wherein a motif of obscuring and coalescing stripes are introduced and will crop up throughout the show. Sillman has brilliantly deployed a Chippendale tinged edge, along the



bottom of this boxy canvas, of diaphanous white overlay that seems to levitate the entire composition. Not to be satisfied Sillman calls attention to this detail of resolution by highlighting it with a forrest green dry brush underline along the lower edge of the painting. This accent also nicely echoes touches of this same color laid down in the upper half of the picture.

The pairing of *Afternoon*, 2024 and *Little Elephant*, 2023 complete the wall by riffing on the figure presenting an argument as to that two these works being the culmination of the 195 drawings in the torso series. In the case of *Afternoon* the title aptly captures time-suspended détente état during a lazy midday.



*Amy Sillman, Ravenna, 2024, acrylic and oil on linen, 75 x 66 inches.*

Around the corner, and now into the main gallery is *Clock*, 2023. The title pointing my receptors to Jasper Johns for the first time. Between what could be a wispy silhouette reminiscent of John's outlined self-portrait appearing in his *Four Seasons*

series and the areas of cross-hatch styled stripes. Plus, the title calling to Edvard Munch's *Between Clock and Bed*, resuscitated by Johns in both title and imagery. My reverie is stopped short by the daubs of streaked alizarin crimson, in the flavor of Howard Hodgkin, and the bands of glowing red throughout harking to free-floating zips (Newman) or hand-painted fluorescents (Flavin). A cousin, *Almost Blue*, 2024 hangs in tandem, an earth and air toned squeegee fest.

The trio of identically-sized Aegean-hued paintings, *Minotaur*; *Harpie* and *Clown*, all 2023-24, comes next presenting a presidium harmonious to a spectrum of classical influences, as to which the first two titles allude, culminating in Keatonesque posturing while passing through a flirtation with tailoring al la 60s Savile Row savor faire that is *Clown*. From its tendril grid to the stoic evocation of a sturdy-built structure/figure that shows tendencies to Picasso's *Three Musicians* in its smartness. Sillman's methods produce plates of color that float and submerge amongst active strategies involving both clipped and flowing line as well as erasure by means of scrapping and wiping and scumbled passages that most closely resemble applications of a layer of color crayon that rides across the high points of what lies beneath, leaving pits at the low points of the ground that peek through.

Then, we are upon the monumental wall of drawings, followed by a quartet of paintings of missed pedigree. From *The Banana Tree*, 2023, a work that buzzes with movement, mindful of Boccioni. The effect is enhanced by placement, allowing the vibrations from the adjoining wall of drawings to be echoed and sustained. *NBFF*, 2023-24 and *Albatross I*, 2024 play their roles in validating and furthering this energy.

The whole affair closes with *Clownette*, 2024, hung diagonally from its gender opposite, and displays the Johnson flavor in all its subtlety. Its curvilinear 'stoppages' call to recollection Duchamp—another Johns favorite—but it is the glinting orb, with radiating dashes, along the right edge that evoke those intrusive eyes in Johns work of the late 90s/early 2000s; one merely need substitute the ray-like dashes for the similarly rendered 'eyelashes'. I don't know if what I am pointing out is subconsciously, or consciously, in the work, or if the inducement of such mental wanderings can be credited to the a spell exuded by the work itself?

I could say more, particularly about works I skipped over, but, alas, I will leave it here by saying that I consider myself lucky in having caught the exhibition on the very last day! **WM**