

DIKE BLAIR

By David Gibson

USA

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Approaching the art of Dike Blair is no ordinary task. His work is monumental and oblique, sleek and detail-orientated, and it maintains its distance from any standard aesthetic response. The works in Blair's recent solo exhibition were two sculptural installations paired with a series of gouache paintings. *Hard Shadows* (2012) and *Dance Dance Dance* (2011) comprise a pair and a trio of white packing crates, which are used as both the container and the support structure for a set of abstract gouache paintings on paper. The psychedelic qualities of his paintings alternately reference transcendental mysticism, Modernist architecture and the suggestively idealistic abstract imagery most commonly associated with iTunes Visualizers, which set whatever music is being played to a randomly generated depiction of imagined cosmological phenomena.

Blair is interested in creating a visual event that transforms into a visceral one. As we look at the gouache that is hung upon the front of the box, we become conscious of how the specific elements of the painting have been used to suggest further surface details that wind around each side of the box and even play upon the interior surface, which is opened and laid upon the floor, inside face up, as if to provide every detail possible in the dramaturgical explanation of meaning. For instance, *Dance Dance Dance* begins with three boxes, two of which remain closed and one that is open on one side. The interior of the lip of the box is painted in a light red mist with three white squares peeking out, like stones in a path that carry some interior illumination. They lead, like the paintings on the outside, straight back inside the box, which is empty, and merely throws us back out to confront, yet again, the variety of



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pictorial references that melt, dance and glower across the broad face of the box like unseen moods hiding secret knowledge, or extreme changes in weather that deny understanding.

Adding to the experience of this exhibition are three neat little gouaches that explore how an interest in visual phenomena can draw the eye towards the most minute of pictorially defined moments. They portray the passive movement of light through a bathroom window or stall, with only vague forms beyond the barrier and the knowledge that the subject of the image is a space defined by intimacy where the necessary functions of the body are attended to in a routine fashion. These images were produced from photographs the artist took while on a trip to Japan, and they reflect his own heady fascination with space, illumination and the difference in aesthetic and use value between spatial and sensory experiences in foreign places versus familiar ones. Blair's achievement is that we never perceive these bathrooms as mere functional environments, just as his boxes are transformed from utilitarian containers of value into vessels of potential meaning.

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