

Tomory Dodge at ACME
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It's evident that Tomory Dodge has painted for some time, and with commitment. When he was 12 years old, Dodge announced to his mother that he was an artist. He's 29 now. According to Acme co-owner Bob Gunderman, "people who've been collecting as long as I've been alive", are showing interest. Concurrent exhibitions, at Acme in Los Angeles and at Taxter & Spengemann in New York, have sold out, and affirm this. Unbelievably, all of the work at Acme, and most of the work at Taxter & Spengemann, was completed in 2004.

Dodge is familiar with the capacities of paint and the context of painting practice. In his work, he aestheticizes a landscape of decay, bringing to light the contradiction between the materiality of paint and the illusionistic image. He uses this materiality within the construction of representation, drawing from the tradition of Abstract Expressionism, but using it in a different way. Anoka Faruqee, who was Dodge's mentor at Calarts, says, "It's almost like working backwards, using material to dictate the subject, instead of the subject dictating the material. His subject matter is linked to the way he paints; the primacy of that paint is what's creating the painting, not the adherence to the image."

Several large canvases in Acme's main gallery ensured that viewers, perhaps lost in the delicious surface, would turn to engage the other paintings from a distance. The perspectival trajectories in the debris-strewn landscapes of *After Party*, o/c, 72" X 84" and *Inside Out*, o/c 72" X 96", click into place, producing a remarkable accuracy, considering the paintings are made from Dodge's imagination. The paintings bear scrutiny and distance equally well, where the details of painterly invention and choice of color produces a rich field. Whereas a painter such as Michael Reafsnnyder loads the surface heavily, a more controlled use of paint forms Dodge's approach, one in which the individual strokes are noticeably performative. In *Tunnel*, o/c, 84" X 96", the canvas is large enough to accommodate the really broad gestures that made the artist's body move. Like a photographer circling a subject, this movement in the image refers back onto the artist; the canvas inherits the artist's position in space.

Based on sites from Dodge's past, they put forth a narrative, but not so much one of subjectivity. They're painted from his imagination as a starting point. It's the bodily materiality, particular to paint, and the seductive viscosity, particular to *oil* paint, that is foregrounded and the fields of fantasy it allows. The image is based in the real, but the paint is what allows it to become fantastical. He's approaching the fantasy through paint, how these abandoned sites and objects of decay become visually engaging. Because the paint allows for ambiguity, it's not a documentary approach to a painted image or a specific connection to the past.

The paintings bring up a question of the relationship of skill to a cultural practice which has noted that a shift has taken place (again) from unusual abilities to an emphasis on the navigation and display of meaning within the actual art object, and to the broader context in which it resides. Has this become an a priori condition for which painting's criticality is already undermined? In terms of Dodge's painting, his awareness of what constitutes an effective contemporary art practice validates the works beyond an acknowledgement of skill. Dodge's work is more than capable; it's effective because it's based on a thorough knowledge of painting, and a letting go of these concerns and moving beyond.