

ACME.

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Critic's Choice: Tomory Dodge puts freedom back into the picture at ACME.

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A long time ago, abstract painters talked freely about freedom. They went into the studio to find it.

Then it seemed they needed some freedom from freedom. That word disappeared from discussions, replaced by ideas less burdensome, less portentous, less ambitious.

At ACME., 23 new paintings by Tomory Dodge sneak freedom back into the picture.

Rather than declaring that freedom is their goal from the get-go, the L.A. painter's dense oils on canvas let freedom seep, burble and fizz from the gaps between the irregular shapes and clashing planes that make up their vigorously worked surfaces.

Dodge's paintings have one foot firmly planted in the mechanics of collage and the other in that of plate tectonics. Each canvas looks as if it has been cobbled together from cut-and-pasted fragments, all taken from long-lost sources.

Each also feels as if it's under great pressure, its disparate slabs, chunks and slices relentlessly pushing into one another — and being pushed by others.

All of Dodge's compositions consist of an impressive inventory of types of painterly application. It's clear that brushes of various sizes, shapes and bristle-stiffness have been used. The same goes for palette knives, trowels, rags, hands and fingers.

Some sections are brushed on thickly, the paint meaty. Other areas are atmospheric, made of thin washes. Handmade patterns play off of meandering lines. Scraped off passages expose earlier applications. Wet-on-wet blurs share space with monochrome blobs.

To look at any of Dodge's rock-solid compositions is to see all kinds of ways of organizing reality. No single method adequately captures reality's complexity. The magic happens in the gaps between the various sections. That's where the mystery — and the freedom — resides.

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