Anne Neukamp

Johanna da Rocha Abreu
A Quickening: Paintings by Anne Neukamp

Looking back through an assembly of paintings by Anne Neukamp doesn't so much mark a point in time in the artist's career as represent an outtake in a reel of pictures that one can imagine continuously playing out over time. Her paintings have a cinematic quality to them. Schema flicker against the muted, pale backgrounds. Each time the eye examines a stroke or outline, it grapples to identify a skewed symbol or a distended puzzle piece and tries to capture a brief moment of understanding. The sensation is one that is fleeting. The eye may rest on an image briefly in the knowledge of faint recognition, yet the "aha" moment eludes the viewer. Instead, a quickening emerges as we realize Neukamp places us in a looping of images, coming around time and time again, and with each full-circle of experience and use, slightly altered. Our senses are not confirmed but heightened.

Neukamp plays with communication and understanding, deliberately choosing symbols in print and type that for the last century have symbolized an absolutist conveyance of information, such as the dash, the ampersand, and more recently the hashtag. Equally at play in her work are ubiquitous symbols, like the on and off button symbol, that hover like shadows of the actual objects they represent (hardly existing in their original form any longer). Neukamp renders these very "black and white" signs and logos that once signified a kind of road-map to clarity ineffective by amputating, oversizing, or super-abstracting them or just turning them on their head.

These graphics would lie flat and lost on monochromatic surfaces were it not for the robust intervention of objects like ropes, envelopes, keys, and paperclips that seem almost fleshy and three-dimensional as they either come to the fore or cleave down the middle of the canvas. In one painting *Juggler* (2015), a hand seems to bring the black and white, almost cartoonish slashes to the surfaces as an offering to contemplate and even challenge. In works like *Inveiglement* (2017), the envelope becomes an activator, willing viewers to look inside, or in *Refrain* (2017), the key seems to pull back and open the underlaying graphic allowing it to unfurl into a new dimension. These galvanizing objects force our eye to shift from background to foreground, toying with perspective, but more importantly completely freeing the graphic from any remnants of its former incarnation.

Neukamp uses a confidence in painting in combination with more mechanical forms of production and duplication, such as stenciling and playing with computer generated images, the diverse techniques underscoring her

invitation to the viewer to contemplate shifts in meaning rather than nailing them down. In viewing the large paintings from a distance, a knowledge of theater design seems to come into play. A stage is being set for us. Forms are blocked and angled into space, complete with consideration of the need to bridge a distance and to draw the viewer in. As we approach the canvas, the beautiful execution, the smooth surfaces painted by hand, the neutral yet lush bottom layer almost lulls us into complacency. But then come the black and white strokes, like slashes, laid over or intersecting the crisp outlines of—well, what is it? A face or a bifurcated B? It doesn't matter. Assertions held about the symbols and image begin to shift. The flatness falls away and you find yourself eye-to-eye with the openings and gaps in the canvas like tunnels, and you finally have to let go of any lingering inertia. The figurative associations, the meanings both historical and implied, don't ask for definition, they ask you to completely recondition the means by which you seek definition.

Just as it would be a mistake to "nail down" the imagery, it would it be a mistake to follow the temptation to categorize Anne Neukamp's work too heavily in her Pop Art or Dadaist predecessors. The traces are there in the use of everyday objects and a slightly collage aspect to her work. Yet, where Pop Art found its hook in hyper-realism or goofy fobbing-off of popular culture, Neukamp decidedly avoids "hooks," placing her work firmly in its own time and against it. By subverting the symbols and communication tags that so many rely on in a digital age, her work goes against the notion that if you see it in a video or read it on Twitter, it is truth. The symbols that have been passed down over the decades are no longer signposts. Her images are not a game of catch, but an invitation to contemplate, to return to the quickening (away from the confirmation, illusory or otherwise) that realization can bring.