

RJ Messineo, *Trans*, 2010

LOS ANGELES AREA

RJ MESSINEO

Steve Turner Contemporary

DIGESTING THE BOILED-DOWN geometries and concrete materiality of Minimalist abstraction into a do-it-yourself, shabby-chic vernacular of everyday objects, RJ Messineo presents a suite of handmade, wall-mounted wood shelving units. In her exhibition, "Attached," Messineo passes an artistic inheritance of mathematical rectitude through makeshift design culled from the salvage yard. Six boxes have been roughly constructed out of half-inch planks of wood: carpenter's glue oozes out of corners, splinters and grooves fray edges, and casually painted swells or sprays of grays, whites, navy, and mauve make for an expressive if partial paint job leaving much of the grain exposed. The constructions are large rectangles subdivided by horizontal and vertical boards into unequally-sized but uniformly empty compartments.

One key transitional piece, aptly titled, *Trans* (all works 2010), conflates a rudimentary picture frame (or canvas stretcher) with a single rectangular shelf unit — it is square one for Messineo's project of reconstituting geometric abstract painting in terms of throwaway domestic furniture, forming the basic building-block upon which the other works are formally based. *Gemini* partitions its walled-in void into flipped twin shapes. *Untitled (Louise)* is painted all black and contains the greatest number of cubbyholes — a referential nod to Louise Nevelson's all black stacked compartment sculptures. All are marked by a simple elegance pocked with beautiful flaws and the hand-hewn crudeness of easy construction.

If we read them as shelves, then their emptiness implies burglary, abandonment, or bankruptcy — the day after a recession-special final clearance? Made out of cheap, distressed materials, they match an economy of means to an economy of form. Principles of recycling and repurposing turn the shelves into frames — frames of whitewall monochromes? Frames of unfulfilled potential? Frames for future paintings? Multiple conjoined frames that cluster a whole bunch of paintings in one elaborate high-rise display complex? Maybe it is a support structure to house other artists' works, like Rauschenberg's *Short Circuit* (1955) that nested paintings by Jasper Johns and Susan Weil within it, or Mateo Tannatt's recent collaborative jungle-

gym-esque platform, *Monster Model: Blue Screen Version* (2010), collecting the works of numerous artist peers in its bounds.

While the voids inside Messineo's shelf/frame constructions gesture to possible future or past occupants, they presently frame a rich tonal range of grays produced by layers of overlapping shadows cast by the wood planks. Overhead lighting emerges as a crucial factor modeling the boxes' vacant depths and shadow takes center stage.

Two paintings near the entrance are exceptions to the exhibit's shelf theme and read like coded prefaces to it. *Wet answers* (and, by doing so, substantiates) the barren whitewall monochrome of *Trans* with a thick, moist layer of green paint squished under glass: a terrarium-turned-monochrome. It has a gold leaf frame that imparts antiquated gravitas and hints, from the show's outset, that primary painterly attention will be consolidated from now on to the margins, the peripheral depths. *Piece Painting* is a large canvas shaped (in a gesture to Ellsworth Kelly) as a downward-pointing triangle and covered in yellow and pale pink paint. Its faint rosy skin and inverted orientation signs the geometry of femininity and ghosts the politics of the pink triangle. But, more than that, it is an enormous arrow pointing us toward the concrete floor, directing our aesthetic attention toward dumb materiality and worn out physicality that may or may not be seen as art. Even though an artistic project fusing the morphology of geometric abstraction with utilitarian everyday objects is at least as old as Flavin's fluorescent tubes, Messineo refreshes the impulse by roughing it up and opting for messy, imperfect surfaces that confuse signs of dilapidated age with the hallmarks of painterly expressionism.

—S.R. Lehrer