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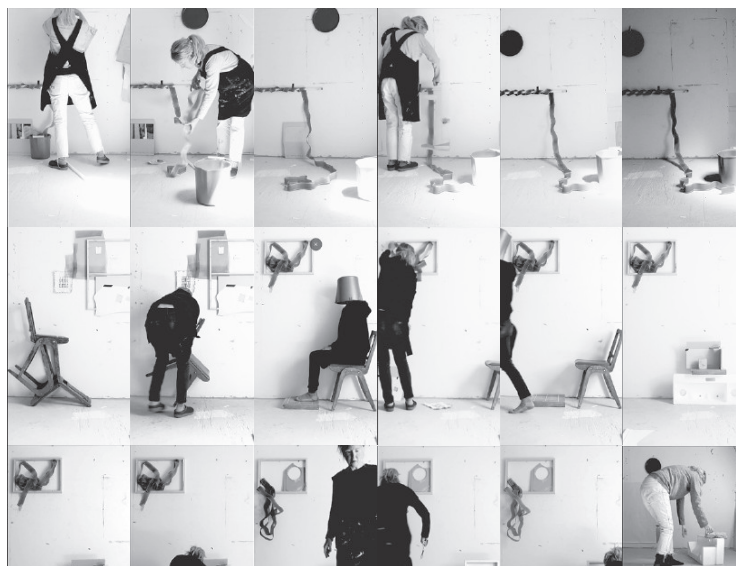
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Stills from a video by artist Jenny Brillhart documenting her creative process, in which temporary arrangements of common things become the subjects of paintings. COURTESY JENNY BRILLHART

Old mattresses, Styrofoam packaging, a plant borrowed for the winter, trays from my kitchen, wallpaper samples ...



SEE HILO ART, page 5

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HiLo Art—

A Process Language: Jenny Brillhart's 'Placement'

by Alan Crichton

Jenny Brillhart's premiere solo exhibit in Maine is an event that needs your attention. On first seeing the paintings in her exhibit, "Placement," at Bangor's Zillman Art Museum through April 21, one sees elegant

geometrical abstractions in close, light greys and muted colors, a series of works investigating spare compositions and their spatial variations.

On closer examination, a viewer quickly realizes that those apparently severe rectangles actually reveal painterly birds' eye perspectives, satellite-like views over the edges and flat planes of scrapped building materials, like odd sheetrock and plywood cut-offs, Styrofoam packing blocks, remnants of accordion-fold window blinds, a detached red chair cushion.

Brillhart collects these mundane and familiar objects in her studio, and in a repetitive process of leaning or hanging them on the walls as gravity allows, she arrives at random-feeling systems of built-up shapes that somehow function for her compositional sense. The combinations often beg to be decoded as to what is near or far, upright or flat, solid or shadow.

In "Zig Zag at 3 pm" (2021), one might say, "The light is coming from the right, so that large shadow must be cast by something about a foot square, so I must be looking only at its top edge. But where does that zigzag come from?" One observation amongst many in the fascinating process of "reading" these paintings.

In "Cut Blind Décor" (2021), the same zigzag, revealed to be that cut-up section of blue window blind, actually makes a physical appearance, rapidly receding into deeper space above a collection of white, green, blue, tan and pink boxes. These shapes hover above a chunk of sheetrock that may be flat but also could be moving off into a deep space. Such visual harmonics keep appearing in many variations throughout the paintings.

Extended looking reveals that these are not severe abstractions at all but masterful and beautiful explorations in the game of perception. Though the exhibit's title, "Placement," clearly refers to the mundane objects variously positioned in the setups from painting to painting, it could as well refer to the skillful way Brillhart's brush situates the carefully



"Zig Zag at 3 pm," 2021, oil on panel by Jenny Brillhart

modulated strokes of color to define and coordinate spatial conditions.

Finally and happily, this viewer could not decode all the variations, all the birds' eye views and cast shadows, the angular sunlight rectangles moving across the walls, yet the hard looking was rewarding and worthwhile. It left me suspended within each painting, experiencing the pleasure of the compositions, the perceptual conundrums, the paint, the touch of the brushes, the muted but welcome colors.

Understanding a work of art through its representational subject matter, whether human figures and architecture, their emotions and references — what an image may literally picture — seemed enjoyably unnecessary with this work. Instead, Brillhart's compelling and beautiful puzzles of object, light, form, color and composition engage all the elements of a painterly process language in works that are completely representational, yet rigorous in exploring abstraction.

Jenny Brillhart's "Placement" is on view through April 21 at the Zillman Art Museum, 40 Harlow St., Bangor.

For more information, visit zam.maine.edu.

Alan Crichton is a cofounder of Waterfall Arts in Belfast and an artist from Liberty.



"Cut Blind Décor," 2021, oil on panel by Jenny Brillhart


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