

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Kate Sutton, "Amy Sillman: The ALL-OVER," *Bookforum*, April/May, 2018

BOOKFORUM



AMY SILLMAN: THE ALL-OVER

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IN "STAGES OF LAUGHTER," *Art in America*'s 2015 roundup of artists' insights into humor, painter Amy Sillman recounts studying improv comedy as a means to get a firmer analytical grip on the role of spontaneity in her work. "I've always painted without a plan," she admits. "It's not that I don't know what I'm doing, or that I don't stop and make decisions. I just work by the seat of my pants."

A year earlier, at Campoli Presti in Paris, Sillman had poked gentle fun at the idea of assigning intention to her abstractions by providing a "legend" to the multilayered painted panels presented in her solo show "A Moveable Feast—Part XIV." Rendered directly on the wall in charcoal, *Key to Test Strips*, 2014, loosely mapped out the main composition, labeling specific shapes and slashes with either suggestive formal readings—"PINK STAIN," "BREASTS"—or darkly humorous, pseudo-Freudian concepts: "DETACHED VIRGINITY," "CONSCIOUS IMPULSES OF DISPLEASURE," "THE JEWISH QUESTION." *Key to Test Strips* returns as a prelude to this catalogue, which accompanies "the ALL-OVER," Sillman's 2016 solo show at the Frankfurt exhibition space Portikus, where the artist wrapped the walls with *Panorama*, 2016, an immersive installation of twenty-four ink-jet prints. Nearly six and a half feet tall and five feet wide, each of these images originated as an iPad drawing that Sillman printed out and then layered with hastily applied acrylic, draping diaphanous veils of indigo, plum, and periwinkle over the stubby skeleton of the digital sketch. The airiness of the artist's touch preserves a sense of improvisation, suspending forms on the edge of figuration without ever quite coalescing into recognizable objects.

This catalogue shares a similar sense of spontaneity, veering from spreads of *Panorama* to include reproductions, installation shots, and animation cels from recent years; essays from Yves-Alain Bois and Manuela Ammer; and a reprint of Sillman's rollicking 2016 treatise, "Shit Happens: Notes on Awkwardness." The latter text explores the term *awkward* as a semantic Band-Aid over the "tension between the ideal and the real, where what's supposed to happen goes awry." This tension, Sillman notes, "is what abstraction is partly about: the subject no longer entirely in control of the plot, representation peeled away from realism." As a final flourish, the artist appends an "index" that gleefully sends readers on wild-goose chases for topics like "RISK AVERSION," "CHUBBY CHASER," "ELBOW GREASE," and "TACTILE EXERCISES." If you're going to lose the plot, why not enjoy the ride? —KATE SUTTON

Amy Sillman, *Panorama* (detail), 2016, gesso, acrylic, and ink on twenty-four ink-jet printed canvases, this panel: 79 x 59".

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