

ARTFORUM

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

Dana Frankfort
BELLWETHER

“DF,” Dana Frankfort’s second solo exhibition in New York, presented ten thickly layered, restlessly gestural paintings, each featuring a word or phrase scrawled messily across its surface. Grappling with the history of abstraction, Frankfort’s canvases are marked by an engagement with text; by vibrant, lustrous colors; and by energetic brushwork. The artist’s work appeared in more than one group show this summer. *GUTS (yellow/gold)* (all works 2007), for example, her contribution to “Late Liberties” at John Connelly Presents, is a vivid and uncompromising canvas that confronted viewers with a seemingly metaphorical treatment of the titular word, ensuring that they would be hard-pressed to disagree with curator Augusto Arbizo’s claim that “for

a young artist to be making work at this moment in what could be called an abstract or nonrepresentational manner . . . is . . . a highly personal and political act.” In the current phlegmatic climate, it takes guts indeed for an emerging artist to make subjective, expressive paintings.

While Frankfort’s work seems to eschew some of this historical weight in favor of a nuanced linguistic playfulness suggestive of the paintings of various other artists, including Ed Ruscha, Mel Bochner, Suzanne McClelland, and Kay Rosen, it nevertheless both engages with the physicality of paint and retains a certain conceptual directness evocative of Louise Fishman’s groundbreaking “Angry Paintings” from 1973 (recently



Dana Frankfort,
STUFF, 2007, oil on
panel, 36 x 48”.

included in the exhibition “WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution” at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles).

The strongest works in Frankfort’s show push the tension between verbal language and painterly gesture to an extreme. Letters and lines swim in and around each another, foreground and background are transposed, and colors and shapes compete to occupy tiny crevices. Unlike Robert Smithson’s 1966 drawing *A Heap of Language*, which teases out the myriad meanings of the word *language*, the scribbled-over, crossed-out, and otherwise distorted words buried under Frankfort’s skeins of oil are, one can only assume, meant to be kept secret. A large, square painting titled *Lines (transformer)*, features several planes of text woven together in a tautological game that almost fills the canvas, leaving only a stark white border. The word *LINES*, also rendered in white, spills over the panel’s edges and covers *TRANSFORMER*, painted in purple, which is itself arranged over several mostly illegible lines of text, in shades of green. Other paintings, such as *STUFF*, *A LOT OF STUFF*, *CRACK*, and *POSSIBLY PERMANENT*, smartly both embody and obscure a clear textual address, shunning vagueness in favor of a more useful ambiguity.

In a few works, Frankfort brushes the Star of David over words or washes of color. These paintings appear less formally resolved than the others on show here, but are interesting nonetheless in their intimations of autobiography—stars connect the artist’s Texan and Jewish lineages—and may become fertile ground if they begin to incorporate the productive unruliness of her text-based paintings. By worrying so insistently at abstract painting’s frayed edges, Frankfort and her contemporaries are beginning to push beyond inward-looking debate over the form’s continuing vitality into new territory.

—Lauren O’Neill-Butler