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Emily Joyce at Inman – Brief Article

Frances Colpitt

A young artist originally from Chicago and currently completing her second-year residency as a Core fellow at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Emily Joyce has the acute eye of a formalist painter and the deft, X-acto knife-wielding fingers of a collagist. This exhibition, her first solo show in Houston, included 18 works of art, the largest and most convincing of which consist of pieces of adhesive vinyl affixed directly to the gallery's walls. The brightly colored commercial signage material has been cut into mostly small shapes derived from craft-store stencils of the sort used to make decorative borders for furniture, walls or perhaps T-shirt images. The intricate shapes are arranged in fluid, organic patterns, about 3 feet in height, that creep across the walls. To make the works transportable, each piece is backed with clear vinyl that can't be seen by the viewer.

Joyce's paintinglike collages are characterized by a subtle relief texture resulting from the overlapped shapes of thin material. The ridges formed by the edges of the underlying shapes interrupt the smoothness of the glossy surfaces and provide the works with an irresistibly tactile appeal. When I first saw her work last year, I assumed that it was spontaneously composed directly on the wall where it was shown. Contributing to this impression was not only the shape-on-top-of-shape appearance but that work's random meander. The new pieces include a few larger swaths of vinyl with at least one straight edge. These areas of color serve to anchor the snaking forms compositionally, while leaving their fragility and transience undisturbed.

Although Joyce's palette is essentially "found," since the vinyl is ordered from the manufacturer, her use of color is not at all arbitrary. In *The Quiet* (all works 2000), she brings together areas of turquoise, yellow and brown with a wide array of details in orange, black, dark green, red and beige. Turquoise and yellow again predominate in *Dingbats*, which includes delicate, lacy passages of lime green, violet and several more colors. White vinyl, particularly at the borders of a few works, provides an intriguing contrast and makes a transition to the wall. Complex figure-ground relationships produce a layered, landscapelike space although tiny shapes are also used to suggest spatial recession. Most of the twisting, turning, rivulet-like or patchy shapes are basically abstract. Here and there, stars, sunbursts and flames appear, but more startling

are the occasional iconic images of, for example, dinosaurs and prancing horses, which check the eye's otherwise unimpeded delight in the luxury of pure color and form.

Joyce's show included a second body of work on clear Plexiglas. More intimate and objectlike, these pieces consist of a few faint pencil lines (applied with the help of an aerosol fixative) and scattered abstract or cartoony images painted in acrylic. More illustrational than painterly in feel, they are still further evidence of Joyce's playful sensibility.

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