

frieze

Liam Everett
Altman Siegel, San Francisco, USA



Always inside a world where the light discloses the structure that shows us the 'movement' of always falling, 2012, mixed media, 244 x 97 cm

Liam Everett's art stands, first and foremost, as testament to the processes of its making. In spite of their rich optical pleasures, his art works claim a solemn dignity as battered survivors of previous punishments. It is fun to imagine just what these wild, intense forces might have entailed.

Sun evidently plays a major role in Everett's work: the dyes of the fabric of his baggy constructions (not quite paintings, but too painting-like to be sculptures) are unevenly but expressively faded. Wind, too, seems to have been involved. Some, such as *The way we slip over from one to the other, there and no where* (all works 2012), appear to bear the gridded impressions of wire fences; you can picture them flapping in the breeze as they dried. Elsewhere, crusts of salt crystals imply that heat has also had a hand in their making, causing quantities of seawater to evaporate, perhaps, until sweaty white tidelines build up across the fabric. These works, though they make reference to the indoorsy, post-Minimal assemblages of Richard Tuttle as well as artists such as Sergej Jensen and Gedi Sibony, are infused with the landscape of northern California.

In the main gallery five of these large fabric works are lined up against one wall. The extended wooden frames on which the panels of wool and organza hang remind us that the word 'stretcher' is more commonly associated not with paintings but with hospitals. A dynamic of unabashed romanticism emerges: the battered pieces of fabric are invalids, victims or survivors of the artistic process, recuperated only by their unwitting beauty.

A sculpture in the adjacent space, titled *Killing floor (or a proposed action plan)*, hints at how these paintings may have been made: a woollen blanket is slung between two long planks resting on sawhorses. It is a pragmatic, workaday arrangement – a far less picturesque process than one might have imagined from the works next door. They may look effortless, even lazy, but there is clearly plenty of elbow grease involved. They do not make themselves, nor are they formed naturally by the wild Californian landscape. It is Everett himself who controls them, even if he goes out of his way to make it look like he does not.

A series of untitled smaller paintings more openly derive from the artist's labour. Everett has applied dark ink and acrylic paint to Masonite boards, and then rubbed them clean with alcohol and salt until they are almost – but not quite – returned to their original white. Again, however, the process is far from arbitrary, and distinct areas of white or residual colour reveal the works to be subtle abstract paintings made in reverse.

Throughout this exhibition there is a tussle between what is revealed and what is hidden; what is left on the surface and what is discarded along the way. Everett titles his works as if hoping to lose the reader halfway through; one sagging panel of crimson wool is titled *The threshold question that arises in connection with the concept of establishing a language without the problem of speaking*. I've read these words a dozen times and I can still make no sense of them. Two of the organza panels have mysterious objects – a piece of dowel, a ceramic disk – dangling, half-glimpsed, behind them. As to their significance, we are left in the dark. As if to acknowledge this game of interpretive hide and seek, the exhibition is called 'If I could sleep I might make love. I'd go into the woods. My eyes would see... the sky, the earth. I'd run, run, they wouldn't catch me.'

Jonathan Griffin