

Marcelle Alix, 4 rue Jouye-Rouve, 75020 Paris, 1 Dec 2010

Lydia Gifford: Brackets

Lydia Gifford review by Eleanor Weber

Why not generate a grammar of your own? Why not work toward an alternate language, a set of gestures, phrases and sentences not necessarily bound to established forms, but rather constantly becoming communication – visual, experiential, linguistic? This language would not be about rules and restrictions but discoveries and openings; an evolving understanding of how and through which means one can communicate. It would thus be a language that encounters, appropriates and reproduces other languages, a process of solidifying but never quite arriving.

'brackets' is the title of British artist Lydia Gifford's recent solo exhibition at Marcelle Alix gallery, Paris. The title is aptly ambiguous. Is it 'brackets' as in literal parentheses, 'brackets' like wall- or shelf-supports, 'brackets' for some kind of sectioning or classificatory mode? It seems to be a bit of all three. Gifford worked closely with the Marcelle Alix gallery space itself in the lead up to the opening, so that the final showing is the result of that specific time-period rather than the retrospective exposition of a premeditated "Plan For An Exhibition".

This way of working is present in the traces we see (or don't see) in the gallery. Pencil marks are left where it seems measurements or possible positions had been ruled and then decided against; paint stains or smears appear in places we wouldn't normally expect them – above the entrance to the second room, oddly dispersed on the walls, around and beside the canvases; the canvases themselves are purposely misaligned, painted via rather than onto, creating gaps and non-continuities; the generic white-beige walls of Marcelle Alix appear, if we look closely, to have been re-painted by the artist.

The matières used – paint, canvases, wood, pencil, etc. – thus function, according to Gifford, like "tools". These tools enable relations or conversations ("sentences") between propositions to emerge and accordingly suggest possible readings to those present in the space. Evidently, it is nice to have time on side to join this conversation: a plot is not necessarily going to reveal itself immediately. But one realises that the traces of a language – of a message – emerge most clearly from revisitings, re-ponderings and extended discussions. They emerge from time taken to consider a space and the movements and inscriptions that have been made in and on that space at a particular time.

Thus the compositional dynamics Gifford reveals permit a dialogue to flow between propositions in a gallery space and potential understandings or received perceptions. Ultimately, the ambiguous title makes complete sense. All at once 'brackets' can point to a grammatical parenthesis – an aside, a tool for mentioning something that could go unnoticed otherwise; it can suggest a support, a context for objects and relations between – a tool for arranging and proposing space; and thirdly it designates a classificatory tool, a way of indicating categories or positions that, in this case, gesture toward an alternate language.

Online resource: <http://www.thisistomorrow.info/viewArticle.aspx?artId=558>

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