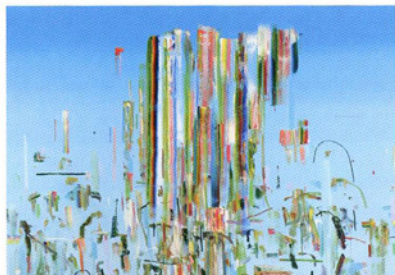


Tomory Dodge

CRG GALLERY

When I think of the Los Angeles-based artist Tomory Dodge, a specific painting comes to mind: *Weekend*, 2005. Titled after Jean-Luc Godard's 1967 film, the canvas depicts a red drum kit amid a thicket of loose yet perfectly restrained gestural marks suggestive of a chaotic, trash-strewn forest. *Weekend* was featured in Dodge's first solo show in New York at CRG in 2006 and encapsulates the narrative themes he developed between 2002 and 2007 in works that portrayed haphazard disasters, debris, and the type of destitute terrain found just off the highway. In the six new paintings that made up his second solo exhibition at the gallery, Dodge explores entirely different types of explosions and catastrophes, moving closer to abstraction and away from the precarious landscapes and wastelands that defined his earlier work.

Like their predecessors, Dodge's most recent canvases are composed of oddly stacked and structured lines and fat slabs of piled-up pigment. Again, the artist has used a palette knife to smear paint across his works' surfaces, creating patterns akin to animal fur, and left some blobs to sit like wads of chewing gum. But here, instead of building landscapes through a mosaic of marks, Dodge's brushstrokes deteriorate into a frenzied mass. Wide rainbow clusters spread against blue, pink, and black backgrounds, like fireworks against toxic skies. In *Tung* (all works 2008) a geyser of pastel and neon colors swells up behind a thick surface of crisscrossed strokes. *Drop* shows fluorescent tubes falling among a mélange of multihued marks similar to that pictured in *Tung*, but here the background has a dark nocturnal cast. The titles provide subtle clues to the nature of these explosions: *Daisy Cutter* recalls the name of a fifteen-thousand-pound bomb dropped by American forces on Vietnam and Afghanistan, while *Depth Charge Ethyl*, although named after a song by the band Grinderman, also alludes to antisubmarine explosives developed during World War I.



Tomory Dodge, *Daisy Cutter*, 2008, oil on canvas, 84 x 120".

Lost in these weightless and hallucinogenic scenes is a sense of place, as if the paintings are capturing detonations midair. More entrancing, however, is Dodge's eagerness to experiment. In his new works, the artist explores how different marks can interact and accumulate, in ways that make them seem about to fall apart; it is like he is playing a solitary game of Jenga. Given the ephemeral nature of his earlier subjects, Dodge's turn to a greater level of abstraction is perhaps expected, but, as evidenced by the several representational paintings in his show at Alison Jacques Gallery in London last fall, his future work may not necessarily be abstract. He's simply becoming more and more invested in his central subject—paint.

A nauseating exuberance hovers beyond the gestures in these canvases, which recall the sublime through an abstract and seductive use of color and movement. The compositional negotiation between beauty and destruction suggests the artist's preoccupation with catastrophe, rapture, transcendence, and rebirth. The paintings bring to mind Dana Schutz's recent imaginings of the future and Barnaby Furnas's pictures of floods and violence. Yet the apocalyptic undertow is harder to find in Dodge's new paintings than in the work of his peers. His paintings may allude to escalating disaster, but the effect is ironically achieved through the pictures' colorful, fluffy charm. Looking at them feels like enjoying the calm before the storm.

—Lauren O'Neill-Butler