

Elise Adibi

SOUTHFIRST

For the first solo presentation of her paintings in New York, Elise Adibi steered clear of the kind of baroque installation gimmicks and exogenous conceptual frames—in ready supply elsewhere lately—through which her medium becomes an empty sign conveying post-criticality. Instead, in a tightly focused hang, she presented nine abstractions nakedly shorn of appropriative conceit, and let them stand for themselves. All are square; most sit resolutely between small and medium size at twenty by twenty inches; many reveal an unprim-

Elise Adibi,
Abiogenesis, 2009,
oil on canvas,
72 x 72".

ed canvas to which Adibi has applied a putty-colored oil that redoubles the canvas's hue, a pigment of radiant white-mixed pistachio, or an admixture of graphite and primer. Spaced at precise intervals around an unadorned room, with just enough distance between the panels to guarantee their autonomy but still make clear their dependence on one another, these works suggest a decidedly traditional engagement with the stuff of painting under modernist circumstances.

Admittedly, my description makes the work sound somewhat anachronistic—and it emphatically is. Yet this pur-

poseful recourse to the material history of abstraction was only part of the show's interest, precisely because Adibi's project is shaped by the powerful conviction that despite the facts that precede an undertaking, a mutability of outcomes might result. Though she titled both her show and one of the paintings *A Priori*, thus acknowledging her own philosophical grounding in the notion of first principles, she could have just as accurately gone with *A Posteriori*, admitting as she does the certitude of obdurate particulars (the tooth of the fabric, or the matrix that organizes its weave) and their experiential determination. In Adibi's work, the grid is generally the foundation for the patterns that happen through its tracery, and her adherence to it frequently remains evident, even prepossessing, in its formalism. But—owing to her application of multiple paint layers and the deeply idiosyncratic exigencies of human accident—physical imperfections, misalignments, and miscalculations predominate.

Indeed, "A Priori" modeled contingency rather than foreclosure, with slips, smudges, and the like disclosing that the consequences of Adibi's choices are born of their physical or perceptual interaction and mutual adaptation. This openness to the aleatory is evident in the formal relationships internal to certain works that arise out of the felicities of their making: in the dyadic play of overlapping shapes and parts in *Logical Vision*, 2010, for instance; or in the compositional configuration of the substantial *Abiogenesis*, 2009, built as it is on a centerline and a visibly articulated process of unpredictable becoming that nicely manifests the emergence of life through inanimate matter referred to in the title. Such trials become the basis for subsequent efforts, so that the negative space in *Abiogenesis* is reversed in *Schema and Chroma*, 2010, which fills in the area around the former's replicating geometric formations with green paint. Most crucial with regard to Adibi's reliance on a posteriori thought, these paintings effect mirages from the play of paint and support: The canvases look as though they are blushing an incandescent pink—despite the absence of any such color on the surface—because Adibi's precise green draws out the red latent in the beige.

Graphite 2 and *Graphite 3*, both 2010, propose a less representational if no less direct connection to their givens. As the medium in which lines are drawn, graphite serves as a mainstay in the execution (and ideology) of the grid. Adibi turns it against itself, using the stuff to produce amorphous, sensuous fields of pigment. For the former work, she brushed graphite onto the not quite dry coat of primer, meaning that the brush picked up some of the white to generate a diffuse covering, with pockets of dense, inky black relieved by passages of the underpainting. For the latter, she mixed graphite into a wet base of the aforementioned putty noncolor; the results are so varied that they appear as a frenetic aggregation of decomposed brushstrokes slipping into one another. Read together with *Abiogenesis*, they appear as lively, even vital things. Countering Rosalind Krauss's famous definition of the grid's properties (for her, they are "flattened, geometricized, ordered . . . antinatural, antimimetic, antireal"), Adibi ushers in the organicism that the structure's abiding classicism was meant to forestall.

—Suzanne Hudson