ARTFORUM

REVIEWS LOS ANGELES

Lois Dodd and Ellen Siebers

Parrasch Heijnen Gallery

By Red Cameron



Ellen Siebers, *dusk*, 2024, oil on panel, 8 × 6″.

The two-person exhibition of paintings by Lois Dodd and Ellen Siebers at Parrasch Heijnen made for a surprisingly strange pairing, given the overlap in the artists' chosen subject matter and format. Both paint views of nature and work in oil on panels that are generally small. Both have an eye for distance and detail and share some sense that profundity can be found among observations of natural material. Yet each artist has a distinct vision, and it was in their divergent approaches toward encountering beauty in nature and transmitting it to the viewer that the poignancy of the pairing, and of this exhibition, became apparent.

Lois Dodd has been painting for seven decades, and it well shows. Her oeuvre is characterized by economy, and the work on display here exemplified her skill in identifying a fleeting moment or elusive quality observed during her plein air process. For instance, *Apple Tree in Bloom – May*, 2021, appears unfinished from afar, but upon closer inspection one sees that the raw-canvas outline of the titular tree's blossoms is touched by just the right amounts of pure-white highlight and light-gray shadow, all in the service of suggesting the brilliance of a clear spring afternoon. Dodd's drawing is equally restrained, as evidenced by the forms of the leaves in *Branch of Dried Leaves* and *18 Leaves and Sky*, both 2022. Each one is an attempt to find a distinct idea of a leaf, somehow displaying the reality and exactitude, the precise shape, of what Dodd saw, while simultaneously denying that any such transmission is possible beyond what the artist has invented for the picture.

Siebers, nearly sixty years Dodd's junior, paints from studied memory rather than *en plein air*. Despite this physical distance from her subjects while working, the artist makes paintings that nonetheless appear intimate with the reality of which they partake, the reality of nature itself outside intellectual intervention. Paintings such as *two moths* or *dusk*, both 2024, for all their nebulous obscurity, look very much like moments of mirroring and reflection. The titular moths appear both right side up and upside down in a swamp-like haze of vertical and diagonal brushstrokes that blend deep viridian and dark moss, while a single horizontal brushstroke proposes a horizon and possible meeting place of still water and dusky air. The question of which moth is "real" and which an image in this ambiguous world is left to the painting's and the viewer's orientation. Conversely, the horizon is explicitly oriented in *dusk*, as the curved line of the sun's final daytime moments is seen in faded tones of peach and lemon glinting off the swell of some large sea otherwise obscured in a brushy fog of gray, gray brown, and gray black, the sun's loose orb rippling forward and repeating toward the bottom of the frame, a vertical ellipsis of light's memory.

Beauty, for both Dodd and Siebers, seems the point. But these are different kinds of beauty. Dodd's *Elm Tree Branches and Sky*,2020, is comprised of an attempt at perfection. The different hues of the branches, their graceful arcs across the canvas, and their relation to the sky's precise blue-gray depths are all results of Dodd's intellectual modulation of the scene, her ideas reasoning the turning of nature into a picture. Siebers's *plums*, 2024, on the other hand, resides in an obliteration of just such reasons and nearly of the image itself. Three small orbs in three different colors are almost blended into the background and into each other by a lilac haze of wide vertical brushstrokes, such that the act of creating the painting (fast, intuitive, improvisational) is as much on display as the image itself. The work, nearly unintelligible at first glance, radiates plum-ness the longer one looks.

Many beautiful ideas were on display in Dodd's work in this exhibition, relaying their multiple conceptions of form to the viewer. But in Siebers's work there seemed many sights to behold and a singular vision displayed. In their earnest disorder, their unreasoned beauty, they appeared much closer to a vision of nature itself and brought to mind the thought that reflecting upon encounters with art, as upon encounters with nature, is best done in silence.