

Nicole Collins: untethered

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Nicole Collins' painting practice consistently employs the encaustic medium. Wax and pigment applied to a surface. Wax is inherently and emphatically a three-dimensional medium. When liquid, it is syrupy and searing. Once hardened, it stiffens and heaves. Regardless of its physical state it is ceaselessly corporeal. Over the course of the last several years, Collins' work has explored application and construction in equal parts with removal and re-construction. Shards of decomposing paint picked from a wall, wax skin peeled from a canvas, jute pulled and piled onto the floor. In this exploration of removal sits the articulation of the sculptural in painting. If something can be removed, and as such seen or touched, it is therefore an object no matter its scale.

In this recent body of work, Collins shreds burlap into fragments, assembles jute twine into sculptural masses, stitches pieces together. The burlap pieces and jute bundles are coated with white or black encaustic. Often, her paintings are immense and surprisingly weighty. However the works in this exhibition are not heavy. The suspended pieces of monochromatic encaustic lay lightly supported by a surface. The fibers of each burlap piece are embedded, thoroughly entrenched, with the encaustic material. The paintings are not rigid or delicate, even though they might appear as such. Due to the nature of burlap, a thickly woven and webbed material, the pieces are inherently penetrable. Light not only fills the space between its gaps, but also passes through the encaustic burlap, like transparent and porous flesh. Veins seen through a hand.

In 2009, Collins presented a body of paintings where she began to remove the encaustic from the surface of the canvas, leaving behind the burned markings of the molten material. The removed fragments of wax later reconstructed as new works; counterparts to the first. In Collins' latest body of work, the frame and its stretched material, the plane and its rendered image, have each been cast aside. The surface, wax and pigment no longer exist as distinct layers that can be separated, removed, restructured. The burlap is not pulled taut against an armature. The piece of fabric has soaked the wax; there can be no separation. Surface and application are fused. It is not a matter of coating, but embedding the fibers with the enveloping encaustic. These works are without the traditional distinction between support, surface and paint. The latticed shadows lightly stretched against the wall are a reflection of this unity. The encaustic cannot be peeled back.

The woven edges of the burlap are left loosely unraveled, ripped from a larger whole. Yet the pieces do not appear to be connected, their shapes do not conform to each other. Puzzling. At once the burlap entities are singular in shape while seemingly pulled from an enigmatic, once-uncut entity. The removal, impossible now, is present only in the suggestion that the pieces have been cut from an original. There is an attempt at a coming together, yet we are confronted with an impossible puzzle. The monochrome paintings sit somewhere between whole and part. The dichotomy is no longer logical, no longer necessary.