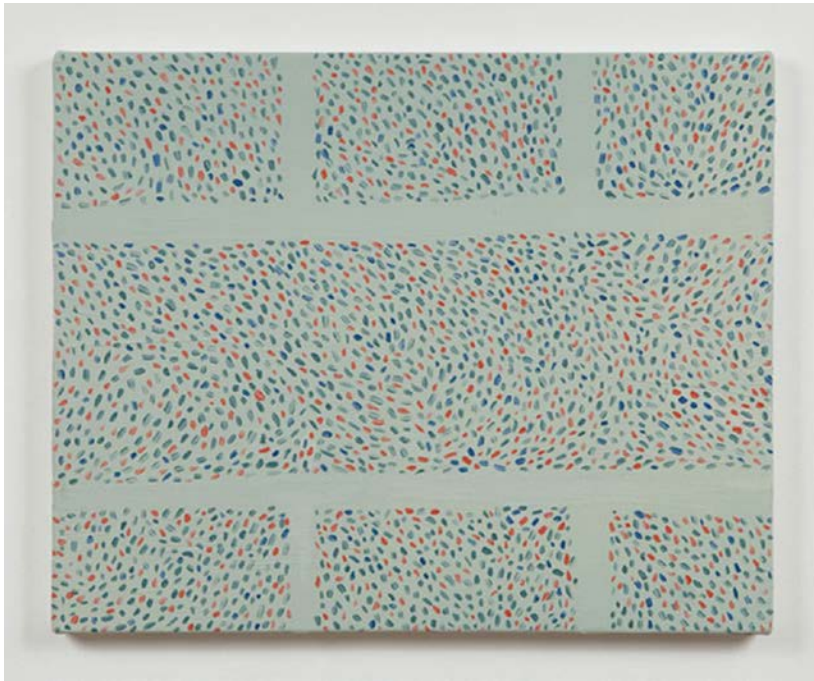


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the online magazine of art and ideas

The Big Picture at Sikkema Jenkins & Co

by David Cohen



Robert Bordo, *Yankee Dollar*, 2011

Somewhere in Paint Heaven there are adjacent walls of Robert Bordo and Merlin James. This alone makes Sikkema Jenkins' group exhibition, *The Big Picture*, a blessed place to be this summer. They hang gorgeously together despite strikingly contrastive approaches. James typically distresses his slow-won, acrylic canvases with a dry brush that often exposes a raw, even punctured support, his forms managing to impart contradictory vibes of perfunctory and agonized delivery. Bordo, on the other hand, seals his surfaces in oily brushstrokes that are lush to the point of glutinous in a way that betokens swift, decisive execution—unless, like *Yankee Dollar*, 2011, it manifests fastidious labor in which case it remains decisive in its nutty all-overness. What has Bordo and James singing in harmony is a common attitude that balances the cerebral and the visceral; as I've said elsewhere, they both epitomize the slogan of Robert Storr's 2007 Venice Biennale, "Think with the Senses, Feel with the Mind."

They are brought together in this eight-person group that also includes John Dilg, Jeronimo Elespe, Josephine Halvorson (her obsessive realist empiricism the perfect complement to Bordo's obsessive abstract empiricism), Ryan McLaughlin, Ann Pibal and David Schutter, because of another shared proclivity: working within modest dimensions. "Big" can thus be construed as ironic, but – these being earnest workers, despite a high quota of savvy humor amongst them – I prefer to think that the show title is making a distinction between picture and painting that pertinently matches that between scale and size.