

The art of Pamela Lawton is audacious and learned, a synthesis that at once makes her work seem extremely elegant and yet keeps it inexhaustible and troubling. The truth is, as she has conjured up, her childhood was one of intent drawing and full of music, and she trained herself in modern models by her early youth. She is a fine draughtsman, but she has also learned to constrain mere facility, which no longer dazzles her. She is always committed to vigilance and observation sur le motif, but she can make these observations while carving a face through staves, collaging a mystique with pools of color, or easing a contour as much as building up a Paradise. Thus, her work alludes simultaneously to water and light, to architecture and landscape, and to the stress of modern glass where it erupts in shadow-play like a Javanese masque.

Of course, there is an easy, almost messianic way to interpret a whole bloc of her works. The eschatology of our times makes us see these refractions through another one: that of catastrophe and the specific catastrophe that electrified the world in the ruins of the World Trade Center, where Lawton had worked. She is one of the last artists to melodramaticize; nor was she in any obvious sense a victim. However, just as one of her works is still literally trapped in ruin downtown, so her works, produced in a year and a half's labor in the ironic half-floor with "parking lot" conditions that terrified her, remained retroactively stained into triple significance by her care, her perspective, and the furious future within them. They are perhaps better than almost all elegies to the space of the World Trade Center, because they were not crushed by the messianic or the lugubrious; they bear within them a

sober wonderment concerning ALL structure. And in the condition of what Anthony Vidler has called "warped space", they deal with the hole in modernity that can be brought to justice without the messianic. Thus, these gigantic pieces are full of the madness of the Momentum that led to the almost endless demise of the Center.



The Art of Pamela Lawton: In Memory of Architecture

David Shapiro



Lawton has inscribed in her work a kind of impossibility, to make light "hard and durable as the art of the museums" in Cézanne's famous phrase. Lawton takes the impressionistic radicality of our best abstraction and rewrites it from the point of view of an urban flaneur. She is a portrait-artist when she wants to be, and her poignant nudes and heads, not shown here, are complements to the physiognomic of these buildings that are not buildings. A face, the psychological face, is an impossible task for our latest robotics. Lawton has also taken on what Leonardo called the most difficult task in painting and representation: water and reflection. So I am not amazed that photographs of her motif show how closely these seeming zebra patterns are to the absolute face-muscle of the buildings. She has captured shadows as an impressionist devours clouds. She has taken the Miesian mission of the WTC and transformed it by hypostasis into a grid system of trouble. The loopy entrails of a Brice Marden appear here as an extended alphabet. It is not for nothing that she has collaborated with the poets of the New York School, for example, the melancholy young master, Elio Schneeman. She has the empiricism of those poems and their past perfect. She can use charcoal to transform a grisaille into something as complex as a Johnsian grid, moreover, because she doesn't stop at the empirical, merely. And Greenberg was almost correct in using the sad phrase "homeless representation" to detect

an impossibility in the young Johns's shading of the unshadable. Lawton's task, too, is to bring a home and local habitation out of these monstrous and now absent windows. The wreck and the terror of it all are just outside the frame.

We live in these pictures with an absolute memory of the gigantism and imperial force of the Glass of the World. In Scheerbarth, an early expressionist glass architecture had the most acute Utopian dispensations. Here it has been turned into something ghostly but substantial, pure pattern that keeps dissolving, a system of multiplicity that seems to break through the very idea of system. The Deleuzian flow here is baroque, busy, and a relay. It is hard to think of any painting that is less reductive, where the whole blockish mediocrity of the Towers was begging for simplism. The structure of these monumental patterns is almost strangely non-probabilistic. One hardly wants to call them patterns or the decorative, because there has been such a condensation of multiplicity. It is hard not to find something Sabbatian, as it were, lost here: something found like the holy in the forbidden. She didn't like her space; she wasn't in love with the wind-blown tortures of the indoor parking-space; and she notated it all, bravely, and with the proper precision and reticence.

So we come to the feeling of fate, as Lawrence Gowing has it in Mantegna's perspective. And here I would summon the sense of Lawton's destruction of perspective and its new fate. The shadow-play resists us, and yet we have our freedoms. The music staves seduce and insist with us, and yet they too dissolve; like a white magic in derision or scepticism or radical joy. Isn't it Negri who finally says, in his new and opaque book on globalism, that what we want is a communism of joy and light that, after all, may be the best legacy of Saint Francis? Lawton's work is a hymn to the created beings, through light and water. De Kooning found it impossible to paint hair. Some have found it impossible to simulate flesh through the digital. In her learned oils, in her collages and fountains of shadows, Lawton yields at the emergence of a plastic art without whimsy. It is a severe accomplishment, and one that reminds us of the vertigo inherent in architecture, which, as Lindsay Stamm has put it, is a fragile art. It is the fragility of perception that delays our reaction. It is the frangibility of empire that stuns us, as we think these shadows over.

And finally, for the artist, who overcame one dread and "got used to it", it is the representation of fear. Of the howl she heard in the hall and the elevator and down on the street. Vertigo every day has here become heavy and stable, a fragment of light fractured into a rhythm. □

A Song For Rudy Burckhardt and a Song of Fire: The Towers (9/11)

David Shapiro

And so the snow fell
And covered up poetry.

And so the snow fell
And covered up cities like bags of leaves.

And so the snow fell
And covered up an architecture.

And so the snow fell
And covered one red orange sexual flower.

And so the snow fell
And covered the bus and the passengers.

And so the snow fell
And covered up our friend.

And so the snow fell
And covered his clear water-towers,
his windows and his door.

And so the snow fell
And covered up the word poetry.

And so the snow fell
And covered up the snow and a house within.

And so the snow fell
And fell on his fallen leaves.

And oh the snow fell
And covered up his photographs of snow.

And so the snow fell
And covered up even passing clouds.



And so the fire fell
And covered up poetry.

And so the fire fell
And covered up cities like bags of leaves.

And so the fire fell
And covered up an architecture.

And so the fire fell
And covered one red orange sexual flower.

And so the fire fell
And covered the bus and the passengers.

And so the fire fell
And covered up our friends.

And so the fire fell
And covered the clear water-towers, the windows
and the door.

And so the fire fell
And covered up the word poetry.

And so the fire fell
And covered up the fire and a house within.

And so the fire fell
And fell on their fallen leaves.

And oh the fire fell
And covered up their photographs of fire.

And so the fire fell
And covered up even passing clouds.