

Recently my friend Tony called. "I heard that your paintings got trashed in a performance with Ei!"

What a great rumor! It was more extreme than what actually happened, but it meant that the paintings, in their role as performers, had achieved exactly the sort of uncertainty that I had always hoped for them to have. Uncertainty is how I interact with painting in the studio, but as public objects, paintings are usually slotted into their duller roles of thing, fact, or commodity. It was incredibly satisfying to see these paintings-as-performers living in a situation with more endangerment, uncertainty, and risk than they would have in their next incarnation in a museum.

Indeed, paintings were perfect characters in *BYOF (Bring Your Own Flowers)* because they front for me anyway — they are stand-ins, others. They each have their own persona. These two paintings in particular, named *B* and *H*, originated with portraits of people. I've been working all year on a project where I visit various friends at home and draw them from life. Then I draw them from memory, then make drawings of drawings from memory, and so on, and they slowly transform into a kind of structural abstraction, losing the figuration completely. But I title them with initials, in this case *B* and *H*, because I know where the paintings come from, so it's like a secret code for me to remember them by. There is a kind of secrecy to all painting, in fact, because no one except the painter sees the progressive transformation of the layers. In this case I alone know how what started as a beard became a patch of banana yellow; what started as a nipple and an arm became a polyhedron of dirty grey; what started as entwined legs became stripes.

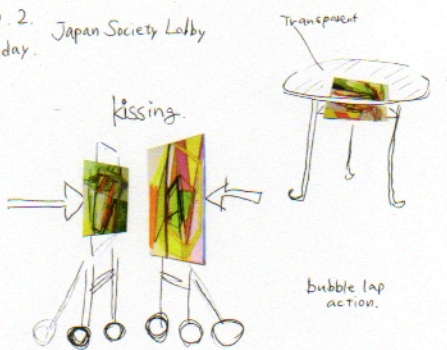
Originally I wanted to perform with Ei myself. But I was in a time crunch, desperately trying to finish a solo show. So Ei and I decided to send the paintings out as the substitute for me. In the end I think that made a much better performance. These paintings-as-performers were the ones I made for a show at the Hirshhorn Museum — they were already on the checklist and had actual value, so if they were wrecked, there was a real risk, because I would never have been able to make the same ones again. I was nervous for them. These weren't props to be "ruined" as a performance; these were real one-of-a-kinds, and it was the last time that I would be able to send them into a position of liability because at their next outing they would be in a public place with a guard waving people away from them. When I drove the paintings to the performance in my car and dropped them off at Japan Society, I felt like I was dropping my children off for the school play. They were tilted and whirled, screwed in and out of a makeshift bar, mocked in a joking lecture on drunken action painting and used in a kangaroo auction. I asked someone in the performance if they were making fun of me, and he said yes, but lovingly. In the end, making my paintings into performers amplified triple states of mind: pleasure, anxiety, and comedy. And all of that is precisely what I seek in the action of painting anyway.

Ei Arakawa and Amy Sillman, *BYOF (Bring Your Own Flowers)*, 2007. Performance view. Photo: Paula Court

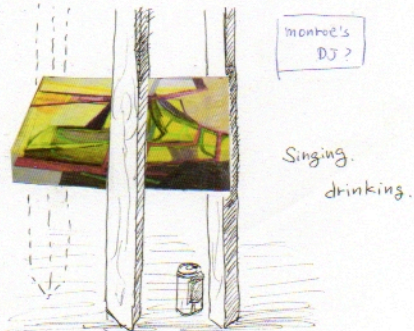
Drawings by Ei Arakawa and Amy Sillman for *BYOF (Bring Your Own Flowers)*, 2007



Nov. 2.
Friday. Japan Society Lobby



pat
Ei
Alisha
Charles
Patricia
Monroe?
or
move



8pm.

