



Svenja Deininger's elusive art, at the Norton

By: Myles Ludwig
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The young Austrian artist Svenja Deininger paints shadows and phantoms in textured layers of subdued tones and vibrant colors that sometimes hide and sometimes reveal themselves. Her exhibition of 20 paintings spanning some 11 years is currently marching in carefully ordered formation along the walls at the Norton Museum of Art.

Deininger was selected as the 2017 Recognition of Art by Women recipient and her challenging show, titled *Second Chances First Impressions*, is on view through April 16. Although her work is known in Europe and recognized for its subtlety, this is her first solo show in an American museum.

The show's title is apt, because it takes a second, even third viewing to get a sense of the imagery and the thinking behind it on the unframed canvas. "I am looking for this moment when they do not need an excuse for being there," Deininger has said. The work steadfastly refuses to define itself, relying instead on the viewer's emotional, even poetic associations and responses with reference to art, shape, space and color.

The globular or flat landscape-like shapes, surfaces and defined stripes are abstracted and fragmented and seem to float like pieces of a metaphysical puzzle within the space, particularly in the case of the larger works, all of which are untitled. One piece actually is a construction that uses the gallery wall itself as part of its vague narrative. They are mounted as per the artist's precise instructions because she considers each a word in a kind of train of visual, instinctively made thought.

Deininger has said, "it is about the sentence ... there is a subject and a verb, and more important words than others, but it does not function without all the parts."

This is a new kind of investigation of abstraction though one can feel references to Mondrian and Noland in form and even Miró and Matisse, particularly in the sheer joy of color and juxtaposition. According to curator Cheryl Brutvan, "It is as if the artist's paintings are objects, excavated through process, time and thought in the manner of a sculptor finding the form within rough, unfinished stone, rather than a painter controlling a liquid on a surface ... but with a rigorous inquiry into process."

They are what Brutvan calls "meditative abstractions" and make use of a variety of techniques which seem to be secreted within the layers of color, which are sometimes sanded and scraped to suggest coarse shadows of themselves or the feeling of old wall frescoes, questioning the role of abstraction and painting, itself.

The Norton's Recognition of Art by Women (RAW) is a program sponsored by the Leonard and Sophie Davis/MLDauray Arts Initiative, and was launched in 2011. The Deininger show is the sixth exhibition in the series. The RAW program also supports the Leonard and Sophie Davis Curatorial Fellow.