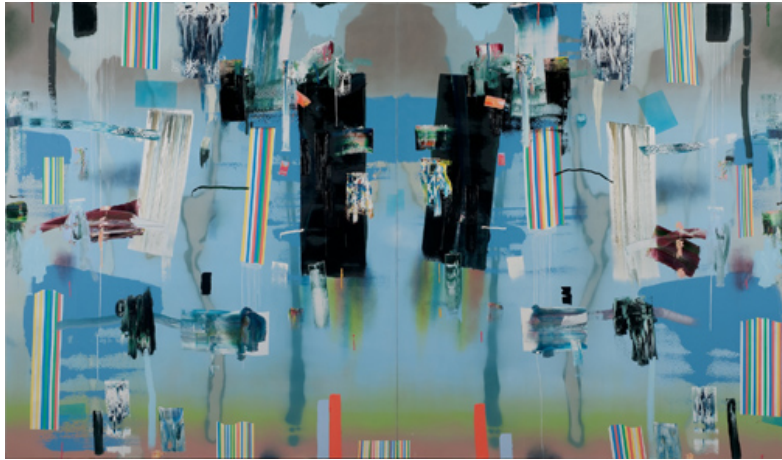


- Art Rated

Artist Interview: Tomory Dodge

By Jonathan Beer | April 18, 2012



Tomory Dodge is an artist based in Los Angeles who is known for his vibrant and active abstract paintings that combine gestural brushwork with a highly tuned color sense. His paintings are simultaneously announcing themselves as paintings and as spaces, each layer fueled by the “endless temptation of finding new forms, new phenomena.” Art-Rated was able to catch up with Tomory and discuss his work and ideas:

"Texoma", 2011, 84 x 144 inches

Art-Rated: Your work creates a dialogue about the physicality of painting and pushes what paint can do. Like Richter or Bacon, you push and pull and scrape, building layers and depth. Have you always made paintings that turned the brushstroke into a living entity on the canvas? Who or what has influenced you?

Tomory Dodge: I've always been interested in the physicality of paint and the physical process of making a painting. For me that's something that's at the core of painting itself, a physical substance becoming a image and vice versa, a little dab of paint becoming an earring, in the case of Vermeer. I've always been drawn to painters who tend to foreground that. The painters you mentioned for sure. Historically: Rembrandt of course, Velasquez too. The New York school: DeKooning, Guston, etc. A lot of contemporary people. The list goes on and on.

AR: Who are you looking at now?

TD: I guess most recently I've been looking at Diebenkorn. There is an excellent exhibition of his Ocean Park series at the Orange County Art Museum right now. It's interesting because he's a painter who's been dismissed to some degree, maybe because he's been associated with California and people see his work as lacking all the sexy angst of New York abstraction from the same time. But they are really amazing paintings. They are very quiet in a way.

AR: Your pieces have fascinating titles. “Murdered Afternoon” and “Horrid, Torrid Times” being two of my favorites. Can you speak about your conceptual process, where do the titles come from?

TD: I'll take titles from anywhere. I'll make them up, take them from music, books, film...etc. Lately I've been drawn towards using things like typos or misspelled words for titles. That seems to get closer to how I want the paintings to function in general. I used to go for simple, descriptive titles in my earlier work. As the work changed and became more abstract I really began to have a title crisis of sorts. I'd never given much thought to titles before and they suddenly seemed really important. I didn't feel like I could just leave everything untitled, although that is always an option.

One reason I had begun pushing in a more abstract direction is that I wanted to make the work more experiential. I wanted to move away from narrative. I wanted to emphasize that immediate experience of the painting and attaching language to that experience seemed very problematic to me at first. A lot of the titles from that period seem really stilted or self-conscious to me now. I'm hoping it's something I'm getting better at, but I think language is starting to play a more important role in the work.

AR: They seem like they might be song lyrics – does sound or music play a role in your work or it's creation?

TD: Music is huge for me. It definitely plays a role, but I'd be pressed to define exactly how it influences things. I'm what one could call a very amateur musician so it's something that is always in the background. I think that all creative endeavors utilize the same neural pathways at some level so there is definitely some crossover somewhere. I started working with stripes a couple of years ago and I would think about how both notes and colors are contextual. In other words, an A is an A but it elicits a completely different experience if it's played along side a D and opposed to an F#. A color we perceive as red will look totally different next to a green rather than a yellow- that kind of thing. Also, when I first started working on the

mirrored diptychs I had the notion of creating a feedback loop of sorts. That's not a necessarily musical concept, but it does have musical connotations. Those would be specific examples, but I'm not sure they provide any concise overall picture of how music influences the work as a whole.

AR: Some of your pieces reference digital collage in the usage of overlaying layers, stripes, and juxtaposed shapes... at the same time you come in with a completely oppositional, expressive painting language that eradicates the layers beneath. Is this something you are thinking about when creating your pieces?

TD: Yeah, I definitely think about the interaction of those things in the work. I like the formal tension that comes from the inclusion of different approaches to painting on one surface. But I think a lot of that tension comes from my own doubt in the adequacy of any single approach or system of painting. There is often a simultaneous doubt and fascination by the last mark or action I've made. I'm often driven to alter it by doing another action on top of it, not to obliterate or eradicate it, but to make it not so easily absorbed into a preconceived system or approach to painting. I try to make it a hybrid in a way. I think there is a lot of doubt in my work. Some people would say that is not a good thing and that an artist should be an absolute believer in what they do. I don't think that's true. I think doubt is essential.

At the same time I really want to surprise myself. I will often drag paint over a previous mark to see how it transforms. It's that endless temptation of finding new forms, new phenomena.

AR: In this recent work you seem to be using much more precise marks – where has this come from?

TD: I'm not sure. It may come from getting to know my own work better. Some of the work from a few years ago has a frantic quality when I see it now. I think a lot of that came from me trying to control the painting process in way that just wasn't really possible. I would often be simultaneously trying to keep all the things I liked in the painting while changing everything. I often ended up with something I liked (not always), but it was an exhausting process physically and emotionally. I took me a while to realize that when I start a painting it will necessarily change and that much of what I put down won't be there in the end. The paintings aren't necessarily any easier to make now, but I fight them less. I think this lends it self to a more direct or precise application of paint among other things.

AR: It almost looks like paper on the surface of the painting. Are you searching to anchor a vision of reality by suggesting the use of ready made materials?

TD: I like the fact that everything is made from the same material in the paintings. If I can stretch that material to the point where it starts to resemble other materials I think that's really interesting, but in the end paint is kind of this non-thing. It really lends it self to that kind of transformation anyway. It can be an object and the objects' shadow at the same time. It's hard to pin down. I think to some degree, all paintings function as object and window, or void. They are simultaneously of our physical world and not.

AR: Some of the works reflect new materials like an airbrush...can you talk about those decisions?

TD: That is all done with dry brush. When that first started appearing in the work I wasn't consciously trying to mimic airbrush or anything. I was just experimenting with another way of applying paint and it happened to really look like a spray application. I don't have anything against using an airbrush, but it's not necessary in my case. I could easily go buy an airbrush, but then it would inject the fact that something was done with an airbrush into the discourse of my work and that's doesn't interest me. I'm much more interested in the effect that application, whether its sprayed or dry brushed, has in relation to the work as a whole.

AR: Your work has tension, a controlled chaos of sorts. How often are your decisions made formally and how does exploring your artistic intuition come into play?

TD: I kind of touched on it before, but I think the two are always slipping into each other. I'll often begin with something that seems really formal and then react to it in some way. That will lead to another reaction and so on. I guess at a certain point I don't know if I can say whether something is purely formal or intuitive. I'm not sure the two are mutually exclusive. It seems like all formalities operate on some intuitive level as well as an analytical one. That's one thing that makes abstraction relevant and powerful.

AR: Where is the work heading now? Do you have any forthcoming exhibitions?

TD: My next solo show is in September in Los Angeles at ACME. I've been working on a body of small paintings for the last few months. There are a lot of things that developed in those paintings that I would like to try and do on a larger scale, or at least I'd like to see what happens with that attempted scale shift.