



the Stranger

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Art in Transit

A View from a Bus, Plus: Tupperware

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Seattle artist Susan Dory's abstract paintings have always been soft and waxy. (She makes them by underpainting, pouring, and masking-off, leaving layers of shapes that shift from separate to interdependent.) Her color combinations have always been luscious. But in the last two years, her work has undergone a transformation—though you could think of it simply as the transition from car to bus.

For the better part of 10 years, Dory's paintings had one basic design element: horizontal bands of acrylic color with curved edges. She called them "capsules," and they zoomed by within the frames of the canvas. Looking at them was like watching the world go by from the window of a fast-moving car. Her newest paintings—some of which are six feet to a side—shown simultaneously in Seattle and New York at Winston Wächter Fine Art, are dominated by elongated arches. The arches that appear in the top half of each painting reach downward; those in the lower half reach upward. It's as if each painting were a set of open jaws, or many sets of jaws, each vying for space. The action implies, but never establishes firmly, a horizon line.



This is also what the inside of a city bus feels like, seats rising from below and handholds lowering from above, bodies swaying and crowding. The arches have thick outlines, mostly black or white, which immediately brings to mind aerosol art, or graffiti. In a phone conversation, Dory says that her son has become an accomplished graffiti artist—and unintentional influence. Recently, on a trip with him, she fell in love with LA wildstyle graffiti: vivid, hard-to-read, complexly overlapping writing. Dory's signature softness and refined paint handling has gone a little bit street. In some of these paintings, you might be looking up at the famously swooping freeway overpasses of LA. It is an exhilarating break.

Her work began shifting in 2008, when Dory says the economic collapse led her to a greater emphasis on systematic interconnectedness. Her new paintings, like her old ones, are entirely abstract—there are no actual images of jaws, cars, or buses in them, just colored shapes and lines. But you can see that they have taken on a new internal conflict, the way that parts both try to fit in and try to interrupt the whole as these arches fight their way forward, out, up, down.

Showing with Dory is the (rightfully) beloved LA artist George Stoll, who hand-makes manufactured objects such as sponges, wrapped rolls of toilet paper, and, here, Tupperware. Stoll's cups and tumblers are made of beeswax and paraffin pigmented to mimic the real-life colors of the containers over the years, from frosted pastels to the '70s-est oranges and deepest raspberries. Their subtly rippled and thumbbed-over fleshy surfaces betray the hands that made them, but only slightly—they're monuments to the funny intimacy of Tupperware. ★



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