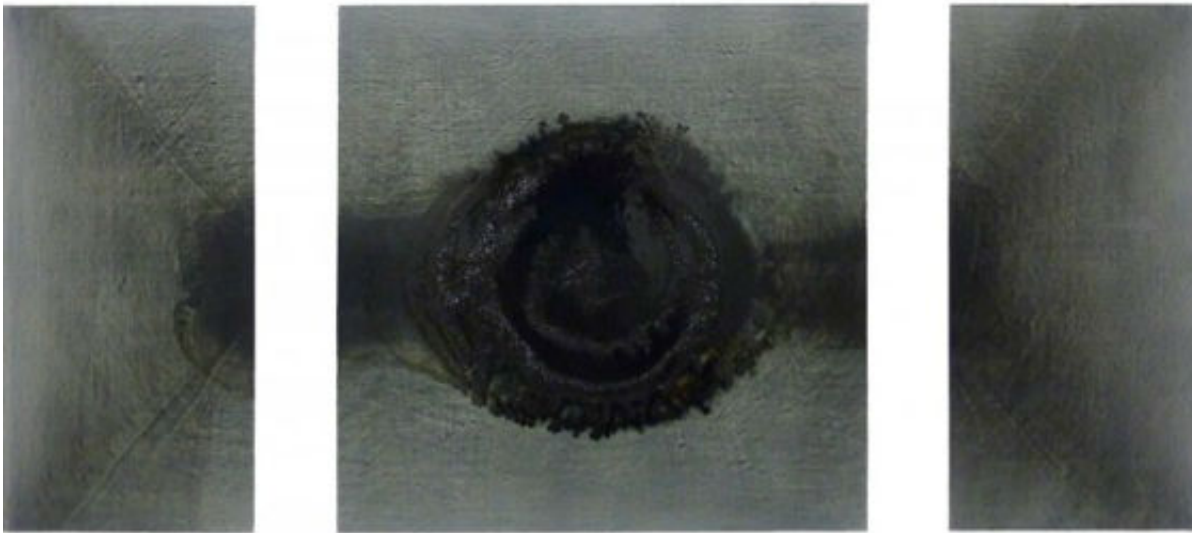


Alissa Blumenthal Retrospective Is Not Real

Categories: Visual Arts ^[1]



Alissa Blumenthal, "Pendulum II"

Let's get this out of the way. In "Alissa Blumenthal: A Small Retrospective," currently up at Art Palace, Alissa Blumenthal is not real.

The gallery text may try to tell you otherwise. Press materials describe Blumenthal (1899-1995) as an "under-appreciated American painter of the 20th century." Among the highlights procured for her bio, she was born in Russia, studied under Malevich, received a harsh review by Clement Greenberg, died in Brooklyn and was rediscovered in 2011.

To the casual gallery-goer, it's a fascinating story, but again, one that's entirely made up (the fact that the contemporary gallery isn't prone to doing retrospectives of dead Russian painters, let alone retrospectives at all, may

immediately tip off some observant visitors not already in the know).



Alissa Blumenthal, "Small Abstraction (w)"

This "retrospective" is curated by Tatiana Istomina, a real live artist who's a resident at the Core Residency Program at the Glassell School of Art. She is both the creator of the works on display and the underappreciated Blumenthal. So why such an elaborate, confusing fiction?

The answer lies in the works themselves. Istomina has nearly 30 small, mostly gray abstractions on display that are inspired by another time -- constructivism. They have clean lines, random characters and loose doodles and coils. After she painted them, Istomina felt compelled to create this character around them who could justify their existence in 2013. Her interest lies in this bygone period first, authorship second, if at all.

On the one hand, it's a curious, intriguing concept, one that can be appreciated for its creativity and freedom in exploring art history. On the other, it's also pretty cowardly; Istomina doesn't seem to have the confidence to put her name on her work and justify its existence on its own. And for all the attempts to create this fiction in a gallery show, when the pieces are considered outside of the "retrospective," as they inevitably will be, Blumenthal is no longer relevant anyway. She is as nonexistent as she always was, and the work will be judged based on its own merits and not on any elaborate, distracting yarn -- as it should be.

"Alissa Blumenthal: A Small Retrospective" at Art Palace, 3913 Main, runs now through May 11. For more information, call 281-501-2964 or visit www.artpalacegallery.com.