

Jim Lee *Altamont*

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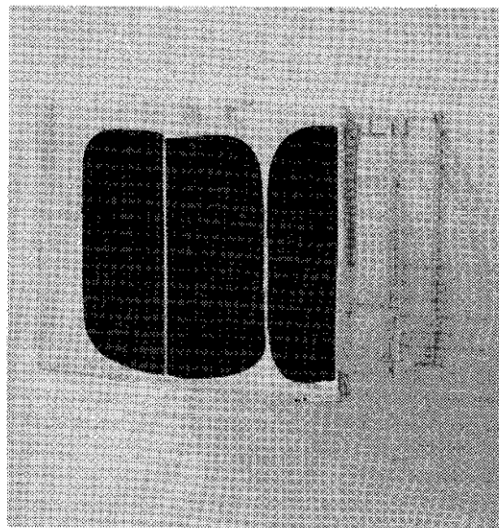
There's a tumbledown, pieced-together ambience to Jim Lee's current exhibition at Freight + Volume. If you haven't been to this gallery, it's an excellent, small, cramped room. Lee's work is strewn all over the place, coupling with the industrial realities of the space—the tubing and pipes running across the ceiling, the exposed nuts and bolts—in a way that sets the little wheels in your head spinning round and round. As you discover how ramshackle yet precise the work actually is, and how oddly it echoes these architectural details, one of those little cogs up there blows out and you settle into a delightfully looping rhythm, just the kind needed to navigate this terrain.

Most, if not all, of the work flirts on the edge between painting and sculpture. The pieces read as strange hybrids, refusing fixed interpretation. Aesthetically, they lean toward those interesting bits of junk you see everywhere in the city, the detritus of consumption and production whose traces can range from familiar to the downright baffling. In one of Lee's more overt gestures, the painting "Untitled (Complimentary Collage)," he attaches a scrap of Day-Glo orange plastic construction fencing to the picture plane. It fluctuates between the pictorial and the concrete, and brings to mind the wider world outside the gallery. Other pieces drag you back in. "Untitled (UltraBlueCrutch)," leans awkwardly against the wall near the gallery entrance like some misshapen creature waiting for validation. It's an off-kilter,

rectangular piece of wood painted an intense blue. The painted surface terminates in a neatly curving edge that exposes the linen that's been stapled to the wood. This structure is affixed atop a paint-splattered two-by-four propped against the wall, and in its entirety stands about thirty-four inches tall. On the floor around it are little orange spray-paint markings, not made by the artist but left over from the construction of the gallery. They seem to tease and needle this bizarre deformity, daring it to be as useful as they once were.

To further amplify the interplay between the work and its architectural environment, the artist has built a wall that runs at an obtuse angle into the exhibition space. The studs have been left exposed at the ceiling, allowing our reading of the environment to fold over the room's preexisting pipes and random markings. It's a beguiling move, one that mirrors the make and feel of Lee's other pieces. "Rust/Slit," which hangs on this wall, has an exposed skeletal wood frame, delicately constructed, that projects nearly one foot into actual space. Across its surface is a Myron Stout-like abstraction in oxide red. One can't help but bounce back and forth between the ceiling, wall, and painting.

For all the dilapidated nuances there is a real rigor to the work's conception and execution. Their odd presence draws us in to inspect them more closely, and to experience what complex structures they are. There is care



Jim Lee, "Untitled (Rust 2 Slit)" (2007). Acrylic and flashe on linen over wood. 11 ¼" x 14 ½" x 9 ¼".

and effort and a feeling of the handmade. This is a refreshing contrast to the often anal construction of most painting—the heavy-duty stretchers, the fine linen prepared with several layers of high quality gesso, the taped edges—that comprises the clean, conservative givens of the practice. Lee bends these conventions, keeping them just close enough for scrutiny. In doing so there is a breakdown of authority; order gives way to unexpected territories where success and failure merge into some hermaphroditically eccentric concept that cannot be pinned down.

—Craig Olson