

REVIEWS

witted Rothko, all filtered by way of Blake Rayne, Cheyney Thompson, and R. H. Quaytman, the lot was calculatedly varied and had an effect similar to that of the cast-aluminum set, likewise generating a symbolic field of expression. With these “true” paintings, Henderson punctuated his intention with what might be read as a pictorial quotation mark: the photographic technique of vignetting at the painting’s edges, so that a hazy border separates the image field from the stretcher’s edge. Yet these paintings are slow in their touch, self-reflective, and pagelike, standing apart from the merely conceptual tableaux in the exhibition. Despite all of these winks and nods at critiquing the activity of the genius painter, when a brush is in Henderson’s hand, he leaves traces of invention and evidence of painterly curiosity that suggest that “frugal genius” may apply, above all, to him.

—Michelle Grabner

AUSTIN, TX

Lisa Tan

ARTHOUSE AT THE JONES CENTER

“Two Birds, Eighty Mountains, and a Portrait of the Artist,” a picturesque summation of the works in Lisa Tan’s exhibition at Austin’s recently renovated Arthouse, seemed a funny title for such a predominantly text-based show. But it certainly touched on a signature aspect of her work—that the message it communicates is often more complicated than it first appears. For the past decade, Tan’s conceptually rigorous output has frequently been read in terms of intimacy and its attendant themes—desire, attachment, loss, longing—but rare is the discussion that delineates her key insight, which emphasizes not intimacy as such but its possibility, and the fact that it is always present and ever changing. This compact selection of the artist’s recent work, including two ongoing pieces, opened up that conversation while pointing to another operation common in Tan’s practice (and indeed a dominant strain of art production in recent years): the reformatting and deployment of found and archival material to deeply contemplative effect.

Of the lot, “In Search of the Forgotten, Letters from Mme de Forget to Eugène Delacroix,” 2010–, an Arthouse commission, most explicitly suggested this direction. The series reproduces missives written to the Romantic hero over several decades by his old friend (and former lover), and they are very hard to read (the paper is creased and torn; Mme de Forget’s calligraphy in French is barely legible), but a gallery handout helped to make apparent the warm exchanges to be found between the lines. Mme de Forget (so aptly named) is just one of the many forgotten figures Tan has reimagined in her practice. Another emerged in *Les*

Samourais, 2010, a short video inspired by “a minor and sentimental fact” that was captioned in a footnote beneath a wall label: the death of the loquacious finch that appeared in Jean-Pierre Melville’s eponymous 1967 film, after a fire that demolished the director’s studio. In Tan’s version, the lone finch was given a companion, digitally inserted by the artist into the first three and a half minutes of Melville’s film. The addition is seamless, making for an admirable modification of the auteur’s original.

Two final works cast more direct links to the artist’s biography through found materials. The dual slide projection of *National Geographic*, 2009, contrasts photographs of mountains Tan carefully excised from old issues of the magazine against an image of the reverse side of each page; the proverbial “other side of the mountain.” A candid and poetic narrative on the same Arthouse handout provided clues about this piece, too: that Tan’s divorced parents lived on opposite sides of a mountain range; that extracting every single majestic peak from twenty-five years’ worth of her father’s collection of dusty back issues, ten years after his passing, proved to be a deeply personal, even metaphorical, task for the artist. Including this information in an oblique way, again, Tan negotiates the private-public divide by slightly pulling back, allowing for such information about each work to be present only in supplemental materials.

The most straightforwardly personal piece in the show, *Letters from Dr. Bamberger*, 2001–, comprises clinical notes from physical examinations written by her doctor in frank detail to Tan and her romantic partner at the time, following an annual checkup. For each installment, one letter is always addressed to the artist and the other to her then lover (though occasional blank pages suggest that some years Tan was without one). This project could amass into an extraordinary archive, yet it also serves as a delicate foil to Tan’s latest work, or at least the few new pieces here that, in broad and open-ended ways, and through specific material delivery, revise and comment not only on lost history, but also on what it means to lose.

—Lauren O’Neill-Butler

ASPEN, CO

Mamma Andersson

ASPEN ART MUSEUM

In 2004, the Swedish painter Mamma Andersson was included in a show at LA’s Hammer Museum called “The Undiscovered Country,” which explored a postmodern take on representation described by curator Russell Ferguson as a strategy of “painterly ambiguity.” At the time, Andersson was not well known in the States, yet it was immediately clear that her paintings epitomized an approach to form that could be characterized in Ferguson’s terms: Old dichotomies of abstraction and figuration had been erased, and art history had become available as a kind of stylistic smorgasbord to be drawn on at will. Despite the artist’s inclusion in the 2004 Carnegie International in Pittsburgh and several solo shows at major American galleries in years since, her elusive, forlorn painterly world would not make its solo debut in a US institution until this past winter, when thirty of the Swedish artist’s oil paintings, watercolors, and mixed-media works dating from 2002 to 2010 were brought together by Aspen Art Museum director and chief curator Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson for this show.

Myriad fragmentary narratives pervade Andersson’s work, which integrates various dichotomies—past and present, outdoors and indoors, roughness and delicacy—to spellbinding effect. Residue, traces, and shadows; quiet dramas intriguingly suggested but never fully revealed: Though tantalizing clues are offered (a burning sofa in



View of “Lisa Tan,” 2010. Foreground: *National Geographic*, 2009. Background: *Letters from Dr. Bamberger*, 2001–.