

Anna Ostoya's "Exposures" at Bortolami Gallery

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By Merve Unsal

Anna Ostoya's twenty-eight canvases in Bortolami Gallery mark the twenty-eight days of February 2011. Upon the gallery's invitation, Ostoya set herself specific rules of production—to initiate a new piece each day for the duration of February, and to work only on 20 x 24 inch canvases with three main materials: newspaper, gold leaf, acrylic paint and papier-mâché. The resulting series of 28 works, *Exposures* on display are thus residues of a performative, diaristic process that the artist obscures with formal finesse.

Each canvas is remarkably different. While a black and white eye that would make Deren proud marks one canvas, another is void of any images, a bare monochromatic papier-mâché relief. In another piece, an upside-down L of images interwoven with yellow stripes, contrasts a Mondrian-like grid. While one diagonal is a dash of color, another is a collage of images of hands. The canvases are installed at equal distances apart, in a single line around the larger rectangular room of the gallery's two spaces, triggering a staccato yet rarely surprising experience.

Ostoya's On Kawara-esque pre-determination of the process is not a means of trammeling; on the contrary, having to use what exists in the newspapers on the day of, to trigger what could be made seems to have enabled Ostoya to create a seductive set of paintings that might be too "together" to the works' disadvantage. The papier-mâché acts as a visual glue while geometric forms, marked by vertices, reveal a modernist aesthetic sensibility.



1. Anna Ostoya, *Exposures*: 10.02.2011, 2011.



2. Anna Ostoya, *Exposures*: 14.02.2011, 2011.

The most compelling canvases on display are marked by an absence of images. What could it be about the day of production that stopped Ostoya from using images, her ammunition? The viewer is forced to imagine what could have caused such a cessation. Was it the horridness of what happened on that day or was the artist just *blasé*? The gesture of *not* doing is more political, interpretive and construed than days on which the artist used easily recognizable news-related or other such stock images.

Ostoya's impulse to make incongruent collages is diluted by the conceptual framework of the project. The monastic daily practice would benefit from further specifications, as the temporal limitations somehow seem insufficient. The tension between the working method and the visuals feel unresolved—if each painting is anchored by the boundaries of the day, what are the other parameters at play? The issue of industry becomes particularly pertinent in the context of the labor-intensive, structured method required by Ostoya's project. Yet the relationship between industriousness and artistic practice remains somewhat murky.

Upon viewing Ostoya's work, Robert Morris's pieces where he painted over newspaper pages, almost fully "hiding" the content with light gray paint, currently on display at MoMA, come to mind. Ostoya seems to be straddling a few different spheres and histories; visually referencing Minimal works (both with a capital and lower-case m), setting conceptual limitations, making surrealistic collages, and drawing on other contemporary photography-based practices. The initial appeal of the exhibition is, in this sense, familiarity, yet it is also these conflicting visual and conceptual pulls that prevent Ostoya's work from having a fresh, distinct tour de force. The temporal anchoring seems to have been a sincere response to the world in February 2011. However, it is precisely the hefty responsibility of making work in February 2011 that suffocates these beautiful collages.

—Merve Unsal

Merve Unsal is an artist and writer from Istanbul currently based in New York.

1. Anna Ostoya, *Exposures: 10.02.2011*, 2011. Papier maché and gold leaf, on canvas. 24 x 20 inches. All images courtesy of the artist and Bortolami, New York. All photos by Thomas Mueller.

2. Anna Ostoya, *Exposures: 14.02.2011*, 2011. Papier maché, gold leaf, acrylic and newspaper on canvas. 24 x 20 inches.

3. View of "Exposures," 2011. Bortolami, New York.

4. Anna Ostoya, *Exposures: 19.02.2011*, 2011. Gold leaf, acrylic and newspaper on canvas. 24 x 20 inches.

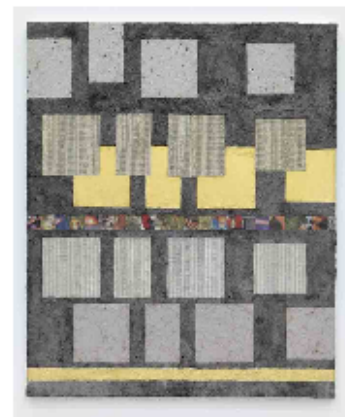
5. Anna Ostoya, *Exposures: 9.02.2011*, 2011. Papier maché, gold leaf and newspaper on canvas. 24 x 20 inches.



3. View of "Exposures," 2011.



4. Anna Ostoya, *Exposures: 19.02.2011*, 2011.



5. Anna Ostoya, *Exposures: 9.02.2011*, 2011.