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# ARTFORUM

Reviews

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## Kate Shepherd

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Kate Shepherd, *womantorse daz3d2 Draw-On-1.lfr(three scenes)*, 2014, triptych, oil and enamel on panel, overall 6' × 11' 2".

The surfaces of Kate Shepherd's paintings in "Fwd: The Telephone Game" are glossy, rich, and warm, even when the colors are cool. Made on large wood panels, the works feature compositions of thin white lines in oil applied to unmodulated fields of enamel. These lines appear chaotic at first—they form jagged angles, jointed curves, and sprays like fallen pins—but on sustained viewing, familiar shapes emerge: We recognize an angle as the bend of an elbow, a curve as the swell of a hip, and two or three quick, short lines as the outline

of a nipple. Some works engender these flashes of recognition more quickly than others. In the diptych *daz woman david feet.s15, 22.widened (jester stance)* (all works 2014), for instance, the left-hand panel clearly features a pair of feet, while in the panel to the right, the shapes are similar yet skewed; they float toward abstraction, as if Shepherd had drawn them not by looking at the left-hand panel but by listening to someone describe it.

If the lines suggest bodies, they also depict a process, or the evidence of a process, that bridges a great distance between source and painting—a series of steps, each of which changes the content of the source, like the game of telephone (hence the title of the exhibition). In many cases, Shepherd begins by acquiring 3-D digital models of a female body online (created for use by video-game designers), and then imports the files into SketchUp, a piece of software used for architectural drafting. Next, she draws over the models and rotates and manipulates the results into the form she will eventually paint in white on the surface of her panels. The transformation of computer-generated human body into digital fragments is the result of a complex process involving not only the artist but also a technical assistant based in the Middle East, iChat, Dropbox, mathematical calculations, conversations with friends and colleagues, misunderstandings, and software quirks. (Of SketchUp Shepherd has written, “The interface has to be reckoned with on its terms, like a difficult sibling.”)

This convoluted series of steps gives the paintings a unique temporality, both expanding and contradicting the archetypal activity of figure painting—that is, bringing 3-D bodies to a 2-D canvas with a brush in real time. Because Shepherd’s images are drawn from the eminently malleable virtual space of design software, each painting is a kind of film still, a static picture plucked from a continuous flow of them. This sense is strongest in the triptych *womantorse daz3d2 Draw-On-1.lfr(three scenes)* (the works are titled after the files from which they are derived), which shows the same figure rotated three ways. Read from left to right, the lines become more legible in stages, sliding into a recognizable contrapposto curve, or—if one reads right to left—splintering into abstraction. On either side of this triptych, we might imagine the figure further abstracted and further figured. The contingency of the digital source contrasts with the panels’ physicality, giving the compositions the air of a constellation, the stars having already shifted position by the time their light reaches our eyes.

For two of the works here, Shepherd selected virtual game models that reminded her of Georg Kolbe’s famous sculpture of a female nude in Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s German Pavilion for the 1929 world’s fair in Barcelona. In Shepherd’s rendering, the lines of the figure drift characteristically toward abstraction, while additional strokes suggest the figure’s iconic architectural surroundings, implying an affinity—or at least a shorter distance—between the figure’s angular curves and the architecture’s stark geometry. In this and a set of works based on another modernist icon, Alvar Aalto’s 1931–32 *Paimio* chair, Shepherd interrogates the imperfect yet enduring relationship between bodies and the spaces, both real and virtual, meant to hold them.