

Linda Besemer

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Never demanding more from viewers than they themselves are ready and willing to deliver, Linda Besemer's bold new paintings demonstrate that there is no such thing as difficult art. Dumb as dishrags, these beach-towel-sized abstractions are draped over slender aluminum fixtures that resemble bathroom towel racks. Made of nothing but layer upon layer of pure acrylic paint—laid down in striped and plaid patterns—the painter's ruthlessly honest works hide nothing behind their slick, synthetic surfaces. Absolutely superficial, they appeal to no external authority—other than the sensations and perceptions they generate in viewers. This simply means that each and every one of us is in the best position to know whether or not a particular piece works.

Just because Besemer's paintings are superficial doesn't mean they're not complicated. Consisting of four-by-six-foot shower-curtainlike sheets of acrylic, these two-faced pieces turn inside-out the idea that a painting has a front and a back, or a top and a bottom, or, for that matter, an inside and an outside. Hung so that the surface closest to viewers disappears over the top of the rod to become the surface that's also furthest away, these ingenious objects function something like reversible garments that have been specially designed to undermine oppositions. Since you can see both sides of Besemer's paintings simultaneously, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to notice that their distinct and meticulously arranged patterns are neither opposites nor negative images of one another, but complementary arrangements in which various bands of color play off of each other in a mix-and-match fashion.

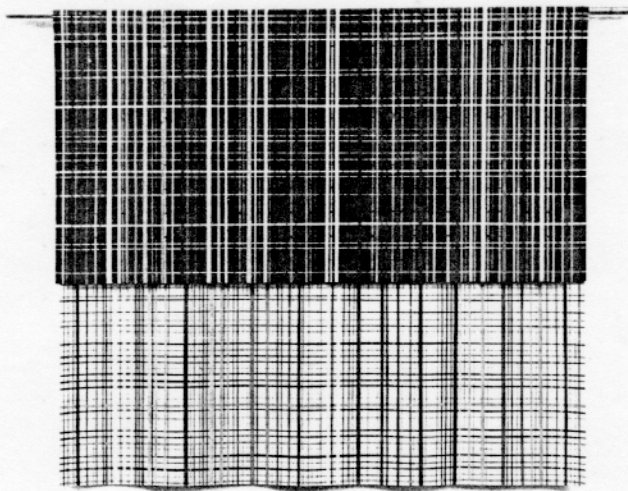
Fold #9: Section d'Or (all works, 1998) pairs predominantly yellow horizontals with blue verticals; *Fold #8: Baroque* contrasts a thick, densely woven plaid with an airy, delicate one; and *Fold #7: Optical Objectile* makes black and white appear to be two sides of the same coin, juxtaposed components that make sense as complements, not opposites. The more time

you spend looking at these curious abstractions, the greater the variety of relationships you see along the lines where one edge of each canvas-free painting begins to overlap the rest of its relaxed surface.

But the most significant opposition that unravels in front of Besemer's works is the one between difficulty and ease. Utterly casual, these user-friendly works fly in the face of the old-fashioned idea that contemporary art is filled with such difficulty that it's practically a language unto itself, and that the services of experts and specialists are required to translate it into terms that are readily accessible and generally comprehensible. In my humble opinion, the belief in art's intrinsic difficulty does far less for art—and for viewers!—than it does for the experts and specialists whose careers and seriousness are based on just such elitist myths.

Likewise, Besemer's paintings contend that just because art isn't difficult to understand doesn't mean that it's simple to make. If you've ever experienced joy or happiness or pleasure, you know that these sensations (which are often difficult to come by) are always characterized by an otherwise inconceivable ease—at least while you're under their influence. There is nothing dumb about pleasure, nor is there anything difficult about it. Besemer's sharp-witted art foregrounds this fact by getting sophistication to slip out from difficulty's constrictive grip. Made to stimulate bodily responses, her highly refined paintings reveal that if contemporary art means anything at all, it means that you have to decide for yourself. Of course, that's more difficult for some than for others.

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Linda Besemer
Fold #7: Optical Objectile, 1998
Pure acrylic paint folded over
polished aluminum
48" x 72"