

DOSSIER

Amanda Valdez: Taste of Us



An abstract painter is situated strangely in relation to the history of her medium. On the one hand, very little in a given work bears a direct and obvious connection to common social life – a situation that has always made interpreting an abstract painting uncomfortable. By definition, it cannot picture its theme, and this makes it seem too distant from the languages in which we usually express our understanding. This seems to put an abstract painting beyond the flow of history. On the other hand, there is a clear history to the development of abstract painting. We can pinpoint its birth, in 1912, first in the work of Vasily Kandinsky, after which abstraction often bore more weight in the eyes of connoisseurs than traditional representational art. But in the 1960s, its clear development broke down, interrupted by a sudden explosion of artistic styles: Pop, Conceptualism, and even the ostensibly abstract Minimalist aesthetic. In the following decades, the art world saw an intense resurgence of representational forms, often ironically used or combined with seemingly unrelated images, but still forceful enough to overcome the power abstraction had previously held.

*Amanda Valdez's work is part of a resurgence abstract painting. On first appearance, its craft and sophistication stands with the small and medium-scale abstraction of the early modern period. Yet its subtle use of more traditional craft techniques links it to other trends in the history of art since the 1960s, like Postminimalism, Feminist art, and Pattern & Decoration – as much an index to a history book as a work in its own right. The meaning is found both in the iconic use of traditional abstract forms and the way it relates to the history of alternative traditions by its indexical use of their methods. A work like *Good to be King* or *Sunset Revenge* often bear visual resemblance to paintings by the likes of Ellsworth Kelly, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, or Frantisek Kupka, yet its technique should subvert the sense that it is a simple imitation. By sewing her canvases, she places traditional craft methods and historically important forms of painting in a horizontal relation, privileging neither. Revealing her methods of creation is a way of incorporating the story of her work's production, and updating the methods of abstract painting for a culture that has relearned to value concept and interpretation. Valdez's painting does not represent, but it creates forms whose meanings are representative as well as purely aesthetic. It may be appreciated for its simple pleasures or taken as an invitation to review the history of its medium.*

*Amanda Valdez: Taste of Us runs now through February 17th at Denny Gallery. 261 Broome Street, New York City. Above Images: (Left) *Good to be King*, 2011 Fabric, thread acrylic and canvas. 72 x 84 inches. (Right) Installation: *Taste of Us*. (From top left): *Sunset Revenge*, *Lost*, *Double Decker*, and *Lost & Found*, all 2012.*

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