



Anna "Patched Aquilone" (left), acrylics, felt and marbles,
felt thread and paper on canvas, 46"x55a"x21"



interview by Colleen Taylor

interview conducted at Palmetto

and the Artful

DIANA COOPER

doodling, independent of any one position, has an identifiable language: its motifs are small, frequently repetitive, and never problematized. It privileges touch, the play of pen into paper, over image, and its use rarely violates the duration of its making.

Doodling is what we do while we are doing something else: talking on the phone, listening to a lecture, thinking through a problem. It is a record of the mind's habits, as if

keeping one's foot or pacing about the room left a permanent trace in the air. ▶

If your handwriting gives out early, doodling is what we turn to in common—a

shared signature. This can cross your I's and dot your Y's, but your doodles might look

just like Jeffrey Dahmer's. Of course, precisely because doodling doesn't use the

conscious mind, it has often been studied for the psychology it might reveal—but how

much more interesting to imagine it as the brain's status, like a hand-operated BOD for

the pattern of one's thoughts, if not their substance. To continue, as it so much allows

doodling to serve not only as the bodily source of much of

Cooper 's work, but also as a metaphor for its meaning. ▶

Diana

It also courts an ineluctable question about how to understand abstraction in a post-Greenberg era. Once you lose the Modernist idea that a medium is best employed to reveal its own limits, purely self-referential abstraction starts to seem awfully boring, if not an impossibility. Letting color and form profit from their relationships in the world are in itself, even when not aware of them, can only be a good thing. On the other hand, it can also leave one scrambling for a way to understand abstraction that isn't merely a game of free association not much more sophisticated than that employed to find a face in the clouds. The one looks like the game has its purpose, but used exclusively, it can make an abstract work seem like the bastard child of representation, waiting only for a marriage to image to give it meaning. ▶

diagram:

The Essential City Parts, Mixed media on paper,
13" x 14" x 5/8"

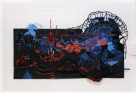




▶ Dana Cooper's work looks like a lot of things—maps, brochures, street boards, diagrams, architectural renderings, and realistic information are all commonly evoked comparisons. You could also add to that list fetch gear, rock, a candy store, and a view of the street through the windows of a car in the rain and all be within poetic license. The first bit, though, has as a common denominator a series of systems for understanding something larger. If dwelling reveals the mind's systems that are a part of every thought, but not particular to any, abstraction can let us think about specific culture and forms in a way that piggypunks on their lounge seats, but is not tethered to them. ▶

▶ What, then, are the primary characteristics of Dana Cooper's work? Some bought color, for one. Individual pieces range from limited palette to full spectrum, with certain shades—like fire engine red—making frequent appearances, but the common denominator is saccharine color of the sort not often found in nature. Unlike Peter Blake, whose palette otherwise warrants the same description, Cooper doesn't highlight the genius of her colors by combining them in jarring ways or by leaving/leaving with purely modern associations, like nuclear green. Nothing overwheals and there is always a lot of white in each piece, whether part of her construction or the wall. This adds up to visual saturation within good taste, rather than making the work seem psychobabble or aggressive. It is cheery and brisk. ▶

▶ The surfaces of each piece are generally smooth, whether flat or multifaceted. Plastic, foam core, paper, neoprene, protein mug pens, vinyl, and acetate are slick, zinc points, felt, and pipe cleaners add occasional textures. Art, craft, and office supplies are used in roughly equal quantities. This expansion of a traditional materials list is not wide enough to include found objects, just as systems navigate something larger, these materials all end in order applied into the creation of something else. ▶



Steve Nitzberg, 2007. Paper, vinyl, steel mesh, acrylic, felt, other paper, 40" x 50" x 15"



Above, for Above Left is for Above Far Left

*All Our Wind is 100% red, blue, paper, vinyl, latex, paper, print, ink, acrylic, glass, wood, metal, and other materials, 100% Cooper, 100% 70" x 80" x 10"

The work is fabulous, but not seamless. How each piece is constructed is pretty self-evident and the labor that is involved in that construction is likely to impress, but not mystify. With the right materials, good instructions, and proper patience, one gets the feeling that in a pinch, anyone could approximate a specific Cooper piece. This is a wall that, like a museum's restorer, prefers to reveal the method of its own assembly and at the end of the day, could be mostly broken back down into parts that would fit inside a Tupperware box. These little bits also combine in Cooper's work to create an immense ecosystem, but are never subjected to the end of the experience of the work system featured.

There is a provisional nature to Cooper's creations. This is confirmed in the way the same work often changes with each shift in location, transforming as it is reassembled to respond to the specificity of the space and the evolving needs of the piece. The work is many ways clearly defined, complicated entirely of numbers, color and distinct surfaces, but its transient nature and generous physicality leave it hard to grasp. Even in the still air of the gallery, one expects to see a pain point (at least for the viewer). All of this makes it tempting to label the work organic, but Cooper's generosity for right angles and clear boundaries renders that term too inaccurate to be really useful. The work takes its cues from urbanity before nature. 1

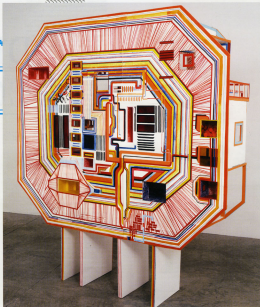
This habit of rendering any single attempt at interpretation inadequate is a fundamental aspect of Cooper's enterprise. The work takes on shape with a feather duster and white gloves. It could be monumental, if it wasn't so funny. As blatantly handmade as it is reminiscent of things better, this is art that is based in process and work, mass and matter. That Cooper demonstrates how inexpensive polished art is one value you can assign that the work doesn't either away from. 2

Two pieces at her most recent show at Rosemead Gallery in New York stand as examples. One, titled "All Our Wandering," depicts a single large object—a rarity for Cooper. Its shape is that of several boxes, each nested within a larger box and spilling one out of the other, accordion-style. The exterior is unlike Cooper's familiar fine engine red, with black piping. The interior is white—or I should say, was white at its current incarnation, the inside is an covered with dense layers of red lines and repeating shapes that it gives away. Formerly, the piece with some exception, the outside is stark, all hard planes and geometry. Nothing contradicts the shape's bottom, froths, every surface is patterned, cutting and fixed, the drawing largely designed to support and merely decorate it. These two approaches not only encompass two extremes in how an history has understood surface, but they also speak to ideas about public and private space, with all their contingent associations in the politics of domesticity. Moving from the inside to the outside of "All Our Wandering" is like suddenly exiting from seeing the face of a skydiver to a view of its complete interior, or moving from the back of someone's head to a map of their thoughts. 3

DI
CC

BELOW A FACILE MODEL

"I produced 1980-1981, from 1975, 1984, 1986, 1988 by Walter, Alberto, Piero, Giancarlo, Antonio, and... 1975, 1980 e 1981"



DIANA COOPER



Below and Far Below

Orange Alert: 100% latex paint, Acrylic spray, 200" x 100" x 100" mesh, Paper, Silicone, compressed foam, map pins, Rope, Installation, Assistant (1/1/11)



Cooper's installation 'Orange Alert' contains another such faceted object, in the middle of a space full of vibrating orange, yellow, and red that engage along the walls and jolt out into the room. Cooper has placed a custom scaffold. The piece reaches like a ladder up into the space—below it and you hover at the center of her creation. The temptation here is to read the object as transcendental, but its disavowal under person-size scale and flimsy construction both metaphorically and literally can't hold the weight. Standing above waist high, it also looks a lot like a ladder—a decidedly less soaring association. Of course, given the piece's title, its most likely point of departure is the Bush administration's color-coded terror alert system. Thus, one dialog forms between a suggestion of transcendence and the resolutely unbound, between a system for making sense of the world and something clearly broken. In Cooper's system, such dichotomies play nice with one another, as does the largest one of all: form and meaning.

