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"Kim Dingle: Painting Blindfolded" at Sperone Westwater, installation view (images courtesy Sperone Westwater)

Kim Dingle is an artist with a history of working under preconceived constraints.

Priss showed up in the art world in the mid-1990s. She was a feisty, anarchic bundle in a white dress and Mary Jane shoes, her Sunday best. Simultaneously three and 30 years old, she looked determined to punch you in the nose if you got close enough. In some manifestations she wore black-framed glasses. Other times she didn't. She had a friend who looked exactly like her, but her skin was brown. I remember one work where she had pulled up her dress to show off her tattoo. When Priss is in 3D, she is usually standing in a crib. In paintings, she gets into fights, runs with a posse, and causes trouble.

In an interview conducted by Carolina A. Miranda that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* (November 8, 2017), Kim Dingle talked about the origins of Priss:

I was in the old LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art] ... in the American wing, and I was looking at these paintings by limners. Before photography, limners went around the country and they painted portraits of people. Limners were no Rembrandts. They were really bad. You're sitting in your farmhouse and you haven't seen anyone for a month and then this limner comes along and says he will paint you. They all have these stony faces. And the one thing I noticed about

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limners is that when it came to children, they took adult heads and shrunk them down to the size of a walnut and put it on a little body.



“Kim Dingle: Painting Blindfolded” at Sperone Westwater, installation view

Much to her chagrin, Dingle is probably best known for inventing Priss. Her exasperation led her to make the work featured in her fifth New York exhibition since 1994, *Kim Dingle: Painting Blindfolded* at Sperone Westwater (January 10 – March 3, 2018). In her conversation with Miranda, Dingle revealed that the idea for this exhibition came to her while talking with her Los Angeles dealer, Susan Veilmetter during a studio visit. Expressing her resistance to doing any more paintings of Priss and her friends, she declared: “I could do these blindfolded.” Around the tenth time Dingle said this, she knew what she had to do:

It was a technique and a challenge. You are using your senses and every fiber of what you know. You use your hands. You use your touch. It could have been such an utter failure.

The idea of working under a preconceived constraint and following through on it is something that Dingle has done before. In 1990, she did a series of map paintings based on other people’s memories, outlining silhouettes of maps on a loosely painted monochromatic ground. The painting’s titles tell all: “Maps of Canada drawn from memory by American citizens” and “The United Shapes Of America, (As Drawn From Memory By California Grad Students)” (both 1990).

Dingle has made different bodies of work using found materials, ranging from a gumball machine to sepia-toned photographs of children. She has designed wallpaper and made installations, some of which involve enlisting young children to paint on the wall. Children, violence, and race have been recurring subjects throughout her career, but – and this one reason I am a fan – she always seems to do something unexpected. She has never settled for a brand: no butterflies, spots, or other signature motifs for her.

In a recent group of paintings, which were not included in this exhibition, Dingle painted on OSB (Oriented Stand Board), a kind of engineered lumber. She used the visible strands and shapes found on the surface of the compressed layers to determine where she put the paint. The focused determination she brought to the arbitrariness of the variegated surface sets loose all sorts of thoughts and associations.

Whatever medium Dingle uses, her approach calls to mind Sol Lewitt's manifesto, "Sentences on Conceptual Art" (1969), which includes these statements:

Irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically; If the artist changes his mind midway through the execution of the piece he compromises the result and repeats past results; The artist's will is secondary to the process he initiates from idea to completion. His willfulness may only be ego.

There is a film of Dingle making the paintings blindfolded, which I did not see. She does them on similarly sized pieces of Plexiglas in black, white, and gray on a gray ground, with strokes of yellow and red. Forms are outlined in either black or white. A dachshund consists of a wide line that goes from a solid color to a dry brush, suggesting that the artist drew it with two or three lines. She might wipe an area out and remake the marks or shape. The paintings seem like they were done *premier coup*, in which nothing is permanently erased: every move is seen.

Willem de Kooning did a number of drawings with his eyes closed. The art historian Richard Schiff has argued that this technique:

[...] allow[ed] de Kooning to circumvent what was for him the more intellectual and regulative organ, the eye, lest it inhibit the more physical organ, the hand.

In 1953, while he was in the army, where he was trained as a cryptographer, Cy Twombly would rent a hotel room when he was not required to be on base and make drawings in the dark. Both de Kooning and Twombly



Kim Dingle, "Untitled (is that a wiener)" (2017), oil on Plexiglas, framed, 51 x 41 x 2 1/2 inches



Kim Dingle, "Untitled (portrait of the artist as a young girl without glasses)" (2017), oil on Plexiglas, framed, 51 x 41 x 2 1/2 inches

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wanted to interrupt the bond between hand and eye, and unlearn what they had been taught to do.



L: Kim Dingle, "Untitled (tragedy on interstate 15)" (2017), oil on Plexiglas, framed, 51 x 41 x 2 1/2 inches; R: Kim Dingle, "Untitled (where did you get your shoes)" (2017), oil on Plexiglas, framed, 51 x 41 x 2 1/2 inches

In the most recent works in *Blindfolded*, large drawings done with a brush on the unforgiving surface of Plexiglas, the line seems tender, awkward, and vulnerable, as well as confident, smart and funny. Compositionally, she tries to keep the figures separate from each other to avoid unintentional mashups. Circumvention was the hallmark of the paintings she made based on the memories of others. Although capable of making fluid lines, she committed herself to enlarging and copying awkward shapes to make her map paintings. Her undertakings are sharp, funny, and ruffling. I think she is far more interesting than many of her more celebrated and dependable LA counterparts.

Kim Dingle: Painting Blindfolded continues at Sperone Westwater (257 Bowery, Lower East Side, Manhattan) through March 3.