

Liliana Porter's works play with reality in 2-D and 3-D



Small figures are covered in blue paint in "To See Blue III," one of Liliana Porter's juxtapositions of mediums on canvas and paper. (Image courtesy of Barbara Krakow Gallery)

Liliana Porter

Allan McCollum: The Shapes Project

At: Barbara Krakow Gallery,
10 Newbury St.,
through April 9th.
617-262-4490,
barbarakrakowgallery.com

By Cate McQuaid
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In "To Do That," an inch-tall metal man appears to make his way across a sheet of paper, tearing it up with a pickax. The gouged paper speaks to the man's hard labor; its size, relative to him, predicts more work ahead. "To Do That," like many of Porter's pieces, tells an existential tale. In "To See Blue III," several little figures appear to have been caught in a downpour of blue paint, which oozes out from one corner of a largely white canvas.

Toy soldiers point rifles; others fall into the blue glop. Ladders and furniture appear to float along, and a bucket spills wee pearls, which scatter prettily down into the white area below. At the edge between blue and white, one man shovels chunks of blue into another bucket; a second man holds a book - I imagine it's a Bible, and he's looking for solace or salvation. "To See Blue III" might depict a deluge, but it also alludes to

the painterly, emotive mark making of Abstract Expressionism.

Sometimes Porter's work explicitly dives into the perils of relationship. In "Dialogue with Sitting Man," another small figure perches on a shelf, nose to nose with a black-and-white painting of a wide-eyed peacock, many times the man's size. Yet the man appears laconic, the bird alert and possibly frightened.

It's easy to read status and power into the postures and expressions of any duo, this one included. Porter's taut scenarios tantalize the viewer to identify with their protagonists, and that infuses often comic scenes with tragedy.

Also at Barbara Krakow, conceptual artist Allan McCollum offers a fraction of "The Shapes Project." Using a computer, he has generated 31 billion unique shapes. The number intentionally outstrips a United Nations-predicted peak world population around 2050. McCollum presents the forms as black-on-white prints, cameo-like sil-

houettes that fill one wall, and as wooden sculptures, squatting on pedestals like little critters; there's also one glossy black wall sculpture. The viewer responds to the large number of images on the wall, or to forms individually. It's a dire topic, but McCollum approaches it playfully, giving us a way in.

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