

Sharon Louden



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Oliver Kamm/5BE Gallery,
through Nov 17 (see Chelsea)

Sharon Louden's ability to marry organic forms with synthetic materials succeeds on more levels than even she might like. Just last year, the artist found herself in a legal battle with Yahoo over an outdoor piece she created for the company's Silicon Valley HQ, in which real wetland grass was planted on a lawn surrounding the building along with artificial "reeds" made of steel wires tipped with reflective material. When the grass became overgrown, the company mowed it, damaging the work in the process. While Louden's return to painting here may not be related to this experience, her renewed interest in a more conservative medium does make some sense, given the context.

A testament to the importance of variation in surface and gesture,

Louden's latest series of carefully controlled paintings on wood seduces with the application of pigment alone. The artist builds small clusters of swooping colored outlines and pools of black enamel paint upon a uniform background. The shapes resemble plant life, paper clips or maybe unrolled film. (Similar forms are featured in her animation work, where they look like strips of celluloid without the sprockets.)

Notwithstanding their precision and minimal approach, Louden's paintings avoid feeling predetermined or stiff, managing to remain almost lighthearted and natural-looking despite their pristine surfaces. In these pieces, black paint obfuscates a background that already seems vast and impenetrable. Much like the original, unmolested version of her work for Yahoo, Louden's new compositions suggest clusters or hedges behind which anything can be hidden.—*Paddy Johnson*