

In Full Bloom

By XICO GREENWALD, Special to the Sun | March 9, 2015

<http://www.nysun.com/arts/in-full-bloom/89078/>

At 88, Lois Dodd may be making her best paintings yet. A marvelous exhibition of over thirty recent oils at Alexandre Gallery presents unfussy landscapes and bare interiors – seemingly simple constructions that express a nuanced, poetic sensibility.

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*Courtesy of Alexandre
Gallery*

Lois Dodd, “Fading
Amaryllis,” 2014

In 2012, the Kemper Museum of Art in Kansas City organized Dodd’s first and, so far, only museum retrospective. Though New York Times art critic Roberta Smith called that show “revelatory,” Dodd has exhibited regularly in New York City since she co-founded Tanager Gallery, the pioneering 10th Street cooperative art space, more than sixty years ago.

While Tanager also displayed artwork by Alex Katz, Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline, Dodd has kept a low profile. Not one to toot her own horn, in this exhibition her paintings speak for themselves.

Dodd said she bought her house in Warren County, New Jersey, because of its windows. A number of the panel paintings here use those window grilles to create linear divisions that seem inspired by the abstract canvases of Piet Mondrian. But while Mondrian famously abandoned realism for straight lines and flat colors to express a “pure reflection of life, in its deepest essence,” Dodd finds abstract rhythms in the real

world.

“Porch Roof Snow Pile,” 2014, hung by the gallery entrance, sets the tone for the show. A view from a window, the cold winter light outside is palpable in this painting. Shadows on a mound of snow are described with jagged light blue strokes and a barren hill in the distance is purple. The triangular roof of a neighbor’s house lines up with the sash. The window grid is slightly askew in this De Stijl composition combining nature and abstraction.

In “Snow, Tree, Window,” 2014, window rails frame the left side and bottom edge of the painting. A window latch sits in one corner of the composition while a right triangle made by a roof outside holds down the opposite corner. A leafless tree in middle distance competes for attention with water droplets on the windowpane. In this understated work Dodd suggests tightly constructed analogies: house as body, window as the eye of the beholder, nature as backdrop.

“Sunlight on Wall,” 2014, and “Reflected Light on Brick Wall, December,” 2014, are paintings of sunbeams floating across bare walls. Shaped by window frames, the projected light evokes the fleeting nature of time, a moment in a day as sun crosses sky.

Dodd spends her summers in Maine, painting outdoors in her garden. Her sunny scenes of flowers, trees and lawn are teeming with bright green life in a pollen-filled atmosphere. On summer nights Dodd paints outdoors by moonlight on small sheets of aluminum roof flashing from the local hardware store.

Dodd believes painters must live rich lives outside their studios. In a 2011 interview she says, “There’s life, right? You’ve got to have other stuff besides.” In “Fading Amaryllis,” 2014, a red flower sags by the windowsill, the plant’s soft arcs contrasting against geometric panes of glass. Dodd’s love for life comes through loud and clear in these works; far from fading away, this is an artist in full bloom.

Lois Dodd: Recent Panel Paintings, through April 4, 2015, Alexandre Gallery, Fuller Building, 41 East 57th Street, 13th Floor, New York, NY, 212-755-2828, www.alexandregallery.com

More information about Xico Greenwald's work can be found at xicogreenwald.com