

HYPERRALLERGIC

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Deborah Brown's Writes Postindustrial Poetry at Lesley Heller

by [Jorge Martin](#) on January 21, 2011



A view of the opening for Deborah Brown's "The Bushwick Paintings" at Lesley Heller Workspace. (all photos by the author)

Last Wednesday the [Lesley Heller Workspace](#) in the Lower East Side, opened *The Bushwick Paintings*, a new group of work by [Deborah Brown](#). The gallery was packed, teeming with people and vibrant paintings.



Deborah Brown's "Dick Chicken #1" (2010) (click to enlarge)

Brown has been painting urbanscapes for quite some time. Fascinated by the world in which we live our everyday lives, she points out the poetic beauty of the ordinary; antennas, sneakers hanging on overhead wires, lamp posts, and fences are no longer invisible elements of the city, but the main characters in her scenes.

As her work has evolved in the last few years, the descriptions of the city have become more detailed and real, while her brushstrokes have relaxed. The vocabulary of elements represented on her canvases has been growing as she has obviously opened herself up to many elements, textures, compositional ideas, but, at the same time, her focus has narrowed to the Bushwick neighborhood of Brooklyn, where she maintains a studio. During that same period, any human or animal presence in her work has disappeared and the scene have become uninhabited.

What really caught my attention in her new work is her representation of graffiti as part of that urban environment. It made me realize how much of this undeniable urban feature is missing in the work of other artists that like to talk about the city. Brown's work has that extra layer of honesty without falling victim to being literal. It is very sweet seeing graffiti rendered carefully with brushes, without losing a hint of spontaneity. Some of the tags are very recognizable and even some of the titles of the paintings — like "Dick Chicken #2" (2010) — reveal her interest in graffiti as yet another visual element of the city; I think it's only logical when living in Bushwick.



Left, "Dick Chicken #4" (2010), and right, "Bushwick Landscape #5" (2010) (click to enlarge)

Brown doesn't take the easy way out by limiting the urban calligraphy to the walls. She is more creative and "cuts" her compositions to sometimes suggest walls at strange angles but that illusion disappears when she lets the lines flow beyond the monochromatic spaces. With this abstract element she represents the dissonance of north Brooklyn's streets, where visual unity gives way to collage.

Her work seems to address the cold and dehumanized city in a postindustrial era. It feels like Brown is launching a fierce denunciation about the suppression of nature in big cities, but she does so with beautiful colors, shapes, textures, and light. Her paintings have an exquisite balance between austerity and lushness, rawness and poetry.

The Bushwick Paintings are a "must see," so do yourself a favor and let yourself get lost in the details of Brown's postindustrial visions.

Deborah Brown's [The Bushwick Paintings](#) continues at Lesley Heller Workspace (54 Orchard Street, Manhattan) until February 20.