

# Art in America



## April Street

12/5/12 | By Danielle Sommer

LOS ANGELES Los Angeles-based artist April Street keeps track of her dreams. Moreover, she keeps track of the twists and turns she makes while she dreams, which she later reenacts in her studio. Street, who studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago before leaving to finish her degree in Tennessee, uses her body as a brush, wrapping herself in hosiery fabric (similar to the kind found on the inside of swimsuits) and lying atop paint-pooled canvases, imprinting them as she re-creates her sleep gestures.

The resulting paintings look gestural yet controlled: Street repaints the body impressions with more intentional mark making. In her recent show, “Portraits and Ropes,” at Culver City’s Carter & Citizen, however, these original images were hidden from view. In the new work, Street covers the canvases with the paint-streaked hosiery fabric, like flesh over bone. She treats it as a drapery, which she sometimes pins, twists or pulls taut. She also sometimes lets gravity take over.

Street’s work straddles painting and sculpture, and it nods toward both Abstract Expressionism and ’60s and ’70s feminist performance art. The most striking pieces have a sense of tension, often created by the treatment of the cloth. *Pink Rope* (2012) consists of a large piece of fabric twisted into a single, slender ropelike form, which

retains its shape solely through the weight of a cast bronze knot at the bottom and a pair of tacks.

The show's anchor piece, *Man has always doubled himself as a means of understanding himself* (2012), induces a visceral response: two canvases hanging several inches apart are enveloped in and connected by a swath of hosiery, which droops between them like a wrinkled umbilical cord. The impressions of the artist's body are evidenced in purple, green and orange smears of paint that accumulate where the hosiery sags. What's most fascinating about Street's work cannot be attributed solely to the artfulness of the draping technique. Part of the recipe is the fleshy and troublesome nature of hosiery fabric itself, which has an enigmatic translucency and heaviness. The beige color contributes to a muddy overall palette, dependent on olive green, eggplant and midnight blue, with the occasional streak of a brighter hue. There was beauty to be found in "Portraits and Ropes," but there was also a feeling of unease, or even disgust, which underscores the show's involvement with the abject.

Like Louise Bourgeois, Eva Hesse and Carolee Schneemann, Street creates work of such confusing sensuality that it can be difficult to look at and hard to process, particularly as a viewer tries to parse the various distinctions between subject and object. The draping technique is a new step for Street, whose work previously foregrounded the painted surface that is now obscured. Though full of color, the older works are less interesting visually and less tight conceptually; one hopes Street continues in this new direction

*Photo: April Street: Man has always doubled himself as a means of understanding himself, 2012, acrylic and hosiery on canvas, 45 by 82 inches; Carter & Citizen.*