

**48 Megan Williamson**

Eastwick Art Gallery  
245 W. North Ave., 60610  
312/440-2322

There is a distinct sense of theater when entering this northside gallery. The gray-green alcoves that comprise the space's insular, rear "salons" evoke a time earlier in the century when Modernist painting was still considered scandalous. This environment is well-suited for viewing the paintings, drawings, and prints of Megan Williamson collectively titled "Tools, Chaos and Order." An emerging artist who uses the vocabulary of Surrealist and Cubist-inspired abstraction to transform still lives of hand tools into gestural investigations of space, form, color, and light, Williamson assumes the difficult task of exploring a painting vocabulary whose established history leaves little margin for error. Her struggle to balance "chaos and order" in her work, while not

retaining the societal provocation of previous eras, displays the continuing need for some painters to locate meaning in the slippery spaces between representation and abstraction, cognition and obfuscation.

The juxtaposition of Williamson's two groups of works—her black-and-white drawings and colorful oil paintings—reveals the crucial inconsistencies in her interpretation of positive and negative space, and scale, which determine her pieces' potential for richness. Surprisingly, it is her graphic, black-ink-brush drawings that dominated the exhibition. Completed in response to the paintings, these works on paper draw one into the interlocking masses of the brutish yet elegant forms of wrenches, clamps, welding goggles, trowels, saws, and work gloves. Where the tools in Williamson's large paintings often appear too small and evenly staggered to create a dynamic push/pull between positive and negative spaces, the same objects

fill her smaller compositions, dramatically transforming white paper into vibrating, seemingly spontaneous exchanges between solid and void.

It is, however, Williamson's ability to unexpectedly anthropomorphize singular industrial forms with a minimum number of decisive brush strokes that is the most poetic aspect of her work. A single trowel standing vertically becomes a lone sentinel through the spare and immediate delineation of its contour; the vacant lenses of doubled-over welding goggles become haunting eyes that resemble beacons engaged in an endless search. These quite simple drawings encapsulate the chaos and order with which Williamson wrestles. If her paintings can incorporate this power, she will only lengthen our engagement.

*John Brunetti is a critic and the Illinois editor of dialogue.*

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*Still Life of Tools*, 1999, Mixed-media collage, 24" x 31".  
Courtesy of Eastwick Art Gallery.

