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Painting à la sculpting, drafting

Allison Miller paints like a sculptor, piling up lines to form geometric shapes that defy gravity, as they stack atop one another, from the bottom to the top of each panel. She also paints like a draftsman, superimposing doodles over one another to eventually form multilayered planes that appear to be three-dimensional. At ACME Gallery, her solo debut flaunts painting's power to pilfer the effects of other media while never letting you forget you're looking at nothing but paint dragged across a flat surface.

Each of Miller's six works measures 4 by 5 feet and is hung horizontally or vertically. Their grounds are white, like the blank pages of a sketchbook. Color is kept to a minimum, predominantly the black, blue and red of ballpoint pens. But Miller is no purist. Metallic gold, silver and bronze tart things up nicely, as does an improbable rainbow of beiges and grays that hovers between the warmth of live flesh and the deadly cool of outdated government paint jobs.

Miller's paintings are big, and their compositions make them look even bigger. She breaks up space and lashes it back together with masterful aplomb, deploying empty areas so effectively that each image seems to give viewers more room to maneuver than its literal dimensions provide. That's the magic of art or spot-on design.

Most of her works have the solidity of old-fashioned trestle bridges or steel-frame skyscrapers. Loopy lines provide equal and opposite attractions, suggesting party streamers, banners and colorfully punctuated graphics.

Sometimes Miller paints over large sections, leaving ghostly traces of earlier versions. This brings time into the picture and creates a give-and-take drama that is a pleasure to follow. At other times, her lines seem so nervous, jittery and unsure that you find yourself rooting for them, hoping they don't peter out before they make it across an empty, suddenly perilous expanse.

Miller's paintings converse openly and confidently with similarly jaunty abstractions by Monique van Genderen, Bart Exposito, Max Jansons and Mark Grotjahn, adding their own voice to a discussion that's well worth tuning into.