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SARAH CAIN By Corrina Peipon May 2012

Sarah Cain uses the basic components of painting – a wall, stretcher bars, canvas, and paint – to explore the limits and potential of the medium. She sees a stretched canvas not only as a surface upon which to enact a composition but also as something to be cut open, augmented, and altered in any number of ways. A work may extend from a canvas to the wall and even onto the floor or an adjacent window, and the wall is not just a means of display but can be a painting surface in itself, to be incorporated into an overall composition.



Rather than conceiving of a painting as autonomous, Cain strives to connect her works to proximate architectural and psychic spaces. For *Made in L.A. 2012*, she has created a delicate structure that is both a drawing in space and a threshold, suggesting movement from one dimension to another. This work asks us to consider the distance between our perception of space and our physical experience of it. Similarly, in a work like *Solar eclipse in Leo* (2011) – with its strainers laid bare, cut canvas, and idiosyncratic mark making – depth is both illusory and actual, eliciting a pleasingly disorienting effect that engages the entirety of one's senses and reflects Cain's complete physical immersion in the process of painting. In earlier works, her use of small store-bought craft canvases was a gesture of resistance to the heroic history of painting, an intentional snub of both virtuosity and inspiration, concepts that have perpetuated the myth of abstract painting for so many decades. As she began to cut into, paint on, and collage atop the surfaces of these canvases, Cain's increasingly physical interaction with her materials led to an enlarged scale and a wholehearted embrace of the materials conventionally associated with "serious" painting.

Cain's combination of multiple painting techniques suggests differing emotional states maintained simultaneously while her use of small ephemera like beads, a spray-can top, an earring, glass bottles, or a geode within her compositions invests the works with physical and temporal specificity. Often pointing to particular events occurring during the making of the work, Cain's accumulations of objects become formal gestures that connect her internal life to the larger world outside. These gestures heighten dualities at play in her work: the body and the mind, external circumstances and internal states, the universal and the personal.

Often composed on found book pages or sheet music, Cain's intimately scaled works on paper arise from the original content on the printed pages but are not limited by them. In this way, these abstract works share the same strategy that she employs in her larger paintings and are similarly connected to their context: the page becomes an analogue for a wall or a room. Instead of drawing inspiration from the architectural or geographic location in which the work is situated, she begins with an inscription or lyric, embarking on a journey that may come back around to its starting point but may just as well veer off the trail, charting a manifestation of thought and emotion in image. Containing paintings made directly onto its pages, *Music Book* (2008-12) is a folio of sheet music that she found in Zurich. The book recalls Shaker gift paintings, tantric meditation drawings, and Carl Jung's *Red Book*, all of which have influenced the evolution of Cain's process and image vocabulary, and it exhibits a confluence of the body, mind, and spirit that is characteristic of her work.