

# ARTFORUM

## Josephine Halvorson

SIKKEMA JENKINS & CO.

530 West 22nd Street

October 21–December 3

The objects and surfaces rendered by Josephine Halvorson's brush are inanimate. But as suggested in this exhibition's title, "What Looks Back," they appear as something more than passive. Nearly all of the oil-on-linen paintings presented here (except *Sign Holders*, 2010) were completed this year, and while they concentrate on a relatively limited repertoire, they induce something strange. Walls, wooden doors, cardboard sheets, industrial tools, machine parts: These are the painter's objects of choice, usually rendered close to the picture plane. The mechanomorphic oddity of *Steam Donkey Valve* is brought into further relief by its juxtaposition with the blood-red *Carcass*; if the latter is plainly carnal, the gaping maw of the mechanical valve in the former, with its interior exposed, displays a strangely animallike dimension.



Josephine Halvorson, *Green Machine*, 2011, oil on linen, 30 x 40".

With more muted, nearly coy, anthropomorphism, *Cracked Back* reveals a plate screwed into place on the back of some fractured surface, shaped vaguely like a head with two ears. The brick-red *Barrier* stands out for the symmetry and weird design of its object, the use of which is by no means apparent. Within its sunken grooves and geometric cavities, function appears rivaled by a certain sculptural curiosity. Halvorson likes edges, sills, lips—the broken drawer of *The Heat Inside*, the ledge of *Green Machine*, the concrete block of *Mine Site*—in other words, the bread and butter of simple figurative illusion, of things receding into space, however shallow.

With two strips of fake blue tape, *Cardboard Template* reaches into the old bag of painterly tricks to hold its pieces in two-dimensional place. Yet the artist reveals equal interest in materiality, in how the stuff of things does or does not square with its painterly representation. With one exception (*Inlaid Stones* seems somewhat clumsily rendered), that investigation succeeds admirably in its effort. The treatment of surfaces in these paintings—the patina of *Sign Holders*; the raised, decorative motif of *Water Link*—is as arresting as the objects themselves.

— Ara H. Merjian

All rights reserved. artforum.com is a registered trademark of Artforum International Magazine, New York, NY