Alissa McKendrick
September 9 - October 16 2011

For her first solo show at Real Fine Arts, Alissa McKendrick has created a coolly unassuming, spare installation of small abstract paintings and curiously positioned cartoons. The calm, open setting that McKendrick has created, replete with a pedestal as viewing bench, speaks to the artists interest in the decorative. Yet the paintings and drawings themselves are dense with mood, labor, and savvy.

The paintings, created between 2010 and 2011, pack various tensions into their small scale. Raked, scumbled surfaces testify to McKendrick's investment in traditions of abstract expressionism, yet often with a few sweeping strokes she transforms the paintings into unexpected graphic statements. In many of her works, the ground becomes the remnants of the painting's previous incarnations, and what remains is a concise, albeit enigmatic image.

One particular painting in the show leaves its prepared surface exposed. The painting's drips, sprinkles, and drops, born both of intention and incident, acknowledge the rainy or acquatic atmosphere that her cartoons inhabit.

Women with umbrellas, some smudged as though hastily erased, gaze at the viewer from their curious positions in the gallery. Above a doorframe, a smirking, cavalier lady confidently leans over her closed umbrella. Another blank-faced woman is ironically perched upon an electrical outlet, clustered in a corner with two identical smiling women, both of whom stand contently sheltered from the downpour of the painting above.

Also occupying the gallery walls are McKendrick's drawings of mermaids. Content in their acquatic atmosphere, they flash awkward, sheepish smiles at the viewer.

The sinister yet sympathetic sense of humor in her drawings illuminates a playfulness in the artist's painting practice. McKendrick paints with a combination of abandon and cunning. She is able to oscillate between recklessness and purpose with uncanny ease.

The result is an exhibition characterized by elegance and ability, punctuated with a sense of mischief.

Alissa McKendrick received her BFA in Painting from Rhode Island School of Design. She has previously participated in a group show at Real Fine Arts.

~ Katherine Siboni