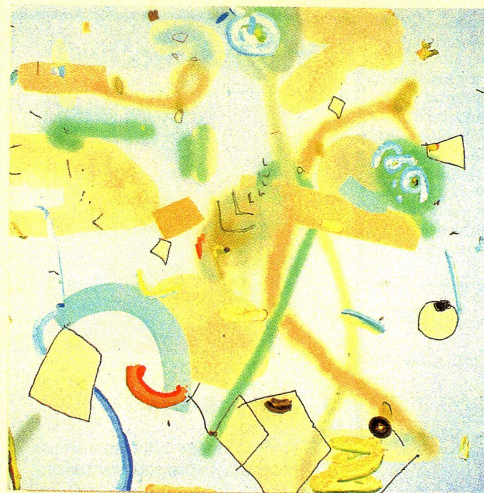


Sarah Kent, 'Laura Owens'
Time Out, November 1999



Laura Owens

Sadie Coles (West End)

‘You really want to make the painting that you want to be with,’ says West Coast artist Laura Owens, ‘not one that is constantly telling you everything it knows.’ And she achieves it; her paintings have the freshness of a child’s doodles yet the sophistication of work by an adult *au fait* with art history. She seems able to forget everything she knows and to reinvent the language from bare essentials – raw canvas, pools of pale colour, thick blobs of impasto and lines squeezed from the tube like puny Plasticine

sausages. Imagine a whimsical Fiona Rae stripped of quotation, narrative and conceptual cleverness to leave subtle visual incidents, floating free of cultural baggage.

Hanging in the office is a large canvas. This lovely picture is euphoric, but not heroic. Owens avoids posturing. Although starting from scratch (with no obvious reference to things seen or known) she provides no trace of anguish – of confronting the void. And she keeps the scale of the elements small. John Hoyland would have enlarged a tiny corner of this solar system into a whole painting. Outlined

in a spindly stockade of black, for instance, is a trapezium of raw canvas. A veil of pale green drifts across and, top left, a dab of thick green nudges a blob of flaming red. Events like these hover in space, fragments that have no desire to converge and create a larger statement or a bigger story. Just in case you imagine that it’s easy, though – nothing more than mindless play – Owens recreates an extract from the large canvas as a smaller picture. Questions about spontaneity, originality and expression invade the garden of innocent delight and kick dirt in the face of preciousness and naivety.

Sarah Kent