

ARTFORUM

Julia Rommel

BUREAU

127 Henry Street

April 29–June 10

According to legend, Thomas Jefferson gave Delaware the nickname “the diamond state” (presumably for its strategic location on the eastern seaboard). Today, however, it seems as if the state exists in absentia—noticeably devoid of corporate taxes, elevation, and any remarkable qualities. Julia Rommel has chosen Delaware as the subject and title of her first solo exhibition, inviting us to examine the state through five modest and fastidious canvases that sweep across Bureau’s small space.

These paintings relish in contradistinction: On the one hand, the canvases imply such delicately detailed construction—coarse linens have been stretched by hand and meticulously folded and fastened to their wooden frames—that they become fetishistic. On the other hand, the thickly applied oil paint in demure hues ranging from a buttery black to a hazy grayish-blue are so delightfully tactile that they absorb all the tucks and texture of the aforementioned assembly. In *Louis-Philippe* (all works cited, 2011), two raised linear ridges intersect in the work’s lower right-hand corner, the result of Rommel’s stretching the canvas once and then restretching it. Yet this painting’s activated features are quietly subsumed by its thick, nearly lithographic black layer of paint. In *Broken Record*, a slate-colored surface contrasts slightly with the darker shade that wraps around the lip, creating a sense of depth, while maintaining a homogeneous texture that belies the work’s complex fabrication. As a whole, the exhibition showcases Rommel’s deft combination of rigorous structure and sumptuous application, giving us insight into her subtle and consuming paintings—and perhaps a reason to explore America’s “first state.”



Julia Rommel, *Louis-Philippe*, 2011, oil on linen, 11 1/2 x 9".

— John Arthur Peetz