

Christel Dillbohner
at Don Soker Contemporary Art, San Francisco, California
Recommendation by DeWitt Cheng



Christel Dillbohner, 'Large Ice Floe,' 2012, installation.

Continuing through August 25, 2012

Nineteenth-century history painting seems staid and contrived to us, as well as complicit with various *Ancien Régimes*, but artists can still face sociopolitical realities — and challenge frozen status quos — by employing strategies derived from the contemporary stylistic toolbox. Christel Dillbohner has long combined scientific, environmental, literary and philosophic concerns in creating what one curator described as “landscape[s] of the psyche.”

Here she fills an industrial-looking space with a show entitled “Nothing is Certain,” a phrase which certainly captures the current economic *zeitgeist*, but is employed here to express the “sense of displacement and vertigo” caused by threats to the natural environment. The drawings, paintings, assemblage sculptures and installation, many subdued in color or composed of battered, corroded metal and wood, have an austere lyricism that is nicely accentuated by the concrete pillars, exposed ductwork, and popcorn-sprayed utility boxes of the gallery.

The assemblages (“Following the Tradewinds,” “Uncanny Terrain,” “Valley Glacier I,” “Frozen Dream”) in particular caught my eye, but don’t miss the paintings — “The Fall” and “Liquescent” — or the installation, “Large Ice Floe,” a previous version of which was shown at the Hafenumuseum in Bremen, Germany, in 2009. The show as an ensemble conveys both archaeological and ecclesiastical themes: a future display of relics from the late Petroleum Age, perhaps? Dillbohner, a dedicated lover of nature and a loyal reader of that explorer of memory, W.G. Sebald, writes: “The present falls forward and backward — receding, breathing — at the bottom of a glacial sea The earth is a map.”