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The painting craze of the past five years or so has found many young artists juxta-posing modes of representation previously considered incompatible. Using high-end enamel or acrylic paints to erase the expressive mark of the painter, artists like Ingrid Calame, Inka Essenhigh, Monique Prieto, and Jay Davis merge abstraction and representation, using Pop art – specifically, its technique of mining the media for photographic imagery – as a template for banishing the restrictions that use to keep the two segregated.

At first glance – and almost always when reproduced in photographs – British artist Rowena Dring's work seems to fit this mold. Starting with images of landscapes taken from travel brochures or photographs snapped by the artist during her own journeys, Dring transforms these scenes into basic, fragmentary visual data in large pictures. Their splintery passage of flat color look like blown-up versions of paint-by-number sets. Seeing the work up close, however, one realises that there is a substantial difference between Dring and most painters – or *any* other painter, for that matter. Her works are made with monochromatic pieces of quilting fabric, which she carefully stitches together before stretching over a frame. A close look at the work reveals the thick black thread binding the colour swatches. When one steps back, the colours snaps together into a cohesive, quasi-representational image – as happens in a Seurat or a Frans Hals.

Works like *Untitled (water)* and *Tall Trees* (all works 2002) are fairly generic compositions – archetypal nature scenes we've seen thousands of times in paintings and photographs. *Untitled (stream)* moves to monumental scale, describing in minute detail the movement of water and reflections of light while sticking to Dring's "system", which evoke comic strips in its eschewal of chiaroscuro and modelling. Two works that reached beyond the common landscape were *Camouflage for In-between the trees* and *Camouflage for a sunny spot in the grass*, which linked the patterning of nature and camouflage with the artist's own use of flat colour. The camouflage theme also calls to mind not only military concealment but the artists (most notably Warhol) and fashion designers who've been using it to completely opposite effect.

Dring also summons the complicated history of textile-based art: the traditions of weaving, tapestry, and quilting, which have been assigned a higher aesthetic value in other cultures. In the West textiles have always been seen as inferior to painting, mostly, as feminists have pointed out, because activities like sewing and weaving have been generally viewed as women's work. (Even in the supposedly egalitarian cosmos of Bauhause modernism, Anni Alber's textiles took a serious backseat to her husband's obsession with rectilinear painting.) By stitching together the worlds of textile and painting, Dring cleverly forces fabric into the realm of "high art" and dares us to think otherwise. Playing with visual associations ranging from paint-by-numbers, cartoons, and camouflage to traditional painting, she collapses form and subject matter, canvas and textiles, and she trumps the contentious realms of representation labelled by such terms as figuration, abstraction, pattern, and decoration.