

Alyssa Monks

DFN

Seen in reproduction, Alyssa Monks's paintings have the appearance of soft-porn hyperrealist renderings. Viewed in the gallery, however, they turn out to be something quite different and far more interesting. Monks is anything but a slavish imitator of appearances. Paint for her is simply a neutral means toward achieving a technically accurate representation. At the same time, she toys wittily with its ability to deceive.

Smirk (2009) is an excellent example of her newest work. At 4 by 5 feet, it is a serious, ambitious painting, but it also shares the humor that flits across the face of the showering girl who is its subject. We are asked to imagine that this woman is looking at us through her shower door. But the water droplets that read so convincingly at a distance are actually awkward descriptions in white and gray



Alyssa Monks, *Smirk*, 2009, oil on linen, 48" x 64". DFN

paint of circles, near circles, and a range of increasingly wobbly shapes. And what we perceive as her right ear, rendered in pinks flecked with white and gray, looks more like a poisonous mushroom cap.

The effect here was most entertaining. Monks further played with painterly representation by putting her bathers—whom she consciously relates to art-historical precedents—before the distorting surface of decoratively modulated, steamed-up, or, as in *Smirk*, water-spattered glass. There is more than a hint of titillation here, as there almost always is in paintings of bathing women, but this is so much a part of Monks's intelligent art that it is entirely acceptable.

—Robert Ayers