



### Ruth Laskey & Suzan Frecon at Ratio 3:

October 17, 2014

Aesthetic tension in a two-person show seldom feels better than it does in the pairing of Laskey and Frecon. Apart from the modest scale of their works, the works of these two women would appear to have little in common.

Frecon, a New York painter now in her 70s, turns out watercolors on sheets of salvaged, handmade Indian paper that can appear abstract or suggestive of landscape-like details pared from larger compositions. In fact, they body forth forms in a dark palette in response to the bounds of whatever sheet Frecon has in hand.

A San Franciscan, Laskey leaves nothing to chance. She dyes and hand-weaves linen, accounting for every mark in the pleated geometry of a composition such as “Twill Series (Bougainvillea/Black)” (2014), integrating surface and figure with a rigor that brings to mind the early minimalism of Frank Stella or Sol LeWitt.

At a glance nothing could seem further than Laskey’s art from Frecon’s, with its brushed-on forms seeming to billow or slump at their pages’ limits.

When a broad line moves through one of Laskey’s compositions and takes a corner or appears to fold, every stitch makes the transition explicit, typically dispelling illusions of overlap that viewing from a distance can create.

We can never be sure where Frecon exerts control, beyond her color choices. Her process appears keenly judged and, like most unmuddled uses of watercolor, precluding revision.

But spend enough time in the exhibition and the affinity of the two artists emerges. What manifests overtly as relentless control in Laskey’s work finds a parallel in the discipline that lies behind Frecon’s far more spontaneous performances. Their differences in style and execution mask a sisterhood of dedication that will impress anyone tired of the slick cynicism that drives so much contemporary art production.

**Ruth Laskey & Suzan Frecon:** Weavings and works on paper. Through Oct. 25. Ratio 3, 2831A Mission St., S.F. (415) 821-3371. [www.ratio3.org](http://www.ratio3.org).

—Kenneth Baker