Walker Art Center

Painter Painter

Notes for an Exhibition

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Painter Painter

At a time when artists may work without obligation to medium, why choose the materials of painting? What does it mean for an artist to assume the role of painter today? And just what is at stake for a new generation committed to the medium?

This exhibition, the Walker's first group painting show in more than a decade, presents the work of 15 artists from the United States and Europe in a focused survey of emerging developments in abstract painting and studio practice. Our collaboration as co-curators began with a shared interest in the current state of the medium as well as a set of questions about the ever-shifting role of the painter in contemporary art and culture. A series of ongoing conversations and studio visits with the artists have culminated in this presentation of new work made specifically for the occasion. In the entries that follow, we offer our impressions of each.

Through our research, we have come to understand abstract painting today as a means, not an end. For these artists, painting is a generative process—one that is rooted in the studio but nevertheless open and receptive to the world. In recent years, as abstract painting has once again become more prominent in the field, a new generation has opened up fresh territory by sidestepping its entrenched discourses. Each freely pursues new languages of abstraction and eccentric methods of making, yet also affirms new relationships beyond the specificity of the medium. Indeed, painting today increasingly crosses paths with sculpture, poetry, film, design, fashion, music, and performance as well as disparate histories of art, craft, and visual culture.

The simple repetition in the show's title—*Painter Painter*—is meant to highlight the term's slipperiness as artists recast its various meanings in our present moment. While the painters in this exhibition identify as such, their roles remain as fluid and open as the medium itself. Within that freedom, painting becomes a conduit—a way to make contact with a world beyond the frame of their formal invention.

Eric Crosby & Bartholomew Ryan
Exhibition co-curators, Walker Art Center

Matt Connors

b. Chicago, 1973; lives and works in New York

Our first studio visit with Matt Connors happened in a busy coffee shop, with the three of us hunched over his laptop. At the time, I regretted not seeing work in progress but in retrospect the context was apt. While the artist's practice is studio-based, his paintings are rooted in a set of circumstances, correspondences, and influences that extend far beyond that space.

For Connors, painting is a visual means of relating to the world, of filtering and processing aspects of contemporary life and culture that fascinate him. His paintings are often executed with a restricted palette of colors and marks, yet they open up to a dispersed network of references. He freely borrows structures and ideas from design, poetry, writing, music, and the history of painting, but his marks aren't derivative. They are removed, distilled, and recontextualized, so that a poetic sense of things borrowed or overheard pervades while direct references remain opaque. No single painting alone can speak adequately to the practice, and like close friends, they tend to rub off on each other, exchanging mannerisms, habits, and turns of phrase. Paintings, like painters, can be social creatures, too.

The physical conditions of his art also speak to its relationality. Light washes of color result in fuzzy boundaries. Hues bleed into each other where forms make contact. Rubbings, impressions, and stains accumulate incidentally. Connors also tends to work in a site-specific manner with painted floors, leaning walls, and other sculptural elements, reminding us that what lies outside painting's frame always conditions our perception of the medium.

In a recent series of works on stretched canvas, the artist identifies two colors—red and blue, for example—and layers successive and uneven washes of each to create immersive, prismatic fields. Pigment doesn't rest on the canvas's surface, but seeps in to reveal the texture of the support as well as unexpected densities of color and composition. Bringing to mind Color Field painting or an updated take on Josef Albers, each is conceived and executed as a singular perceptual event yet ultimately open to interpretation and reflection, revealing that our experience of Connors's work is as contingent as its making.

—Eric Crosby

Studio view of *First Straight Third (red/blue)*, 2013

Sarah Crowner

b. Philadelphia, 1974; lives and works in New York

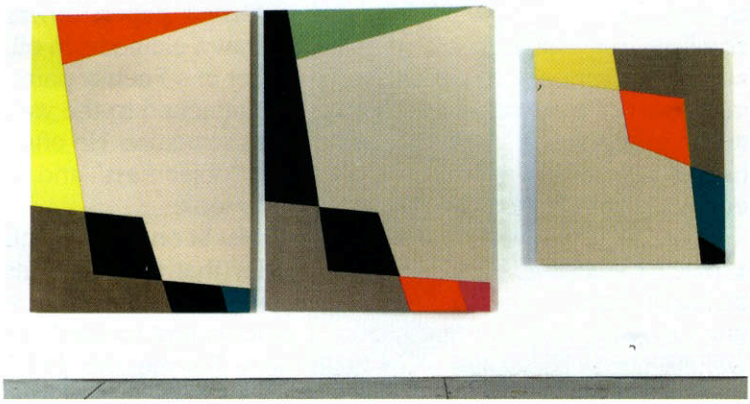
In a recent conversation with Sarah Crowner, she told me that she sees art history as a score—as so much material for her to unpack. She appropriates styles or approaches almost as a way of befriending artists from the past, welcoming them into the complex constellation of her work.

For earlier paintings, she looked to specific precedents for inspiration, including the abstractions of Brazilian constructivist Lygia Clark or a lost sculpture by British Op artist Bridget Riley, which became the basis for Crowner's black-and-white sewn-fabric piece for the 2010 Whitney Biennial. She maintains a strong engagement with art history, particularly forms of utilitarian abstraction arising from 20th-century avant-garde artists such as Sonia Delaunay or Sophie Taeuber-Arp, who didn't see painting as an autonomous medium but rather one in dialogue with fashion, design, and the lived world.

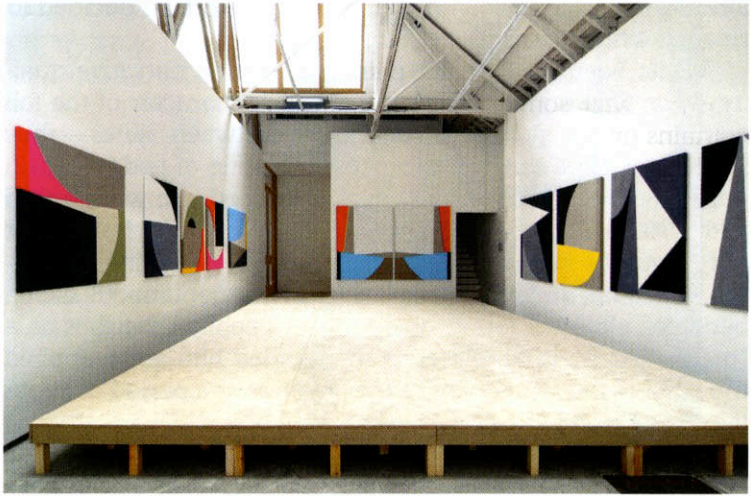
Crowner creates paintings by sewing together painted and raw fabrics in a variety of geometric and abstract arrangements, often using vibrant color combinations. Her process is highly physical, even performative, requiring a strenuous engagement with material that she cuts and stitches, then stretches and pulls into place. Indeed, over the past few years, she has become increasingly interested in performance. For her solo exhibitions *Acrobat* at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York, and *Rehearsal* at Galerie Nordenhake, Stockholm, she combined sculptural elements with her abstract paintings, which were hung serially on a wall, sometimes in combinations that evoked theater curtains or doorways. For her show *Ballet Plastique* at Galerie Catherine Bastide, Brussels, she went so far as to install a wooden stage across the space of the gallery, inviting viewers to step up: implicating them in the action with the paintings as décor.

Ciseaux Rideaux (2012), her triptych in *Painter Painter*, features repeating geometries with subtle differentiations across the larger canvases—a pattern that seems to turn the smaller painting on its head. Literally translated as "Scissors Curtains," the title suggests the labor with which the works were created and proposes veils, backdrops, or even screens. Crowner's abstractions then present themselves in relation to the physical bodies of this world. —Bartholomew Ryan

Ciseaux Rideaux
2012



Installation view of the exhibition *Ballet Plastique*, Galerie Catherine Bastide, Brussels, 2011



Fergus Feehily

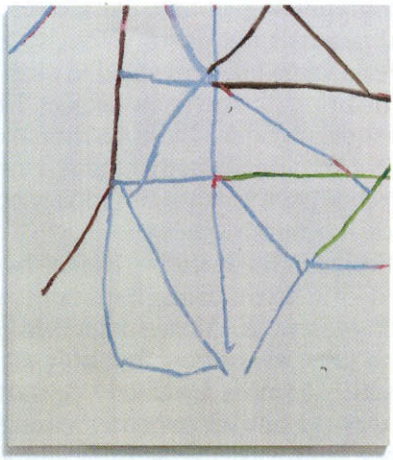
b. Dublin, Ireland, 1968; lives and works in Berlin

Fergus Feehily's small-scale paintings have a modest, ephemeral quality. Some are made entirely with found materials such as antique frames, fabric, foil, and patterned paper; others combine this approach with painted or drawn elements in oil, acrylic, ink, or colored pencil. Every aspect of a Feehily painting is part of the work, from the way it is attached to the wall to the frame or the layers that make up its structure. He often hangs them as a way to accentuate their "objectness" and to encourage people to slow down and really look.

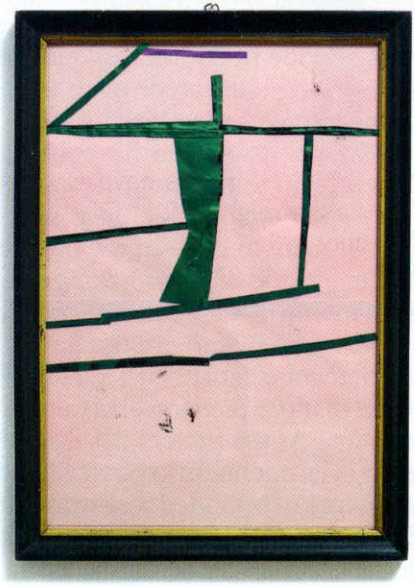
In his studio, several works are in process at one time, each exploring a distinctly personal formal play that the artist has called on his materials to negotiate. Elements intended for one work may migrate into another, or a process that worked out well here may be turned on its head there. For me, this deliberative attitude, a mix of lightness and concentration, accounts for the intensity of the paintings. Think of the cumulative qualities contributing to the perceptual atmospheric play of *The Ship* (2012), for example, from the pink spray-painted lower layer to the translucency of the tracing paper, the glistening opacity of the foil to the reflectivity of the glass. Feehily is nothing if not meticulous, though he is also receptive to chance. For instance, the tracing paper was initially put in place as an aid in laying out the foil composition, but the artist decided to retain it when he saw the effect.

While Feehily's titles have an open-ended narrative quality—*The Ship* might refer to the mastlike character of the foil composition or the sense of motion between states—they sometimes offer clues as to process. The title of *Lodger* (2012) implies someone familiar, yet distant. Indeed, the work began with a small, casual drawing on a Post-it Note, which the artist put through a succession of further drafts—scanning, enlarging, cropping, and redrawing it. This once-spontaneous sketch becomes almost a found object, what Feehily describes as a "maquette," a visual reference that guided him as he applied the paint to the MDF board, wet-on-wet, over a period of about five hours. —BR

Lodger 2012



The Ship 2012



Jay Heikes

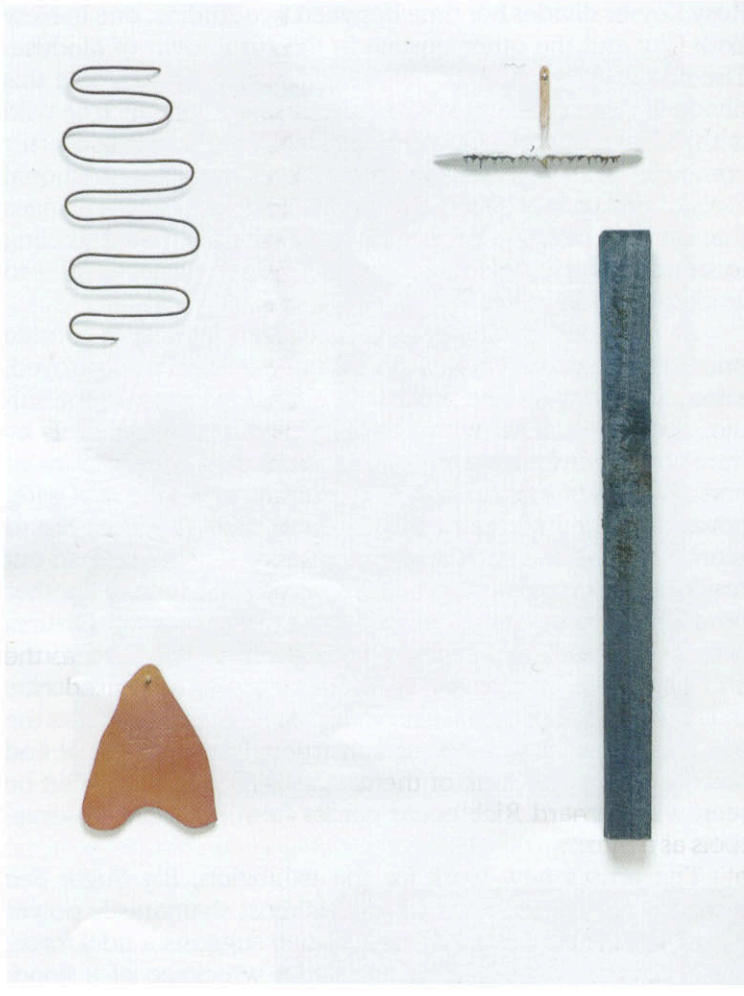
b. Princeton, NJ, 1975; lives and works in Minneapolis

An artist who works in multiple mediums, from sculpture to photography to painting, Jay Heikes has a restless relationship with materials and form. What several studio visits over the past two years have revealed to us is a philosophy of approach that he brings to each new project. He is a self-aware alchemist who tirelessly seeks the transformation of matter while knowing that empirically such a thing is impossible. His works therefore often have a sense of utopian promise combined with an abject, humorous quality.

From studio to studio, Heikes has carried a tool wall composed of electric drills, hammers, and saws that he uses in making his work. Always interested in transformation, he began to think about how the tools we use determine the things we make, or more abstractly tie us into certain ways of thinking. Asking himself whether changing the tools could also change the work, the artist began to invent new implements constructed out of the detritus of the studio: found materials with peculiar provenance; pigments, dyes, fabrics, or negative throwaway forms from previous works. He was inspired by the history of the avant-garde, and specifically the manifesto as a mode of address, and looked to groups such as the Suprematists, Futurists, or even the Shakers, who used new language to create new realities.

As Heikes assembled his constructed "tools" on a studio wall, he began to think of them as a form of painting. While painters (Gerhard Richter, Jack Whitten) have often created tools as a means to bypass previous ways of working and arrive at a different kind of mark-making or application, here Heikes's instruments *themselves* become the marks—they delineate the paintings' borders and are the motifs of composition. A number of elements seem poised to be used in some elaborate way, evolving in more recent works toward a greater level of formal abstraction. As the project develops, the *usefulness* of a tool is situated in its openness to possibility within painting, in its ability to be free of bounded real-world utility. Ultimately, it seems as if Heikes may be shaping a proposition about abstraction as something necessary, to be used and valued as much as anything else. —BR

We will destroy this museum
2012



Rosy Keyser

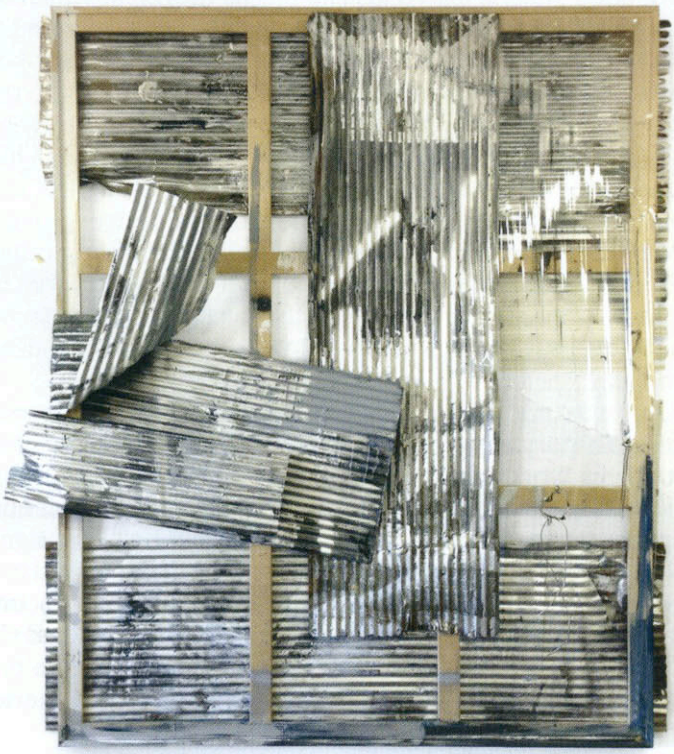
b. Baltimore, 1974; lives and works in Brooklyn and Medusa, NY

Rosy Keyser divides her time between two studios, one in New York City and the other upstate in the rural town of Medusa. The intense physicality of her paintings seems to straddle this divide between the industrial urban environment and the wild with its sheltering backwoods and open hilltops. The artist combines foraged wreckage from both locales with traditional tools of the painter's studio to create large-scale assemblages that seem to harbor a primal energy. Disparate materials cling to stretcher bars, which offer a structure—a perfect grid—to work with and against.

At the heart of Keyser's practice is an interest in a basic principle of physics: energy can never be created or destroyed; instead, it is always in a process of changing forms. In the studio, she experiments with a variety of different materials by transposing attributes from one to another—a spray of paint and a bundle of straw, a jagged brushmark and a piece of wire, powdered graphite and a breath of air. She also uses fire to scorch or melt the surfaces of her works, leaving burned-out residues. This transmission of energy from one state to another produces reverberations, perceptual shocks, or even seizures across the visual field of her paintings. From image to sound and back, Keyser uses visual and auditory terms to describe the effect of her paintings, and her pieces seem to address the eye with a clanging, elemental beat. Yet, however brutal and abstract her marks may seem, this desire to unify what can be seen with what can be heard comes from her close observations of nature.

The artist's new work for the exhibition, *Big Sugar Sea Wall* (2012), balances a mysterious, almost shamanistic power with a determined formal sense. Its title suggests a tidal force, and its twisted metal forms evoke the wreckage of a flood. Expressionistic gestures of spray paint cover corrugated-steel panels, which lie in front of and behind the stretcher bars. Clear panels emphasize the transparency and porosity of the structure. These are not easy materials to work with and they struggle against Keyser's formal studio-based process, but the result is a work that feels responsive and alive—painting as a force of nature. —EC

Big Sugar Sea Wall 2012



Somewhere off County Road 352, Upstate New York, 2012

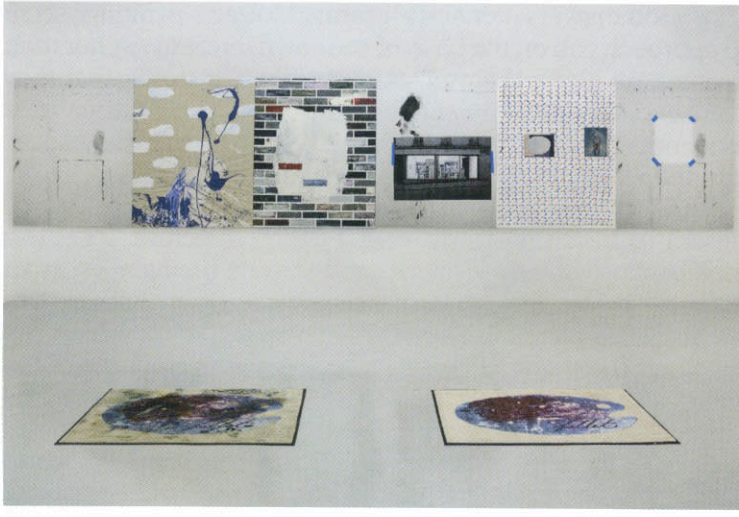
Charles Mayton

b. Dallas, 1974; lives and works in New York

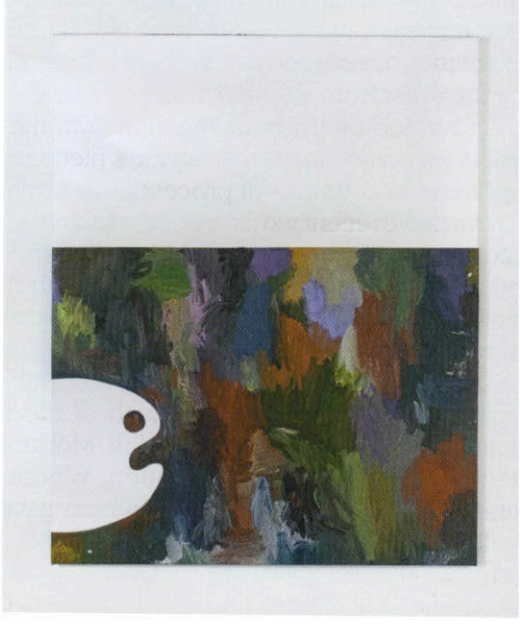
On a recent visit to Charles Mayton's studio, I was struck by a work titled *Trolling with a tasteful palette* (2012), in which an image of a painter's palette, partially cropped, is suspended in a field of large and appealingly colorful abstract brushstrokes. A horizon line divides this immersive abstraction from the upper portion of blank, primed canvas. It resembles a fish swimming in water, a playfulness that the title supports. What I like about this painting is the quality of the fish/palette, almost cartoonish in its contours, and then the analogy between painting/sea, fishing/composition that it sets up. If, as many critics observe, painters today are drowning in the precedents set by art history, then Mayton here faces that weight head on. In my dreams, the palette/fish speaks to me and says, "Please don't eat me."

One way not be eaten is to eat, and Mayton consumes painting's history, repurposing it in motifs and themes that run through his work. He is fascinated by René Magritte, René Daniëls, Jasper Johns, and others who explore the potential of language as something linked to visual symbols and signs. For his debut gallery show in New York, Mayton translated Magritte's famous painting *The Difficult Crossing* (1926) into three dimensions within the space of the gallery. He liked the idea that the title seemed to align with the pressures of a first solo show, and also that Magritte's piece rendered the interior space of the studio—of process.

In more recent works, such as the diptych *Blind Ventriloquist* (2012) on view in this exhibition, Mayton emphasizes process by focusing on the individual qualities of the pieces themselves rather than a more theatrical juxtaposition of several that compose a mise-en-scène. One half of this diptych, executed in New York, features layers of reworked then abandoned underpaintings, a silkscreened element from a photograph of his studio wall, and a paint rag that covers a portion of the canvas. The other half, which includes a painted brick wall texture and blue latex, was completed over the course of a day in a garage in Tennessee. Created in different places over a span of months and united here for the first time, the painting becomes a diaristic tracing of the artist's movements in the world. —BR



Installation view of *The Venal Muse*, Galerie Balice Hertling, Paris, 2012



Trolling with a tasteful palette 2012 Courtesy Balice Hertling & Lewis, New York

Dianna Molzan

b. Tacoma, WA, 1972; lives and works in Los Angeles

Like good conversationalists, Dianna Molzan's paintings seem to approach you on the basis of your own interests, rather than droning on about themselves. Certainly abstract in that they can't be linked to one definable source, her works often bear evidence of her broad interests in design, ceramics, textiles, and the history of painting.

In a beautiful text on Molzan's work, writer Bruce Hainley described her paintings as "voguing their structure." I like this idea because of the play it sets up between the painting as an object and also as a performance or character. Rather than seeing these as mutually exclusive, in her practice they run together: the painting is the thing and the personality of the thing, showing itself off, self-aware, and—typical of the true voguer—persistently sophisticated.

Formally, Molzan has set herself a few simple rules to guide her as a maker. For now, at least, she will only use materials traditionally linked to the medium of painting: oil, wood, canvas, linen, silk, and so on, with which she works meticulously to create the more sculptural trompe l'oeil elements that her paintings sometimes entail. For example, a rope lasso is not purchased readymade from a supply store but fabricated by the artist from strands of canvas that she has unraveled and then twisted tightly back together. She also explores a cornucopia of colors, patterns, and painterly effects, often with a lightness and wit both referential to previous styles but also irreverently unbound from the ideologies that underpinned so many of them.

The artist sees no hierarchy between the surface, the support, and the paint—each has equal standing. What's important is how they contribute to the story. In *Untitled* (2013), a slumping, gray canvas form reveals triangular areas of paint applied in vivid gradations. Each of the painting's elements seems reliant on the other. With Molzan's work, there is a sense of a multiplicity of intention. Where does the structure end and the paint begin? And which gave rise to the other?

—BR

Untitled 2013

Joseph Montgomery

b. Northampton, MA, 1979; lives and works in New York

What first drew us to Joseph Montgomery's practice was a series of compacted, masklike assemblages constructed out of canvas, clay, wax, paper, glue, cedar shims, wire, grout, paint, plastic, and so on. The artist's own rejected paintings served as a support for these new works in relief. A visit to his studio, however, revealed these small, dense paintings as just one strand among other evolving bodies of work, all questioning aspects of the painted image and extending the medium into the field of sculpture.

The wooden shim has become a particularly important object in Montgomery's studio. A shim is a very simple, accessible tool: any thin, tapered piece of material used to support or level something else. He made use of it in his early collage pieces as one element among many, but more recently he has assembled and glued them together into wedges to create irregular grids. He then washes them in a single color of paint, which foregrounds the various recesses and ridges of the works. In another interesting turn, he has used these constructions as the subject of trompe l'oeil paintings that function as stand-ins for the real thing—quite literally, paintings of paintings. Some of these he has exhibited and others he's canceled out to create new collages over them.

It's fascinating to track the different turns and trajectories painters take in their studios over time, and Montgomery's practice is particularly adaptable, allowing the conditions of one painting to set the terms for his next move. Most recently, he has taken the irregular angles of his shim constructions and projected them out into larger cardboard wall reliefs covered with textured ceiling compound, spray paint, and glossy lacquer. Generating each idea from the one prior, Montgomery treats his works as "models"—a word that also signals his interest in architecture and the built environment. His evolutionary approach to the problem of painting today also manifests itself in his system of titling: each finished piece bears the title *Image* and is numbered sequentially. As objects, his works resist this direct title; and as images, they do not point back to a single referent. Rather, they point forward in a practice that regenerates objects and ideas into new forms. —EC

View of the artist's studio, Long Island City, NY, 2012

Katy Moran

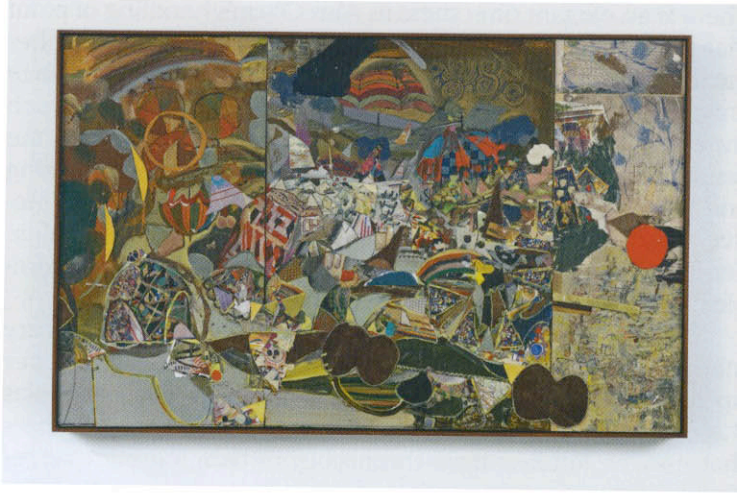
b. Manchester, UK, 1975; lives and works in London

Too often in discussions of contemporary painting, we assume that representation vs. abstraction is an either/or proposition. For Katy Moran, hard and fast categories such as these have very little use in the studio. Her practice is rooted in a desire to capture a sensation of seeing in the world, and while her works are ostensibly abstract—bits of collage, deft brushwork, wet paints mixing here and there—it's their emergent figurative aspects that hold her imagination.

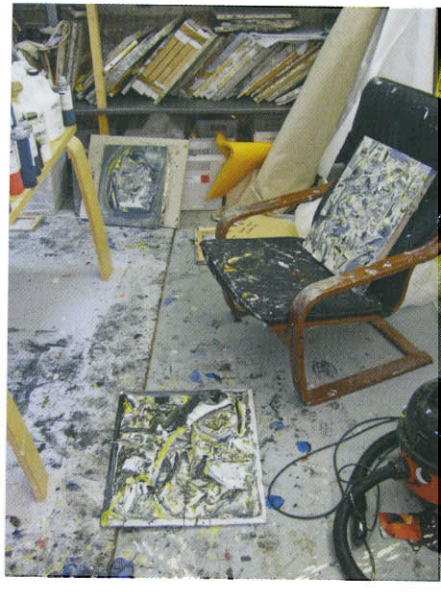
When I first encountered Moran's paintings, she was working in mauves, yellows, beiges, and grays, sometimes from images she gathered in daily life—photos taken with her cellphone, pictures found online, and magazine advertisements. Instead of translating them literally, she worked intuitively, allowing the paint a certain freedom to find its own composition. Old frames, thrift store paintings, and other found supports served as the basis for these pieces, which she often executed on the floor, turning the canvas around until an unexpected figurative element—perhaps a face, an animal, a familiar scene—revealed itself in her dense, jumbled compositions. The shelves in her London studio were stacked high with so-called "failed attempts" to make a picture, and in that I felt a profound sense of searching.

More recently, collage has become an integral part of Moran's practice, which as a technique implies a slower, more layered process of painting than the incidental formal play of quick brushstrokes. Instead of working from images, she's now recombining pieces of past canvases and panels to discover something new. Despite their depth and complexity, these works nevertheless retain the immediacy of a snapshot or something glimpsed out of the corner of one's eye. From a distance, *Joe's in Town* (2012) has the attraction of a bustling 19th-century urban panorama—I think of Manet painting the Paris World's Fair. When you step closer, Moran's canvas reveals gemlike facets of found paper and blobby daubs of paint that skip across the surface. And while it shares the small format of her earlier paintings, it signals a new, expansive energy in the work, as though it's teeming with the possibilities of a whole world. —EC

Joe's in Town
2012



View of the
artist's studio,
London, 2011



Alex Olson

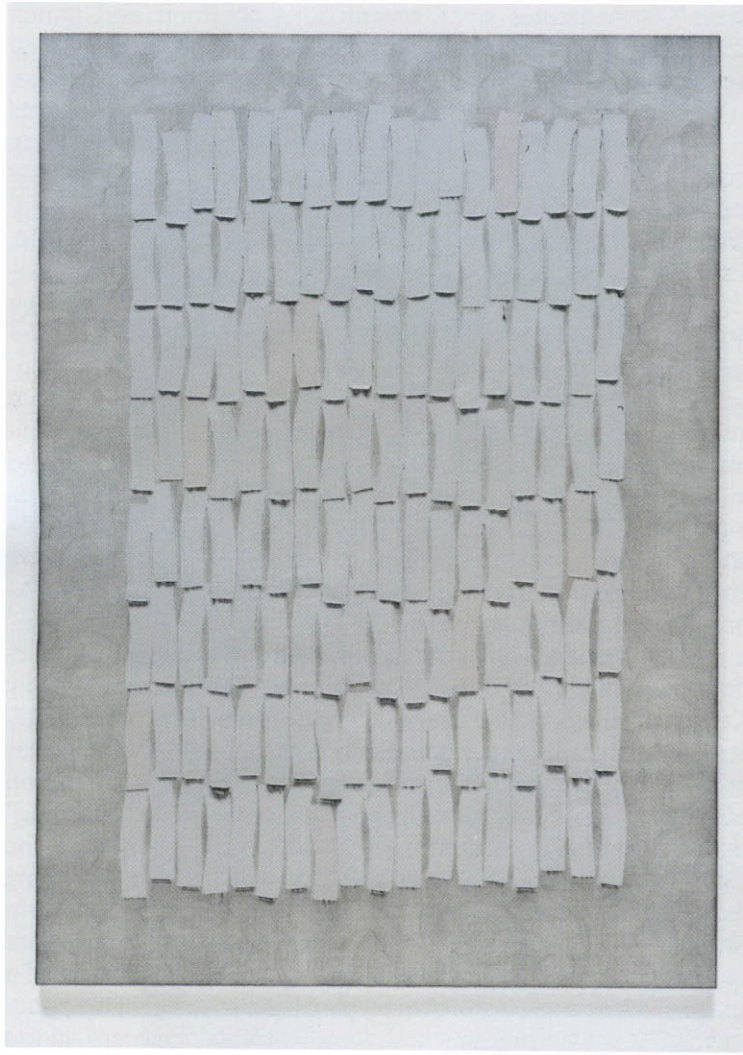
b. Boston, 1978; lives and works in Los Angeles

There is an elegant directness in Alex Olson's handling of paint that I admire. Her style is accessible and welcoming, and her means are modest. She uses inexpensive brushes, palette knives, and trowels to produce fluent, obvious marks (which she calls "flat-footed") with oil paint on linen. Each piece is the result of a careful process of making and evaluation—painting and reading. Proceeding layer by layer, she develops a distinctive architecture of conflicting visual cues for us to decipher. Yet despite their economy of means, her paintings yield complex and shifting optical effects of texture and color.

Grazing, swiping, scraping, carving, imprinting—every mark seems to signal a unique condition of surface. They offer up paint as a kind of information to be read. Olson collects these gestures as "stock signage," or a repertoire of characters that may be familiar from the history of painting but that resist a definitive interpretation. Each is at once an image of a brushstroke and the thing itself—a signifier and its signified. This relationship to language also extends to her titles, which often reference speech acts and include ambiguous words that may function simultaneously as verbs or nouns. Olson reminds us with her work that "painting" is one such word.

With her new works in the exhibition—*Proposal 9* and *Proposal 10* (both 2012)—Olson offers two further propositions for the painted surface. Each canvas features an overall iteration of woven "curls" created with a large round brush—a magnification of her smaller "commas" used in earlier pieces. Then, based on a sequence of moves, such as scraping, dragging, and inpainting, each piece develops differently. In *Proposal 9*, the artist executes an irregular grid of "ribbons." Paradoxically, they appear to rest on the surface of the layer below as well as cut through it. Black has carefully been dry-brushed over the entire canvas to amplify the graphic presence of each gesture in relief. As a result, certain aspects of the painting begin to read as a printed or photocopied image. Colorful scrapes dominate *Proposal 10*, making its central field take on the appearance of a textile or a torn poster. A border of shiny black curls further complicates our reading of figure and ground. —EC

Proposal 9 2012



Scott Olson

b. New York, 1976; lives and works in Kent, OH

Scott Olson creates small abstractions on linen and panel. Often no bigger than a newspaper or a computer screen, they nevertheless have great depth, intimacy, and chromatic range. In these works, figures bleed into ground and each mark seems to hover on the same surface—an uncanny effect resulting from days spent layering, scraping, staining, sanding, and glazing. There is something distinctly musical about their unpredictable geometries, but it's hard to put your finger on it. To me, it's equal parts minimalist drone and jazz solo.

Olson brings to the studio a sense of objectivity that we don't often associate with abstract painting. He doesn't premeditate his compositions; instead, he favors an intuitive approach to mark-making, sometimes using tools of his own invention. There's a bit of alchemy in the process as well. He treats his panels with a mixture of hot rabbit-skin glue and marble dust, which gives them a frescolike appearance. Mixing his paints from natural pigments, such as pollen and cochineal extract, he applies them in washes. In each piece, you get the sense that the artist has worked at a molecular level to bring a composition forward.

Olson's images have the familiar aura of historical abstraction, but while the modernist paintings of Paul Klee or Wassily Kandinsky may come to mind, the past is only one point of reference for him in a much wider contextual field that includes contemporary music, critical theory, and a deep consideration of painting's status in our digital culture. As such, "framing" becomes one of Olson's primary concerns as a painter. In the process of working, he often cuts his panels down, cropping his emerging compositions as one might manipulate a JPEG in Photoshop. The monochromatic borders that frame his more painterly passages sometimes remind me of the margins of a printed page or even a digital screen. I like to think of his paintings as hard-won pictures in a world where images are all too easy to come by. —EC

Untitled 2012

View of the artist's studio, Kent, OH, 2012

Zak Prekop

b. Pittsburgh, 1979; lives and works in Brooklyn, NY

On my first visit to Zak Prekop's studio, I saw more than 30 paintings; many were diminutive, hung salon-style on one wall—a freewheeling range of colors, styles, and materials that seemed to function as note-taking, sketches for material, and formal ideas that often carried into somehow-more-composed larger works within the space. I had the sense of entering a complex visual system born from time alone in the studio, a degree of introspection, and an ability to set up rules for each canvas on the fly, only to drop them with the next work and see them resurface later in others. For example, one small canvas had been pressed against a plastic bag covered in bright red paint, leaving an unevenly distributed impression on its surface. After this fluid first gesture, the artist painstakingly applied small dots of black paint on every minuscule bump that the red didn't cover. The result, characteristic of most of Prekop's work, was both spontaneous and laborious, a puzzle of composition that the attentive viewer could begin to unpack, yet also an elusive and appealing surface on its own terms.

During that visit, I also saw new larger works with raw canvas and hand-cut paper shapes glued to the back. Chosen for its low thread-count translucency, the canvas was haunted by the ghostly indentations of the cut paper, which echoed the surreal abstractions of Max Ernst or Sophie Taeuber-Arp. The play of negative and positive forms seemed to shimmer within the minimal palette spectrum offered by the unpainted canvas surface.

Prekop's work in the exhibition, *Untitled Transparency* (2012), emerges from those earlier pieces, though here he has added new elements. On the back, the paper is joined by a gestural form in white paint, all covered in a deep coat of red. The composition is bold but subdued by the filter of the canvas. On the surface, he seems reticent to make a mark as a declaration of intent, tracing parallel lines of light blue paint within the outline of the white form. The result is a subtly optical painting. —BR

View of the artist's studio, Brooklyn, 2012

Dominik Sittig

b. Nuremberg, Germany, 1975; lives and works in Berlin

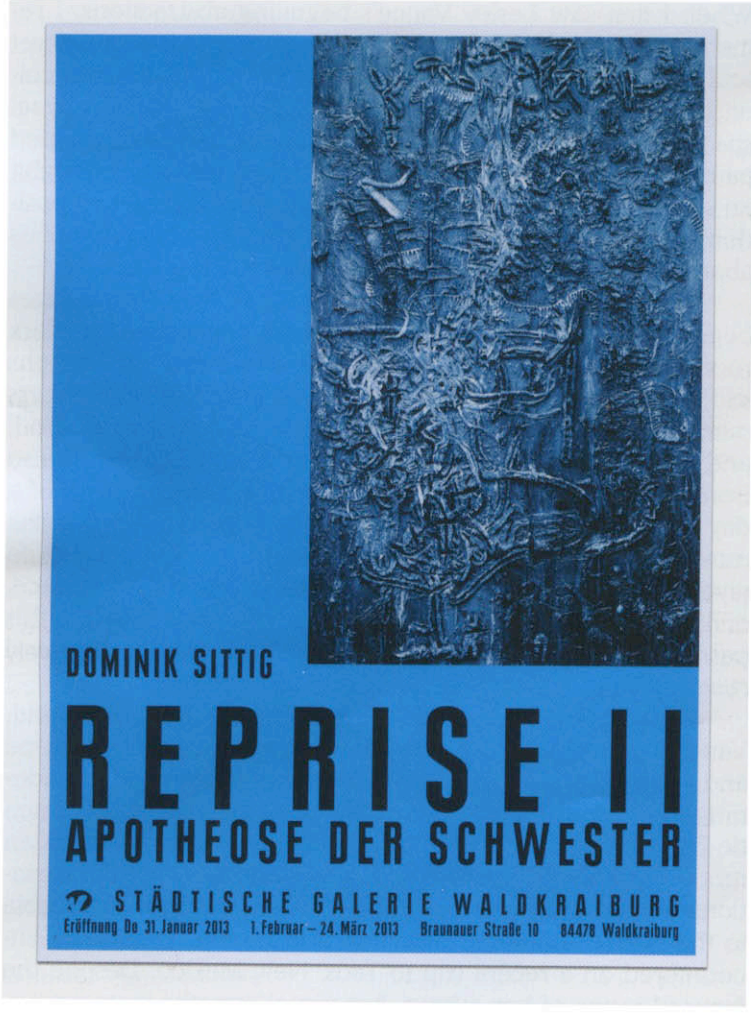
Of all the artists in this exhibition, Dominik Sittig is probably the most attached to the idea that painting is in deep trouble, which is not to say that he has given up on it. Painting is his chosen medium, the one he favors when casting his eye across the contemporary art field. "I would not say that painting is dead," he remarked the first time I met him. "If anything, I would say rather that *art* is dead. But then, art isn't more dead nowadays than any time before."

Sittig works his canvases in an impasto style, applying layer upon layer of thick oil paint in gestural marks that collect over time into murky, scatological, creepy, bold, mucal, thick, and embedded presences. Each layer may take weeks to dry, so a painting often requires up to a year to produce. Though certainly abstract, the works feature moments of incipient figuration—shapes emerge in relief as in *Untitled* (2012), which is on view here.

Stylistically and formally, especially in reproduction, his works seem to align themselves with the postwar European equivalent to Abstract Expressionism—Art Informel, as practiced by artists such as Wols and Jean Fautrier. Indeed, Sittig's publications, posters, and performance lectures aggressively drive home this reference, employing 1950s-style design and language infused with the rhetorical flourish familiar from that time. These characteristics are present in the poster on display, made to advertise a contemporaneous solo show by the artist in Germany. Sittig believes his paintings stand for themselves, but the poster points to his other ways of engaging, and perhaps manipulating, the world as a painter.

It is an art of contradictions. No one seeing a Sittig painting in person would confuse it with a work from the past. There is too much of the contemporary to it—colors that seep through the darker final layers and a heavy varnish coat hinting at the delicate pastel arrangements that form the lower layers. Does it matter that Sittig has a deep distrust of all forms of nostalgia, and indeed has attacked a number of his contemporaries for wallowing in past styles? One thing I know for certain, his is not some grand one-liner, painting as parody. There is too much investment in process for that. —BR

REPRISE II - APOTHEOSE DER SCHWESTER (REPRISE II - APOTHEOSIS OF THE SISTER) 2013



Lesley Vance

b. Milwaukee, WI, 1977; lives and works in Los Angeles

When I first saw Lesley Vance's beguiling abstractions, I remember thinking how impossible they seemed, so fluid yet sculptural in their execution. With subtle modulations of color, they offer striking illusions of depth and a warm, surreal space. Elsewhere, arcs of light and craggy shards of scraped paint collide to form ruptures on the surface. Her works exhibit an uncanny formal precision, yet at every turn of the composition Vance tempers this control with gestures of spontaneous abandon, allowing paint to make its own mark.

It may be surprising to learn that these enigmatic images begin with a reference to the visible world. There is a small, dark room in the back of the artist's studio where she photographs still life arrangements of objects found in nature and others man-made, including broken shells, stones, flowers, driftwood, and ceramic fragments. Working from these images and also from life, she paints with oils wet-on-wet over the course of a day to work out a picture. Somewhere in the process, in the movement of pigment across canvas, the reality of the still life gives way to another dimension—one of paint and surface, of fictional space and folding light. Each painting narrates this passage for us and invites an immersive process of looking and reading. Abstraction becomes a kind of storytelling.

While the genre of the still life implies a closed world, Vance's paintings are much more expansive in their scope and vision. Her fascination with the history of painting is wide-ranging, from the 17th-century Spanish still lifes of Francisco de Zurbarán to the synesthetic abstractions of early American modernist Arthur Dove. When we visited her, our conversations ranged from painters Philip Guston and Francis Picabia to the Native American weavings and kachina masks she encountered on a recent trip to Taos, New Mexico. Despite the focused range of her output, her visual appetite is voracious, and it feeds back into her process. For example, Vance's inky palette of the past few years has given way to lighter swaths of color and more vibrant moments of saturation, announcing a new shift in her subtly evolving studio practice. —EC

Untitled 2012

Molly Zuckerman-Hartung

b. Los Gatos, CA, 1975; lives and works in Chicago

I first encountered Molly Zuckerman-Hartung's paintings in a small Chicago gallery in 2008. They were compact works on canvas with what seemed like years' worth of paint encrusted on their surfaces. They felt resistantly abstract, as if somehow the whole history of painting was crammed into a little rectangle. The works were layered and over-painted. On the one hand, there was something optimistic about them—a belief that painting might still have something to say—and on the other, a feeling of desperation, the sense that the medium was not up to the artist's challenge.

Walking into the artist's studio can be a bit disorienting. There is such a jumble of materials and paintings in progress that it's difficult to process let alone determine where one work ends and another begins. Our conversations about her practice also carry on this way—from Leonardo da Vinci, Henry James, neuroscience, and Immanuel Kant to Cady Noland, queer theory, octopus anatomy, and Gilles Deleuze—returning to the specificity of the paintings in the room. No matter how far afield the work makes her wander, Zuckerman-Hartung insists that she is always drawn back to painting. It affords a context, a history, and a language that she struggles with and works against.

The various elements of *The Failure of Contingency* (2012), the floor-bound installation she has created for this exhibition, have their own history in the studio and together form a highly personal syntax, a narrative about the act of painting today and the anxieties of failure and impossibility that often surround it. Two small canvases—one rectangular, the other round—are connected by a vast network of painted fabric tentacles formed from an old, shredded drop cloth. Two chairs have been handcuffed and a blackened globe has a section sawed off, its scalp attached to another painting elsewhere in the gallery. Images taken from pornographic magazines and old books on marine life point to the importance of touching and sensing in her densely material work. In a more recent painting, *The Necessary (Blushing for Now)* (2012), spiraling blue clusters against an expansive pink field signal a new formal direction in the work as well as a distracted, even dreamy new headspace for the artist.
—EC

Studio view of *The Necessary (Blushing for Now)*, 2012

Exhibition Checklist

Matt Connors

Lisp 2012
chromogenic color print
dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist and CANADA, LLC

Second Divot (articulated) for Candy 2012
acrylic on canvas
80 x 60 in.
(203.2 x 152.4 cm)
overall installed
Courtesy the artist and CANADA, LLC

First Straight Third (red/blue) 2013
acrylic on canvas
100 × 80 in.
(254 × 203.2 cm)
Courtesy the artist and CANADA, LLC

Sarah Crowner

Ciseaux Rideaux 2012
oil and gouache on sewn canvas, fabric, and linen
60 × 137 × 2 in.
(152.4 × 348 × 5.1 cm)
overall installed
Courtesy the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery

Fergus Feehily

Lodger 2012
oil and acrylic on MDF
13 3/4 × 11 13/16 × 5/16 in.
(35 × 30 × 0.8 cm)
Courtesy Galerie Christian Lethert, Cologne; MISAKO & ROSEN, Tokyo; and mother's tankstation, Dublin

River River 2012
oil on card, found frame
12 3/8 × 9 1/16 × 9/16 in.
(31.5 × 22.9 × 1.4 cm)
Courtesy Galerie Christian Lethert, Cologne; MISAKO & ROSEN, Tokyo; and mother's tankstation, Dublin

The Ship 2012
foil, enamel, spray paint, pen on paper, found frame, glass
14 3/4 × 10 7/16 × 9/16 in.
(37.5 × 26.5 × 1.5 cm)
Courtesy Galerie Christian Lethert, Cologne; MISAKO & ROSEN, Tokyo; and mother's tankstation, Dublin

Jay Heikes

We lead healthy lives to keep filthy minds 2013
mixed media
dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist; Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York; Federica Schiavo Gallery, Rome; and Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago

Rosy Keyser

Big Sugar Sea Wall 2012
enamel and spray paint on steel and polycarbonate
100 × 90 × 12 in.
(254 × 228.6 × 30.5 cm)
Courtesy the artist and Peter Blum Gallery, New York

Charles Mayton

Blind Ventriloquist 2012
oil, acrylic, latex, fabric, collage, and silkscreen on canvas
72 × 120 × 1 1/2 in.
(182.9 × 304.8 × 3.8 cm)
overall installed
Courtesy the artist

Dianna Molzan

Untitled 2013
oil on canvas
72 × 19 × 1 1/2 in.
(182.9 × 48.3 × 3.8 cm)
Courtesy the artist and Overduin and Kite, Los Angeles

Untitled 2013
oil on canvas on poplar
43 × 29 × 8 in.
(109.2 × 73.7 × 20.3 cm)
Courtesy the artist and Overduin and Kite, Los Angeles

Joseph Montgomery

Image One Hundred Sixty Six 2011–2012
oil, cardboard, cedar, enamel, paper, canvas, plaster, pastel, fiberglass, resin, PVA, and oatmeal on canvas
28 × 19 × 3 1/2 in.
(71.1 × 48.3 × 8.9 cm)
Collection Ellen Kern, New York

Image One Hundred Sixty Eight 2012
gouache and wax on cedar mounted to gypsum
32 × 16 1/4 × 2 in.
(81.3 × 41.3 × 5.1 cm)
Collection Adrienne and Peter Biberstein, Switzerland

Image One Hundred Seventy 2012
oil and enamel on plaster, polystyrene, cardboard, fiberglass, and resin
73 1/2 × 20 1/2 × 7 in.
(186.7 × 52.1 × 17.8 cm)
Collection Lauren Belgray and Steven Eckler, New York

Katy Moran

Joe's in Town 2012
acrylic, paper, leather, and collage on board
21 3/4 × 34 1/2 in.
(55.3 × 87.6 cm)
Courtesy Stuart Shave/ Modern Art, London and Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York

Alex Olson

Proposal 9 2012
oil on linen
61 × 43 in.
(154.9 × 109.2 cm)
Courtesy the artist; Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago; and Lisa Cooley Fine Art, New York

Proposal 10 2012
oil on linen
61 × 43 in.
(154.9 × 109.2 cm)
Courtesy the artist; Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago; and Lisa Cooley Fine Art, New York

Scott Olson

Untitled 2012
oil and marble dust ground on wood
23 × 28 3/4 in.
(58.4 × 73 cm)
Courtesy the artist and Overduin and Kite, Los Angeles

Untitled 2012
oil and marble dust ground on wood
18 × 21 in.
(45.7 × 53.3 cm)
Courtesy the artist and Overduin and Kite, Los Angeles

Zak Prekop

Untitled Transparency 2012
oil and paper on canvas
84 × 58 in.
(213.4 × 147.3 cm)
Courtesy the artist; Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago; and Harris Lieberman Gallery, New York

Dominik Sittig

Untitled 2012
oil on canvas
70 7/8 × 51 3/16 in.
(180 × 130 cm)
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Christian Nagel, Berlin/Cologne/Antwerp

REPRISE II - APOTHEOSE DER SCHWESTER (REPRISE II - APOTHEOSIS OF THE SISTER) 2013
offset lithograph on paper; edition of 350
33 1/16 x 23 1/4 in.
(84 x 59.1 cm)
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Christian Nagel, Berlin/Cologne/Antwerp

Lesley Vance

Untitled 2012
oil on linen
18 × 14 in.
(45.7 × 35.6 cm)
Courtesy the artist and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

Untitled 2012
oil on linen
24 × 17 in.
(61 × 43.2 cm)
Courtesy the artist and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

Untitled 2012
oil on linen
15 1/2 × 13 in.
(39.4 × 33 cm)
Courtesy the artist and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

Molly Zuckerman-Hartung

The Failure of Contingency 2012
mixed media
dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist and Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago

The Impossible 2012
oil, glitter, screws, ribbons, globe scrap, wire on cheesecloth
24 × 12 in.
(61 × 30.5 cm)
Courtesy the artist and Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago

The Necessary (Blushing for Now) 2012
oil, acrylic, drop cloth on canvas
70 × 60 in.
(177.8 × 152.4 cm)
Courtesy the artist and Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago

Dimensions are listed height × width × depth.

Produced in conjunction with the exhibition *Painter Painter*, organized by the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, and co-curated by Eric Crosby and Bartholomew Ryan, February 2 – October 27, 2013.

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Studio Sessions:
Get to know the artists in *Painter Painter*, both in and out of the studio, through a collection of conversations, playlists, manifestos, and visual essays online at walkerart.org/painter-painter-studio-sessions.