

# SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

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## Mark Grotjahn

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With these “Nine Faces,” Mark Grotjahn appears to have returned to the chrysalis stage. The much-lauded painter of “butterflies” claims to have always used the inherent symmetry of the face as the initial support structure for his paintings. In these new works, the titular faces are at last allowed to penetrate the surface, surging out from the near-sculptural topography of the paintings. Grotjahn applies his paint with a palette knife, knotting together the thick hatch marks into strands, which are then wound in harsh diagonals across the canvas. Each individual mark contains multiple unmixed colors, with sea greens, silvers, and pinks deployed with the same ferocity as the reds. Each accent catches the light in a different way, adding a static-electric crackle to the canvas.

The facial features emerge as grotesque and masklike forms, recalling modernist flirtations with Primitivism. In *Untitled (Geo Abstract Reveal Face 41.61)*, 2011, sharply sloped eyes and flared nostrils are carved from battle-flag reds and yellows, while murky blue-greens hint at depth. *Untitled (Into the White Waterfall Face 41.28)*, 2010, takes up approximately the same palette but threads white through each strand, imparting the deceptive shimmery softness conjured by its title. Grotjahn varies his technique for *Untitled (S 1 Full Frontal Face 41.25)*, 2009–10, eschewing the hatch marks for slender fronds of black, gray, and crimson, which curve up and across the canvas.

If there is anything truly “primal” here, it is the artist’s intuition, his ability to compound accumulations of paint into aesthetically compelling arrangements—never mind that they defy every rule of color harmony in the process. Unlike his ongoing “Butterfly Paintings,” 2001–, which hinge on a pretense of perspectival order, Grotjahn’s “Nine Faces” triumph in their chaos.

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