



Retro-Glorified: History Today in New York

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By Rachel K. Ward

Last week, *Painting: Now and Forever, Part II*, the sequel to the 1998 show, opened at Matthew Marks and Greene Naftali in Chelsea. Ten years ago we had Richard Prince, Lisa Ruyter, Kenneth Noland, Peter Cain, Brice and Helen Marden, Sigmar Polke, Jack Pierson, Ashley Bickerton and Andy Warhol, among others, flying the flag of a resurgent and confident medium (though Roberta Smith judged the show 'relatively agenda-free'). *Part II* is a similar showcase, apparently agenda-free – maybe too much so – featuring a mostly younger generation of painters, among them Kai Althoff, Cosima von Bonin, Karen Kilimnik, Mathew Cerletty, Bjarne Melgaard, Ugo Rondinone, Reena Spaulings and Laura Owens, along with some older hands like Mike Kelley, Blinky Palermo and Rodney Graham.

Painting: Now and Forever is an event as rare as the decennial confluence of Documenta, Munster Sculpture Project, and the Venice Biennale. Serial small-scale exhibitions like this though aren't seen enough: they're a good tool for locating ourselves in history – although you and almost everyone else missed *Part I*. What will *Part III* look like in 2018? What will we look like?

In the Matthew Marks leg of the exhibition, there's a light and colorful summer feel. Even the large, aggressively truncated X's of Wade Guyton – whose work has been feted as a possible way forward for painting through its confrontation with the foreclosure of meaning – seem to open up space, set as they are on a serene white background. Michel Majerus' similarly stunted and strangled cry, *Burned Out* (2000), written in pastel shades, has an expansive and cooling effect. Jack Goldstein and Ugo Rondinone contribute to the airy mood with their colorful orbs of light, like sunsets, but on Venus.

Katharina Fritsch's *Bild mit Spiegel (Picture with Mirror)* (1998), a steely blank reflective surface, evidences the identity politics and self-reflection prominent the late 1990s. For the most part though this is not an exhibition about identity as much as it is a collection of simplistic, colorful painting, relieved of its struggles with meaning or anti-meaning that have been a major feature of the past decade. Mary Helimann is the only painter here who was also in the first show. Her piece *Trellis* (1996), with its red dots on a white ground and wiry geometric lines, represents less about the ten-year period and more about the process of painting, one that is about forever playing with space and color.

At Greene Naftali, recent work by young German artist Kai Althoff resembles Chagall or Matisse in its dreamlike quality. Richard Hawkins' sunset style works are also reminiscent of some cartoon-like dream. It's also great to see Mike Kelley's bright and childlike *Carpet #2* (2008), a painted piece of carpet mounted on wood. Gelatin's plasticine on wood piece, moulded to resemble the Mona Lisa, is a nice mascot for the show, since Miss Lisa seems to have achieved a saint-like foreverness.

A different sense of history is offered up at Rivington Arms's summer group show, *There is no there there*, which also opened last week and only features work made this year – and by artists who were still in high school during *Part I* of *Painting: Now and Forever*. Curated by Benjamin Provo, the exhibition is about the transitions and interstices of art, including its invisibility. One example of the theme is Jeremy Everett's crumpled, wizened, and moist-looking small waxy object stained with flesh-tones. To make it, Everett submerged a porn magazine in a mixture of water and detergent. The success of the object somehow depends on knowledge of its origin. But with the explanation, the object, mute beforehand, basks in retro-glorification. This begs a larger question of whether we have reached a point where, in order to appreciate the work of art, we need auxiliary information, knowledge of some socially or critically astute gesture in the process behind the work in order to justify its aesthetic? This type of conceptually contingent work is almost the antithesis to the immediacy we get at Matthew Marks and Greene Naftali. Beauty alone is not enough anymore; it must be beauty made from something loaded like an old copy of *Hustler*.

The same conceptual urgency is found in Kathryn Andrews' *Notes and Plates*, framed book pages arranged in a very Joseph Kosuth-like presentation. Throughout the show, you get the impression these are not the kind of artists who just tear pages from books; they actually read them. This is a generation of artists conscious of what has come before them, almost too conscious. The notable exception to this domineering intellectual and social-conceptual consciousness is Luke Whitlatch's *Flight of the Carrion Crow*. This painted craft-like work is a wall object, a tower of paper cubes. The work, in title and execution, speaks to an awe for the un-social, natural inspiration of art, which was also apparent at Matthew Marks and Greene Naftali. We do not need to know about Whitlatch's interest in punk rock or his allegiance to materiality in painting to love this piece and to see that the artist does too.

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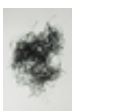
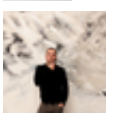

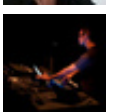

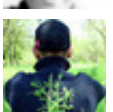
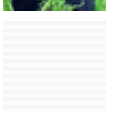
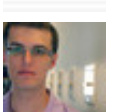
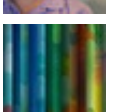





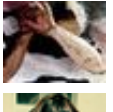

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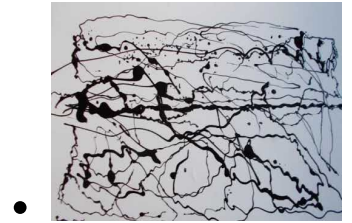
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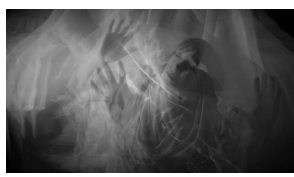


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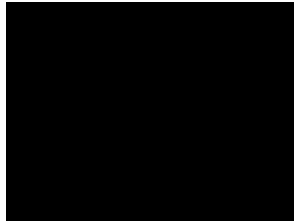
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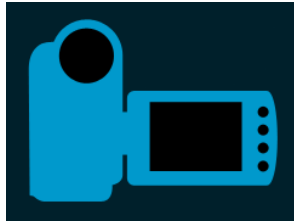
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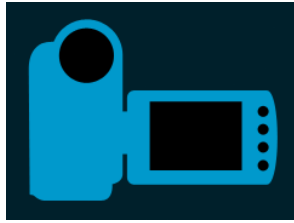
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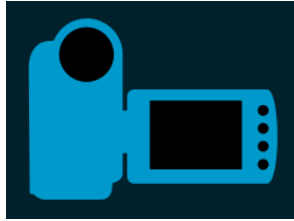
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