

For Immediate Release

POST-MoDERN

Henning Bohl, Mary Heilmann, Sophie von Hellermann, Charline von Heyl, Jacqueline Humphries, Michael Krebber, Makiko Kudo, Laura Owens, Dana Schutz, Amy Sillman, Josh Smith

Greene Naftali Gallery

January 14 – February 19, 2005

Greene Naftali will begin their 2005 season with *POST-MoDERN*, a group exhibition addressing modernism's afterlife in contemporary painting. Specifically considered is painting's ability to reflect our contemporary landscape while looking back as medium relegated to a period that has decisively ended. In the work of these eleven artists, trajectories of modernism are quoted and pastiched as well as extended and formally expanded upon.

Mary Heilmann took up geometric abstraction at the very height of paintings supposed obsolescence in the early 1970s. Faced with Modernism's apex in the monochrome she looked for an alternative approach to painting. Heilmann recalls, "I loved the music-hall type songs of Eno's *Before and After Science* and *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* albums, and Cale's *Fear*. I understood that the music remembered and quoted the style of the music of another time.... I saw a model for my own work." There is a formalism or sorts in her paintings, but it is expansive and subjective rather than reductive.

Laura Owens shares Heilmann's carefree relationship to the idea of subject matter. Her work draws on such diverse sources as Color Field Painting, Bauhaus textile design, Chinese and Japanese landscape painting, Op Art, and embroidery with an idiosyncratic mix of warmth and cruelty. Undermining categorization, Owens' paintings defy easy interpretation. Yet, her non-evolutionary view of Art History opens up formal possibilities and resists the strict, linear model associated with Modernism.

In Dana Schutz's *Coma*, a girl stares with blank eyes into a mass of abstract composition. The abstraction calls to mind Kandinsky. Perhaps the handling of paint suggests van Gogh. The girl, however, seems more likely to have come from an underground comic book than a more widely celebrated source. Furthermore, the abstract brushmarks seem to be pouring out of the girl's armpit, the modernist canon portrayed as the anxiety of body odor.

Amy Sillman folds surreal, daydream imagery over painterly drips and pours to create, in her own words, "paintings that are partly cartoon, partly lament, partly grudge, that I hope are unpredictable, beautiful, but sort of shaggy." In *Trawler*, a cartoon bird is perched on a branch of gestural marks that dissolves into a ship's bow. The pastel palette draws as much on Pierre Bonnard, and Florine Stettheimer as it does the kitschy colors of faux-deco apartments to stand in troubling contrast to the psychological density of the painting process.

In *Untitled (Wedding)*, Sophie von Hellermann depicts a ghostly bride and her deadened groom. The effect is produced by von Hellermann's atypical painting technique in which pure pigment is mixed with water and rubbed onto and into the canvas. The painting has a childlike crudeness— von Hellermann claims to have been painting the same way since she was 12 years old— but demonstrates an advanced

knowledge of art history from German Romanticism to the early Modernism of Manet. Within and beyond the art historical references, von Hellermann takes a highly imaginative approach to social critique.

Henning Bohl pushes the Japonism of the early modernists to the absurd. Bohl's paper collages are, much like those of Matisse, inspired by Japanese woodcuts as well as the geometric designs of Sonja Delaunay. However, works such as Bohl's *Shogun* directly address the misunderstandings inherent in this cultural exchange. For instance, the two figures collaged onto the canvas are the protagonists of the 1968 film *Shogun*, a clichéd tale of culture clash and romance between a shipwrecked British sailor and his Japanese translator. With *Vase With Table*, Bohl presents an object of design as well as aesthetic contemplation.

On the opposite side of this fence lies Makiko Kudo, who first came to attention in a show curated by Takashi Murakami in Japan. *I Don't Know* depicts a young girl lounging idly in a pool of water. The cherry blossoms patterned on her dress float into the picture plane. Mixing dreamlike imagery with scenes from daily life, Kudo's paintings combine the flatness of Western Modernism since Manet with the superflatness suggested by such sources as Japanese animation.

If, as Harold Rosenberg wrote in 1952, the canvas is an arena in which to act, then it is through the role of the actor that we should understand Charline von Heyl's approach to painting. In her work what seems upon first glance to be a spontaneous gesture reveals itself to be a carefully composed addition to the canvas. The expressive marks of Abstract Expressionism are performed in pantomime. Utilizing a wide variety of painterly techniques to achieve the desired effect, von Heyl complicates the connection between the expressive mark and the markmaker expressed by it.

Jacqueline Humphries also takes this process-oriented approach to abstract expressionism. Humphries says, "Exploiting the liquid properties of paint, where I can't exactly predict what they will do, is like collaborating with my materials. It is as if the material is self-ordering, with little intervention from me. It is not unlike a technology, in that certain conditions are created, forces are contained, and filtered through some structure." In this way, Humphries pushes the automatist drips of Jackson Pollock into a sort of automated, mechanical pour; the expressive gestures of Abstract Expressionism are more detached but still reflect a contemporary visceral experience.

Considering Duchamp's general attitude towards painting, his influence on Michael Krebber's practice may come as a surprise. Krebber, however, draws out the Duchampian element from within the Modernist tradition itself. Remember that by 1962, even Clement Greenberg had to concede that "a stretched or tacked-up canvas already exists as a picture -- though not necessarily a successful one." Krebber's work tests the possibility that a stretched, blank canvas might, under certain conditions, work as a painting. In the past, this has led Krebber to stretch found fabrics as blank canvases, a comment on uniqueness in the age of mechanical reproduction. In the paintings here, Krebber plays with the question: When can we say a painting is finished? In the case of *Shoko*, the finishing touch is Krebber's name written over ten times on the canvas's back, a play on authenticity and the fetish of the artist's signature.

Josh Smith's contribution to the exhibition is a similarly Dada-like gesture. As the titles suggest, these small, abstract canvases also happen to be palette's used to mix colors for other paintings. The works are an unusual mixture of found painting and artistic touch. After all, Duchamp's characterization of the readymade as something one doesn't even look at is a perfect description of the painter's palette. Their dynamic compositions are a testament to the creativity of the unconscious.

For further information, please contact the gallery at info@greenenaftaligallery.com, or visit our website, www.greenenaftaligallery.com.