

PRESS RELEASE

## **Figurative Geometry**

Exhibition organized by Bob Nickas

16 October 2016 – 2 April 2017



The exhibition *Figurative Geometry* brings together works by nine artists who can be thought to represent abstraction or, equally, to abstract representation.

To these ends, geometry and figuration are intermingled; shapes are shifted, geometry bends around itself, patterns emerge, while figuration refers to bodies in space—bodies which come forward and recede—as well as to numbers and their temporal register, to the number, for example, of seconds in a day.

Time is also one of the subjects at hand. All of these works have been hand-painted, in some cases wet-into-wet, having to be completed in a single session. The brushstroke itself, amplified and performing to the scale and volume of the picture plane, has duration. Though seemingly in two dimensions, some of these works play with depth of field in terms of material, layering and transparency, spatial dislocations that involve the rooms in which they are shown. Here they may also be considered as time-based, operating visually at different speeds. Whether revealing their contents gradually or seemingly in an instant, an element of time exists between the image and its reception, between the viewer and the work. In this we are reminded that the human exploration of space begins first with vision, since we "move" through the world with sight before negotiating it with our bodies. There is a danger of losing certain early powers of observation as we become increasingly mobile and distracted, mobility increasing and decreasing over the arc of our lives. Painted pictures, whatever the speed at which we receive them, mean to slow us down, to draw us towards them. The works in this exhibition, even the most abstract in appearance, perhaps these most of all, can be seen to represent the act of looking, on the parts of both the artist and the viewer.

For some of these artists, their primary means is painting. For others, this is an aspect of an expanded practice, paint being but one material while its application, in the usual sense, is one process among others. There are paintings in this exhibition which have been pieced together, as if forms were composed to create a picture-puzzle. Some of the paintings are sculptural, engaging with architecture and the support as a surface to be folded, like a screen, or with plaster revealing its faults—and thus a passage of time—a wall upon a wall. Similarly object-like are intimate "tiles" of baked enamel, light and chromatics playing off the polished shine of their surface. Arranged in sequence, these works installed as a single line, can also seem to perform, finding their rhythm internally from one to the next, syncopated as much by the spaces in between. Staged in this way, the proscenium wall becomes part of the picture plane. As in the theater, there is also a suspension of disbelief. Though entirely composed with paint and brush, some of the paintings on view appear to have been woven, thin lines threading through fabric, canvas seeming closer to linen or gingham, with its stripes, checks and plaids—basics, in fact, of geometric abstraction, and related to clothing and the body, to figuration—patterned, dyed, stitched and hand-sewn.

Even though most of the works on view have been painted, this is not a show of paintings but *of painters*, an important distinction to be made. For these artists, the act of painting is clearly represented in their work, and it can be seen as a statement. In a period when anything hung on a wall must be instantly afforded the status of painting, when we are confronted by "paintings" that have been made without any recourse to paint whatsoever, created with printers and scanners, or with the assistance of nature, bleached by the sun, stained by the rain—a pretense of process art to painting *en plein air*, and very late in the day—an engaged practice of painting, rather than dismissed as a thing of the past, is ever more present. In terms of visual art, painting is considered to be the least expedient conveyance of information today, yet why is this undesirable? Painting, with some frequency dismissed as obsolete, persists and counters: replaced by what, exactly? As a purely invented world it need not reflect the visible. It makes visible what wasn't there before, what lies beyond, or has disappeared altogether. All art is evidence of life on earth, and of passage, though not all art will embody this passing. A number of darker works in this show, nocturnes of a sort, attempt to visualize deep, cosmic space, have been referred to as "Landscapes" and qualified as "Before Dying." As a particularly resonant example of figurative geometry, they embody time in terms of mortality, of human trajectory and its traces, serving to remind us that the painted portrait, even cracked and tattered, always outlasts its subject.

The artists in the show include:

**Sadie Benning** (American, lives and works in New York)  
**Alex Brown** (American, lives and works in Des Moines, Iowa)  
**Mamie Holst** (American, lives and works in Ft. Myers, Florida)  
**Chip Hughes** (American, lives and works in New York)  
**Xylor Jane** (American, lives and works in Greenfield,  
Massachusetts)  
**Robert Janitz** (German, lives and works in New York)  
**Ulrike Müller** (Austrian, lives and works in New York)  
**Nicolas Roggy** (French, lives and works in Paris)  
**Richard Tinkler** (American, lives and works in New York)

Private view by invitation: 15 October 2016, at 6.00pm

16 October 2016 – 2 April 2017

Admission free visit during the opening hours of the permanent collection.

Thursday and Friday 2.30pm – 6.30pm

Saturday and Sunday 10.30am – 6.30pm

Closed: 1 November, 25-26 December, 1 and 6 January

### **Info**

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### **Biographies**

#### **Sadie Benning**

Born in Madison, Wisconsin, 1973. Lives and works in New York. Sadie Benning came to painting by way of video and drawing, both of which remain important aspects of her practice. Benning's paintings are constructed like picture-puzzles, fitted together in a similar way to how a story connects characters, events and narrative. Her work is thus animated in a space between abstraction and representation, painting and sculpture, and includes the viewer, who has a part to play: to engage with the painting is also to assemble the pieces of the puzzle and its narrative.

Benning's work has most recently been included in *Greater New York*, MoMA PS1; *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age*, Museum Brandhorst, Munich and MuMoK, Vienna; *The Carnegie International*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; and *Tell It To My Heart: Collected by Julie Ault*, Kunstmuseum Basel and Artists Space, New York.

### **Alex Brown**

Born in Des Moines, Iowa, 1966. Lives and works in Des Moines.

Alex Brown's work involves an overlay of images and patterns, always hand-painted, with images sourced from the internet and patterns of his own devising. The images are sometimes, but not always, discernible from a distance, and he has also overlaid more than one image in a single painting, as if a scene or a figure haunting the same space at different points in time were brought together on the surface of the painting. In this investigation of painting and perception, does Alex Brown aim to represent abstraction? Or to abstract representation? Or is it both simultaneously?

Since the late 1990s, Alex Brown's work has been presented in numerous solo exhibitions in New York, Montreal, Miami, Geneva, Brussels, Paris and Tokyo. Group exhibitions include: *Bit by Bit: Painting and Digital Culture*, Numark Gallery, Washington; *Abstract Reality*, Sead Gallery, Antwerp; *The Expanded Eye*, Kunsthaus Zurich; and *The Painter of Modern Life*, Anton Kern Gallery, New York.

### **Mamie Holst**

Born in Gainesville, Florida, 1961. Lives and works in Ft. Myers, Florida.

All of Mamie Holst's paintings since 1997 have been subtitled *Landscape Before Dying*, and are *grisaille*, painted in tones of white, black and gray. The *Landscape* series was begun eight years after the artist was diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, which only allows her to work for brief periods of time. That the act of making these paintings is a meditation on her condition, and that no other colors appear, in no way intrudes upon the wonder of her imagery, which seems to grasp something of the vastness of the universe and creation itself. Though limited in terms of her movement in the physical world, she is unlimited in the imaginative realm, and offers us views to the far reaches of space, and pictures fields of energy, energy—the very life force which for her is a precious commodity—made visible.

Holst's work has been presented in solo exhibitions in New York, Montreal and Geneva, and she has participated in group shows including *Psychic Landscape*, Yvon Lambert, New York; *The Old, the New, the Different*, Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland; *Eccentric Abstraction 2014*, frosch & portmann, New York; *Creature From The Blue Lagoon*, Martos Gallery, Bridgehampton, New York; *The Optical Unconscious*, Gebert Foundation, Rapperswil, Switzerland.

### **Chip Hughes**

Born in Columbus, Ohio, 1986. Lives and works in New York.

The paintings of Chip Hughes may appear from a distance to be textiles, patterned and moiré fabric, and monochromes, as he interweaves lines and color to create his subtle but active surfaces. There are images embedded in them, although the patterns and color in which they alternately emerge and recede give them more the feeling of after-images or ghost-images. The term embedded is wholly appropriate, since these delineations of imagery may be related to the unconscious, to dreams and even to day-dreaming, where the mind's eye wanders unimpeded. Hughes's images are just as shifting as his geometry, arousing a perceptual instability, a sensation that has been called "optical romanticism."

Exhibiting since 2008, Chip Hughes has mounted two solo exhibitions at K.S. Art in New York, and has participated in numerous group shows including *LOCUM*, Ribordy Contemporary, Geneva; *The Painter of Modern Life*, Anton Kern Gallery, New York; *LAT. 41° 7' N. LONG. 72° 19' W*, Martos Gallery, East Marion, New York.

### **Xylor Jane**

Born in Long Beach, California, 1963. Lives and works in Greenfield, Massachusetts.

Xylor Jane's paintings are based on numbers, mathematics geometric structures and chromatic interplay. From afar, the highly keyed chromatics and the modulation of color stand out. From mid-distance, the numbers come into focus. In close proximity to the surface, the numbers are elusive and the structures and geometric shapes take hold most forcefully. Her paintings register the position of

the viewer and play with perception, variously revealing and concealing their content. The numbers represent the "figurative" element in her work, and the numbers are always personally significant for the artist. Recent paintings, for example, have been composed with the number of seconds in a day. Hand-painted, it's clear that her works are time- and labor-intensive, that the act of painting for her is related to being, and the act of looking unites her and her viewers in real time. On the wall in the gallery, the painting exists before the viewer in the present. To imagine the painting on an easel in the artist's studio is to see its origin in the near-past. And yet in the overlay of these temporal points we have an image that is shared and central to all art: an image of consciousness itself.

Xylor Jane has exhibited widely since 2000, in the United States and in Europe, where her paintings have been shown in solo shows in Paris and Dublin, and in group shows in Brussels, Moscow, Berlin, Amsterdam and Rome.

### **Robert Janitz**

Born in Alsfeld, Germany, 1962. Lives and works in New York.

In the paintings of Robert Janitz one sees the act of painting, of actually applying the paint to the canvas, as the image itself. He has referred to the application of paint as similar to the gesture that one makes when buttering toast at the breakfast table. He makes his paint by mixing wax, flour and oil, resulting in lushly transparent surfaces. The paintings may be seen as gestural and lyrical, but there is, beyond the recipe for the material, a control to the procedure, though a process which does not preclude emotion and detachment at the same time. One is inevitably reminded of the liquid and frozen brushstrokes of Pop artist Roy Lichtenstein, and the now classic works he produced in the mid-'60s. There is a classicism to Janitz's art, somewhat dandified, which comes equally from the facts of everyday life as well as from literature and art history. His small format portraits are also made up of fluid brushstrokes, always presenting a figure from the back, seen from the shoulders up—as if they were turned away or walking away from the viewer, through the gallery wall, and he renders them, at the same time, recognizable and abstract.

Robert Janitz has mounted solo exhibitions in New York, Paris, Brussels, Berlin, and Karlsruhe, and participated in group shows including *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: New Works From Berlin*, Magazzino d'Arte Moderna, Rome; *Informal Abstraction*, Art Amalgamated, New York; *The Painter of Modern Life*, Anton Kern Gallery, New York.

### **Ulrike Müller**

Born in Brixlegg, Austria, 1971. Lives and works in New York.

Ulrike Müller engages relationships between abstraction and bodies and a concept of painting that is not restricted to brush and canvas. Employing a wide range of materials and techniques, including performance, publishing, and textiles, her work moves between different contexts and publics, invites collaboration, and expands to other realms of production in processes of exploration and exchange. Installation is of paramount importance. There are wall paintings which allow for a subtle claiming of space. Carpets of her own design, woven in Mexico, may be placed on the floor or on the wall, hung like paintings. Paintings shift in scale from small to large, suggesting perspective between abstract "figures" within the actual exhibition space. Some of her paintings rely on the traditional support of canvas, while others are produced as baked enamel tiles, often grouped together to form a single piece. She orchestrates various elements in her exhibitions, offering a kind of visual music and performance, staging the players, as it were.

Recent solo exhibitions include Museum of Modern Art Ludwig Foundation, Vienna, 2015, and Kunstraum Lakeside, Austria. Her work has been included in *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age*, Museum Brandhorst, Munich and MuMoK, Vienna; *Blackness in Abstraction*, Pace Gallery, New York. In 2010, Müller represented Austria in the Cairo Biennial.

### **Nicolas Roggy**

Born in Le Blanc, France, 1980. Lives and works in Paris.

The work of Nicolas Roggy is involved with an application of paint to a surface that is similar to a plastered wall, with the delineation of line—often with a highly

optical charge—and a constructed support. His work thus engages painting, drawing, sculpture and architecture. Large-format paintings sometimes angle off the wall, like a folding screen, or appear broken at the edges, as if they were fragments from a fresco or a building, which gives them a sense of being out-of-time. Playing as well with a temporal, slow-motion breakdown of both the image and the support, his worn, weathered surfaces allow for close observation, giving at times the feeling that this is a landscape, a topography, earthbound and lunar, meant to be examined in close proximity.

In addition to solo exhibitions in Paris and New York, Roggy has participated in recent group exhibitions including: *Post-Op: Perceptual Gone Painterly, 1958-2014*, Galerie Perrotin, Paris; *The Optical Unconscious*, Gebert Fondation, Rapperswil, Switzerland; *Les Américains / La solitude*, Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo; and *UNdocumenta*, Asia Culture Center, Gwanju, Korea.

### **Richard Tinkler**

Born in Westminster, Maryland, 1975. Lives and works in New York.

For Richard Tinkler, every painting comes out of every other, related and incrementally different. If you place a painting with a completely coherent structure immediately next to one in which the structure collapses in on itself, liquefies in paint as a sort of "meltdown," they don't seem to be related at all. And yet when you are presented with a sequence of paintings, one after another, you see that they do share the same operating system. They have the same DNA, the same visual language, and are translated by the same brain. Tinkler creates each painting in a single session, painting wet-on-wet, to complete his work in the space of a day. This "daily practice of painting" is both rigorous and contemplative, obsessive and measured.

In addition to painting, a major aspect of the artist's practice is an ongoing series of drawings, now numbering more than a thousand, and occupying individual books which he sequences and re-sequences. The drawings relate to the paintings but, spun out in every direction with spidery lines and interconnected webs, they have an organic life of their own. Seen side-by-side, the paintings and drawings may resemble mandalas and their anarchic counterparts.

Richard Tinkler's work has been presented in group exhibitions in Europe, in Paris and Salzburg, and in the United States, in New York; Reno, Nevada; and Provincetown, Massachusetts.