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MAY 2016 Issue.....

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ArtSeen

Informed Painting

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By Tom McGlynn

Writing on Cézanne, D.H. Lawrence noted that, "After a fight tooth-and-nail for forty years, he did succeed in knowing an apple, fully; and, not quite as fully, a jug or two. That was all he achieved. It seems little [...] But it is the first step that counts, and Cézanne's apple is a great deal, more than Plato's Idea."¹ How exactly does a painting enact its own becoming, attain an imagined state that is also a solid thing, obliterate the virtual distance between form and idea, attain its givenness?



Lawrence Fowler, *Paul's Studio*, 2010. Oil and collage on canvas. 62 x 62 inches.
Courtesy Pablo's Birthday.

On View

Pablo's Birthday

April 1 – April 28, 2016

<https://brooklynrail.org/2016/05/artseen/informed-painting>

New York

Such questions arise when confronted with the grouping of works Arne Zimmerman has assembled for ***Informed Painting***. His concept for the show proposes that these artists might be raising the specter of "aura" in a non-traditional fashion, as something that can be considered a painter's task: to reanimate a haptic presence even without any consideration for a rational progression from primary origin to a copy. It's a twist on Benjamin's concept (articulated in "The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction") of an original aura being transformed by its copied proliferation. What this group show effectively sets up is a problematized path toward aura, a circuitous kind of apostate pilgrimage towards the achievement of these paintings' "reality." Perhaps this is as good an approach as any on the road toward a painterly Platonic inversion (stripping away the Janus-masked argument between reality and its shadow): in passing the milestone of Cézanne's apples, one might be less inclined to take them for ideal forms and perhaps attempt to take an actual bite for sustenance.

Laurence Egloff gains her particular sustenance by optically processing 17th-century Flemish paintings in works such as ***ohne Titel (Jordaens)*** (2013). Her desultory brush strokes capture the liquid essence of a work by Jacob Jordaens: they evoke his Baroque compositional twists and turns and dramatic lighting, yet at an unfocused remove. Or perhaps Egloff is simply refocused on mapping the phenomenology of the paintings' optical effects, while obliterating their historical significance and narrative context. There is something breathless yet stilted in these diminutive paintings, lending them an amiable tension that relieves the copy of its burden of fidelity to the original.

Graham Macbeth has developed his work in relation to a pre-copied world, in the virtual space of computer gaming. His small and poetically gestural paintings remind one in some respects of the casual realism of Fairfield Porter or the similarly delicate brushwork of Maureen Gallace. Macbeth's paintings, however, have been pre-composed by programs from which they are derived. He favors nondescript corners of the screen, landscapes, or backdrops in which the action takes place but from which the active agent seems to be missing. The harsh scopic regime of virtual space is softened by the artist's delicate gestures and brushwork, yet the works emit the mysteries of a slippery non-place, still alloyed to their origins in virtual reality, as in ***Untitled*** (2015). These works raise the interesting thought of how one's projection of intentionality may get immersed in the technological game and simultaneously, metabolically, recoil from its circumscribed limits, as one might with any modernist gesture. An aura may give off a universal glow yet be highly conditional, both attracting and deflecting organic sense.

At first glance Adriana Atema's paintings rely on process as image: in ***Empyrien*** (2013) she drips an oddly specific array of colors upwards from an underlying portrait outline, while in ***Untitled Diptych*** (2016) she paints again with a quirky palette, this

time onto an inkjet-printed canvas. In both instances one gets the impression of surface color in the process of detaching from given armature and then reforming into a mutated version of the original. Here are image-in-process pictures.

In a similar vein, Niels Shoe Meulman's painting ***Enter the exit*** (2016) appears at first to be clearly gestural, but then a paradoxical photo-process focus bleeds across its more bravura strokes. This interaction suspends one's reflexive response to either the spills or their manipulation, creating what could be considered an intentionally diluted "picturehood."

Smaller and much more dense, Sinéad Ní Mhaonaigh's paintings reference vernacular architecture in profile. The hues here are of middle to high saturation; in one work, ***Untitled*** (2016) the colors contrast in yellow and dark violet. Her work is quite sculptural in its feel, and recall the similarly shape-oriented paintings of Robert Moskowitz. The works' virtual physicality is how they are in-formed.

Also architecturally inspired are Lawrence Power's group of paintings. In ***Corner*** and ***Paul's Studio*** (both 2015) the artist minimally indicates vertical, horizontal, and diagonal supports in relation to the "room" of each painting, often with a heavily loaded brush. These reticent gestures compose barely-there soliloquies of space in wan grays, pinks, and blues. They are nevertheless quite insistent on a tactile level. The paintings present as sculptural planes suggesting the memory of spaces and the artist's attempt to reconstruct those memories partially by hand, rather than solely by eye.

In his ***Homer Advert*** (2016) trio of paintings, Jesse Willenbring repeats a Matisse-like frond in rotating patterns and pastel hues. The paintings are as lightweight as wallpaper, yet also exude an organic ***jouissance***, like Minoan dolphins in fresco.

In a more hard-edged format, Michael Zahn's ***Ever Get The Feeling*** (2016) riffs on social-media culture. Three bright yellow, indistinct emoji faces are placed in round canvases opposite a fourth green one, which seems to respond to their mute chorus. All are on a wall-painted chat bubble. Pop figuration gets shorn of its friendly mask here to reveal the blankness of its repetitious smile.

Each artist's work is informed by a subjective slant on the myriad possible atmospheres that might be extrapolated from sense perception, be it physically palpable or at a mediated remove. What seems central to the concept of the show is that either way, it doesn't matter. What ***does*** is the quality of aesthetic intention to suspend the debate between the copy and its other, so that aura happens, anyway.

Endnotes

1. D. H. Lawrence, "Introduction to These Paintings," from *Late Essays and Articles* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 202-203.

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TOM MCGLYNN is an artist, writer, and independent curator based in the N.Y.C. area. His work is represented in the permanent collections of the Whitney Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Cooper- Hewitt National Design Museum of the Smithsonian. He is the director of Beautiful Fields, an organization dedicated to socially- engaged curatorial projects, and is also currently a visiting lecturer at Parsons/the New School.

