Thursday, September 19th, 2013

Oil as Water: POUR at Lesley Heller and Asya Geisberg

print

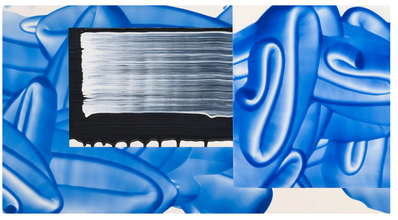
by **Franklin Einspruch**

POUR

University Galleries, Florida Atlantic University
Boca Raton, Florida
February 5 to March 23, 2013

The exhibition was shown in two parts at:
Lesley Heller Workspace
54 Orchard Street
New York City, 212-410 6120

Asya Geisberg Gallery
537B West 23rd Street
New York City, 212-675-7525
April 24 to May 24, 2013



David Reed, detail of No.611, 2010, oil and alkyd on polyester, 24 x 120 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Asya Geisberg Gallery.

We may one day recall 2013 as The Year That Abstract Painting Came Back. Historical exhibitions have appeared at the Museum of Modern Art (*Inventing Abstraction, 1910-1925*) and the Guggenheim (*Art of Another Kind: International Abstraction and the Guggenheim, 1949–1960*), as well as Loretta Howard Gallery (*DNA: Strands of Abstraction*) and Cheim & Read (*Reinventing Abstraction: New York Painting in the 1980s*). The year has also been a notable one for contemporary shows: Paul Behnke at Kathryn Markel, Jennifer Riley at Allegra La Viola, Thomas Nozkowski at Pace, to name a few, with Sharon Louden coming to Morgan Lehman in October. And that's just considering New York.

Add to this list *POUR*, an exhibition that showed simultaneously at Asya Geisberg Gallery and Lesley Heller Workspace after originating at Florida Atlantic University. Curated by Elisabeth Condon and Carol Prusa, *POUR* established that the desire for good abstract form, achievable by way of liquid paint, is a perennial concern. In Chaim Potok's 1972 book *My Name is Asher Lev*, abstract painter Jacob Kahn says to Asher, "I think people will paint this way for a thousand years." We're well on our way. Moreover, we seem to be doing so having settled a debt to Clement Greenberg. Greenberg goes largely unmentioned in the catalogues, criticism, and conversations surrounding the aforementioned exhibitions. Helen Frankenthaler's name comes up in the *POUR* catalogue (this is a show about pouring paint after all), but so does Rubens and Chinese scroll painting. Finally, we can have a show of abstract painting in New York without it turning into a referendum on Greenberg. When someone turns it into one anyway, as John Yau did on behalf of Thomas Nozkowski in his March 2013 review in Hyperallergic, it sounds dated and beside the point. Greenberg has taken his rightful place in the cosmos and we can choose to navigate by his light, or not.

It now seems possible to draw a line from Carrie Moyer's lesbian activism to her formidable shape-making, and think it only natural. Moyer, who was made a Guggenheim fellow this year, co-founded Dyke Action Machine! in the early '90s and designed the group's agitprop. Her painted images have long combined elements from political posters, Tantra drawings, and a vocabulary of abstraction derived from Morris Louis. The last of these influences has come to predominate her work in recent years, as she keeps experimenting with painting techniques. While plenty of splatters remain on her canvases in the state in which they landed there, Moyer seems to have enlarged certain incidents of gravity and viscosity until they form flat, opaque arcs with the graphic fortitude of industrial signage. For added visual heft, she paints in subtle shadows around the edges of some of these shapes. The total effect is both delicate and arresting.

Carolanna Parlato, Coronal Loop, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 47 x 51 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Asya Geisberg Gallery.

The "pour," as presented by Condon and Prusa, takes one of two forms. The first is the revealing pour, the one with which we're familiar from Jackson Pollock – paint as the manifestation of itself, the literal trail of evidence made by the action of colored liquid on a support. There is a distinctive grid, irregular and rounded, that appears when you tilt a canvas with a dripping swath of paint on it along one axis and then across it. This drip-grid appears in work by both Jackie Saccocio and Carolanna Parlato. Saccoccio, working handsomely in a vein first opened by Jules Olitski, is emptying out otherwise busy abstractions with a high-value, neutral color poured generously into the center. She uses the drip-grid to integrate the figure and the ground, by breaking up this central shape at the edge and allowing the more saturated colors there to show through. Parlato, in contrast, uses the drip-grid as a design element. In *Drizzle* (2009), areas of viridian, fuschia, and scarlet have been given the same treatment, one layer after the next, and she tops them off with a lemon-over-green coat that is itself allowed to drip, locking in a diagonal that composes the canvas. Angelina Gualdoni used an analogous technique to create *Opening the Gates* (2011), but the paint was tilted every which way, and she dosed the broad, black pathways thus formed with chalky violet while they were still wet. The interpenetration of the two colors results in luminosity.

The other form taken is the hiding pour, in which the force of the falling paint removes evidence of the human hand from the application, leaving the viewer to wonder how the shapes got there. David Reed's *No. 611*(2010) is painted in oil and alkyd on polyester, using dripping, squeegeeing, and masking of translucent paint on the slick surface, producing an abstract calligraphy of blue across an elongated six-foot rectangle. Carrie Yamaoka's works on reflective mylar, coated with colored gloss that has been allowed to pool across the supports' bending surface, are so limpid and so devoid of evidence of their manufacture that they may as well have come from outer space. Roland Flexner's moody, diminutive landscapes of liquid graphite form from controlled accidents of surface tension on paper. Their appearance is a wondrous collision of an abstract contact print with a Sung Dynasty forest scene. Ingrid Calame's Pop-bright whirls and scrapes of enamel on aluminum may look improvised, but in fact are the product of meticulous tracing in the urban environment.

Later in *My Name is Asher Lev*, Asher and Jacob conclude a satisfying day of painting with a walk on the beach. Gazing at the sea, Jacob remarks, "Sometimes I think all water is blood. It is a strange feeling." No more about it is said. Among painters, no more would need to be said. But I might elaborate this way: liquidity is vitality. The artists of *POUR* have made this beautifully clear.

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