

HOLLIS TAGGART

**HIGHLIGHT:**  
C H E L S E A

OCTOBER 2018



# HIGHLIGHT: CHELSEA

CURATED BY PAUL EFSTATHIOU

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WILLIAM BUCHINA  
ELIZABETH COOPER  
CORYDON COWANSAGE  
MARCEL DZAMA  
BRENDA GOODMAN  
ANDRÉ HEMER  
HIROYA KURATA  
JOHN KNUTH  
MATT MIGNANELLI  
MATT PHILLIPS  
ESTHER RUIZ  
ERIC SHAW  
DEVIN TROY STROTHER

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OCTOBER 6 TO OCTOBER 27, 2018

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## HOLLIS TAGGART

521 W 26th Street 1st Floor New York, NY 10001

For me, one of the most gratifying experiences about being an art dealer is encountering new artists, whether they be past painters and sculptors unknown to me previously or contemporary artists working currently in their studios. As I stated in the last Highlight presentation, what was once contemporary eventually becomes historic. Thus it is of paramount importance to keep “looking” with an open mind. In the *new*, one of course can often find threads of the continuum of what preceded it, but the *new* can also reveal magical transformations and breakthroughs to something not seen before. We must resist seeing with a jaded eye in order to discover insights about life in the present, oftentimes capturing the moments that go on to define a generation.

Organizing this show once again is Paul Efstathiou, a curator who most definitely responds to the pulse of today’s artworld. He has an amazing gift to understand the diversity of expression of artists and he possesses an innate ability to recognize talent with potential for longevity. We are pleased to repeat our collaboration with Paul and thank him for his herculean efforts in exposing us all to some amazing artists working today.

A particular thank you also goes to Kara Spellman, who like Paul, has a strong understanding of prevalent trends and is indefatigable in her organizational and research skills. She was instrumental in many aspects of this project.

These thirteen voices that are speaking to us in this exhibition compose a wide range of styles, approach to materials, and individuality. At varying stages in their careers, the artists reveal what comprises the creativity and energy of painting and sculpture of the 21st century.

Hollis C. Taggart



The thirteen artists assembled in this exhibition work in a wide range of styles, but are united by an energetic approach that translates to the gallery walls. Their divergent practices reflect a genuine excitement that I find defines this contemporary moment. Though the works here are visually dissimilar, recurring themes do run through the assembled group. Many of these artists work with high-key saturated color, often applying it unmixed and in broad areas. A thread of surrealism weaves through the works via the use of perspective and juxtaposition that feels wholly contemporary. And lastly these artists share a commitment to abstraction, even when working with the figure or other elements of the recognizable world.

With this second collaboration between Highlight Curated and Hollis Taggart Galleries I hope to explore how many of these artists have grown and evolved, building upon the work we saw two years ago to push the boundaries of their own practice. I've also brought in some new talent, artists whose voracious approach to the work matched my own. It is this feeling of momentum that draws me to these artists; their energy and creativity cannot be bound by the walls of the studio. This group formed organically through studio visits and conversations I made and had over the past year, and in bringing them together this show highlights that unmistakable quality of good work that supersedes boundaries of subject and medium.

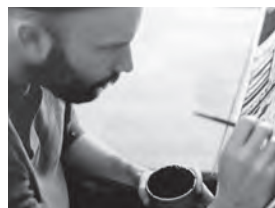
Several of the artists gathered here possess the surrealist's eye for transforming the quotidian into the incredible. Marcel Dzama works with the absurdist glee of Dada, while Hiroya Kurata and Brenda Goodman mold landscape and the body into transfixing near-abstractions. Corydon Cowansage pushes further, nearly leaving her referents behind in strange geometric compositions, but at last retains a connection to the observed world. Others here use their practice to speak to issues of the environment, society, and race in our current moment. John Knuth's distorted landscapes implicate the viewer in the changing environment, while William Buchina uses the imagery of our own history to explore feelings of isolation and unease, and Devin Troy Strother co-opts the language of art history and contemporary slang to speak to issues of race and the historical canon.

Technology is integral to the lives of young artists, and André Hemer and Eric Shaw have embraced the fluidity between the digital and physical worlds in their practice. Each has a unique process that moves between the two, resulting in arresting physical objects, flat and bold in Shaw's case and textural and expressive in Hemer's. Esther Ruiz plays with the relationship between technology and the natural world in neon and plexiglass, smartly juxtaposed with cement and stone. Yet even in this new century, the seduction of pure color abstraction still holds sway. Matt Mignanelli sets gestural abstraction against precision geometry in gorgeous blue tones, while Elizabeth Cooper's expressionist explosions recall the freedom of abstract expressionism. Meanwhile, Matt Phillips creates lyrical, muted abstractions whose sweeping layered forms have a geometry all their own.

This show has been a labor of love borne out of the genuine excitement and real respect that I feel for these artists. It has also very much been a team effort between all of us, and I would like to thank each of the artists for embarking on this adventure with me. The inimitable Hollis Taggart has my deep gratitude for taking on this show in his fall program. My thanks go to his entire staff, and especially to Kara Spellman for being my unflappable point of contact. This catalogue would not have been possible without expert design from Adam Mignanelli, keen editing from Ashley Park, and the unerring advice of Matt Mignanelli and William Buchina. It has been an honor to bring this exhibition together and I am extremely excited to present it to the world.

Paul Efstathiou

# WILLIAM BUCHINA



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**The scenes depicted in your works harkens back to an earlier time, but an ambiguous era. Do you reference specific source material when creating these pieces?**

I would say that a large amount, though not all of the source material I use ranges from the 1930's to the late 1970's. In my late teens and twenties, I was very drawn to the visual drama of propaganda art and social realism, which came from being handed down books about the years leading up to and during the second world war from my father. My interest in the politics and accompanying aesthetics of the next several decades, basically leading up to my birth year, 1978, has led me to again and again go back to imagery from this era, literally before my time. I think it amounts to a sort of fascination with a time and place that preceded my own personal memories and experiences, and about which I have always had an intense interest in.

**Your style has been called illustrative due to the black lines that define the elements of each painting, as well as your often used compartmentalization of scenes. Do you feel the term "illustration" is a valid or accurate term to describe your work?**

I don't believe my work is "illustration" because to me that term has a specific meaning which I don't think fits in my case. I see why people say it of course, based mostly on the style of the work, but an illustration must accompany a text, a process, a concept, something... if it stands alone, then what is it illustrating? My paintings and drawings depict scenes of my own creation that do not correspond to something outside of them, so by definition are not illustrations. I am

attempting in my paintings to set up a story, but not quite tell the story. With that being said, I don't think there is a hard line between "art" and "illustration" because any work of art can be used as an illustration, even if it wasn't the work's original purpose, and likewise any illustration, if removed from the context in which it was created, can be considered "fine" art.

**There is vein of bizarre, unnatural and perhaps ominous imagery which flows through your work. There is of course a long and notable history of artists who have sought to create unsettling themes, and each have had their reasons for doing so, whether known or otherwise. How can you explain this subject matter that dominates your work?**

I try to look at the actions, gestures and productions of people and strip away the context and history, to see it as what it is and not what it means. It's pretty much impossible to truly remove the filters through which we see and do everything, but I am trying, at least in my works. I want to point out the inherent absurdity in the mundane which we don't find because we are so familiar with it culturally and historically. If you found yourself in a culture that you've never experienced, whether first hand or through media, you would have the chance to be confused by certain gestures, ceremonies, rituals, outfits, objects and so on. What I am trying to do with my works is to present these known things in a way that they can be looked at again, and maybe puzzled over and wondered about. In an attempt to achieve this, sometimes I depict subjects as they are and sometimes I make additions, subtractions or other alterations to remove the implied meaning or purpose, or to insert a new one.



**WILLIAM BUCHINA (B. 1978)**

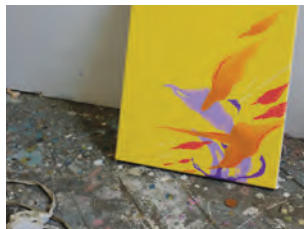
*Common Structures, Simple Mechanics & Varying Degrees of Affection #16, 2018*

Acrylic on canvas

54 x 54 inches



# ELIZABETH COOPER



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**In the exhibition “New York Painting” at The Kunstmuseum Bonn you exhibited works that were chromatically charged. Bright colors were employed in an abstract landscape format, creating a new environment. The color blue is empowering and refreshing -- how did you arrive at the decision to use it as a background?**

I think of blue in my work as a substitute for the sky. Even though my paintings are abstract they pull from life. I bring in elements from the environment and landscape to create a fictional place. The blue is a stand in for the perfect day. One where anything can take place. The events punctuating the sky are painterly but they mimic familiar situations. Bright colors clash and battle for top billing. There is a mashup of abstract expressionism, formalism, pop art and landscape ultimately creating a new space for the viewer to engage with.

**Movement plays a pivotal role in your works through the use of organic shapes gyrating upon a colored field. What do these passages represent?**

The shapes coalesce into fleeting images often mimicking an imaginary landscape. Paint is allowed to drip and pool. The

movement in the work is often dictated by the organic nature of paint itself. The paint mimics properties in nature, often flowing to resemble a plume of smoke or simply a burst of energy. Clouds, waves, even outer space emerge from the paint. Classic cartoon markings signifying movement are used to add humor and action. The monochromatic backgrounds offer a functional space for the foreground shapes to play, where the process of the pours can become fused into the larger composition and explode out into the foreground.

**When making these works emotion seems ever-present, what reaction are you looking to impart upon the viewer?**

The viewer is invited to enter the imaginary abstract landscape. The shapes draw the eye around the picture plane, leading to a newly invented space in which to momentarily dwell. The work is energetic and humorous so I hope people pick up on that. The clear candy pop colors can inspire positive upbeat feelings. Darker pieces may be more mysterious and slow. I like to think of the work as very open, allowing the viewer to enter the space and follow the action taking place on canvas, potentially losing themselves in the painted moment.



**ELIZABETH COOPER (B. 1972)**

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*Untitled, 2016*

Oil and enamel on canvas  
48 x 48 inches

# CORYDON COWANSAGE



**When viewing works from the Hole series, there is both a tantalizing hypnosis and a mysterious quality based in the unknown. What inspired this body of work?**

I usually get ideas for paintings from spaces or situations that I notice in my daily life. I make quick drawings and write myself notes to keep track of ideas, or sometimes I draw in Photoshop or SketchUp. Each painting that I make connects to the next one, and they all build off of each other.

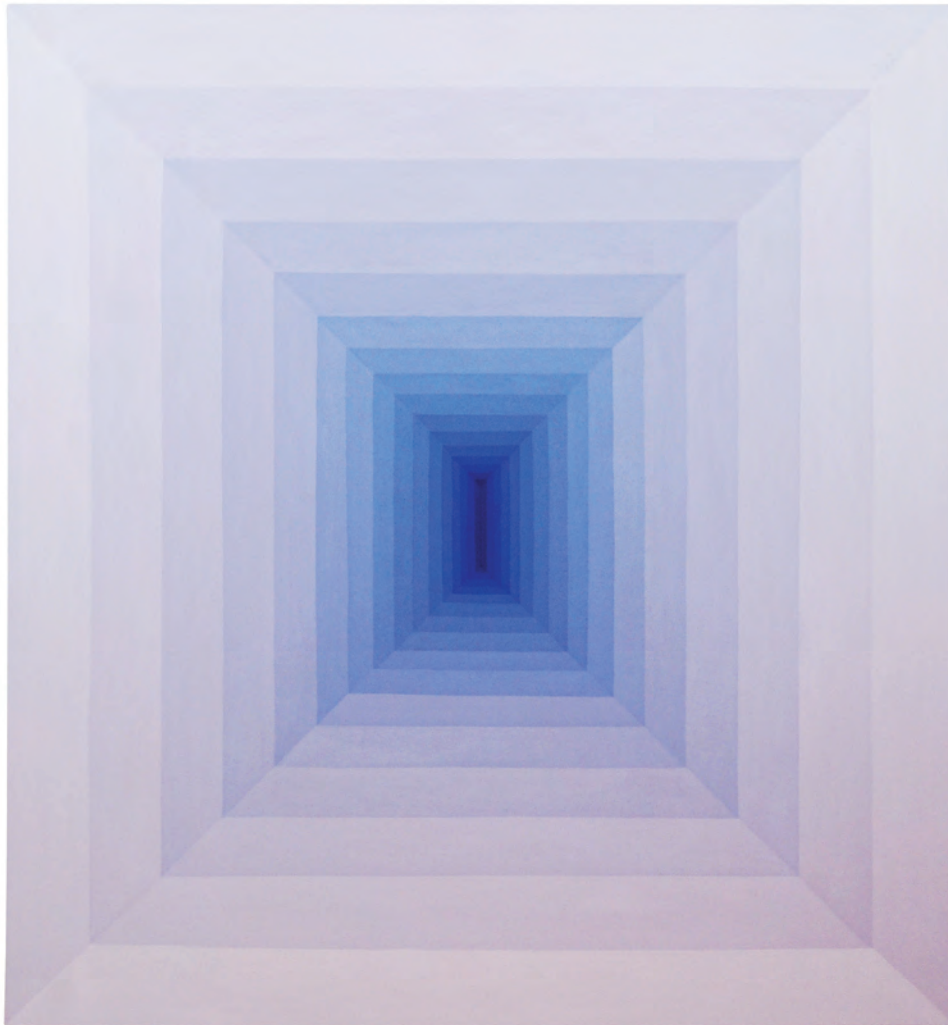
The hole paintings reference architectural spaces, the body, and art history, among other things. For these paintings, I'm interested in making the canvas have an intense sense of illusionistic depth, but I also want them to potentially read as repeating, rhythmic, flat geometric patterns. I like that my paintings can be understood in different ways and that there are perceptual shifts as you look at them.

**We see you alternating between subtle pastel gradations and bold electric color combinations in the paintings. What role does color play in your exploration?**

I love playing with color relationships. I use color to create strange or uncanny optical moments and to get the viewers' eyes moving around so they stay with the painting for a while. Lately I've used really vivid, intense colors in my work, which further removes the paintings from their references in the real world. I usually do a lot of little color tests on paper and make preparatory color studies before making a painting.

**Light, shadow, and repetition all interact seamlessly in each work. How do you characterize the synergy between each element within the paintings?**

In a lot of my paintings I use repeating forms that I've noticed in the built environment or landscape to make meditative patterns. By manipulating light, shadow, and color, I try to make banal moments feel strange and unfamiliar, or slightly perverse or suggestive, and to disorient the viewer. I use naturalistic lighting to help create spatial illusions, which is one of the qualities that makes the paintings fluctuate between representation and abstraction.



**CORYDON COWANSAGE (B. 1981)**

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*HOLE #47, 2018*

Acrylic on canvas

50 x 46 inches



## MARCEL DZAMA



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**Have the rituals of ancient civilizations influenced your work, or are the depicted scenes based solely on mythology and fiction?**

I may have to draw a few scenes of made up rituals but mainly it is the mythology of ancient civilizations like the Native Americans, West African stories, Hermes in Greece mainly ...the Trickster mythology interested me. There is a great book written by Lewis Hyde called Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art, but most of my work is based on fiction.

**Performance has played such a pivotal role in your works on paper. The collaboration with the New York City Ballet at Lincoln Center seemed like such a natural marriage of ideas. How has the experience of creating a fully immersive performance influenced you, and has that experience translated back into the works on paper?**

Before I was asked to design costumes and sets for the New York City ballet I was obsessed with ballet, always buying old magazines and books about it trying to research it. Working on that ballet was a real dream project. I'm so glad I was able to work with such amazing talents. The choreographer Justin Peck was so inspiring and so creative it made it even more exciting to work on. Now I understand movement so

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much more, also working on a larger scale is much easier to me now, because of the challenge of painting the backdrops and curtains. I definitely want to collaborate again on another ballet. I have a few ideas that Justin and I have been playing with, so perhaps sometime in the near future.

**I notice a wide range of influence from mythological beings to modern day fighters in your works, which give the scenes a surreal feel. What are the inspirations for these figures?**

A lot of the figures who appear are usually from books I have read or newspaper articles or even podcast or radio shows I've heard, and their stories usually inspire the direction of a drawing, but I don't usually make it very straightforward. I just have it loosely influence the drawing and have those characters represent some loose statement in my mind. So it can still be up for interpretation from the audience.

A lot of the mythological beings that I draw now are mainly designed to look like costumes for an opera or ballet or a low-budget movie. I usually don't actually draw a creature, I mainly draw a person dressed up as a creature. I like the idea of the mask giving the character his or her personality.





**MARCEL DZAMA (B. 1974)**

*My mother, my father, my sister, my killer, my lover, my savior, and other faces I once knew, 2014*

Watercolor, gouache, and graphite on paper in two (2) parts

17 x 28 inches

# BRENDA GOODMAN



**Throughout your career you have transcended boundaries by moving seamlessly back and forth between figuration and abstraction. Could you speak on how that journey has unfolded for you?**

Throughout my career, my work has shifted between figuration, abstraction, and a combination of both. My most explicitly figurative work is in two series of self-portraits, one from 1992-4 and the other 2003-7. I wanted to express something very personal in these paintings and they were packed with emotion. At other times, when the issues I am exploring aren't so specifically personal, I love the freedom of working with unconscious intuitive abstraction, which feels unconstrained by any self imposed restrictions. But, ultimately, the way of working I like best, and which has sustained me the most, is a combination of these two approaches, in which shapes that can evoke figuration as well as abstraction emerge naturally and intuitively from mark making. This way of working satisfies both the personal and more formal aspects of what I want and need to express.

**Self-portraiture has been a cornerstone of your painting for decades. Do you view these latest works as an evolution of the portrait or something new altogether?**

My earlier self-portraits were just that, in that I was working with very specific feelings within myself that I wanted to expose and express in my paintings. My newer work is more abstract in their formation and intent. Rather than painting explicit images of my body, figurative elements emerge from the paint through an intuitive process of drawing out shapes. I don't usually see these figures as self-portraits, although

I think everything an artist paints is a reflection of his/her inner self and would therefore have aspects of self-portrayal. In the new work, when figurative elements emerge, I see the meaning of the figures in a more complex way, which goes far beyond myself and my personal issues.

**As a painter you're working with some unconventional materials, such as ash from the wood stove mixed into paint, doors as painting surface, and ice picks for scoring surfaces among others. How has your choice of materials informed the work, and what discoveries have revealed themselves through this experimentation?**

Throughout my 50 years of painting, my passion has always been oil paint (and only oil paint) and experimenting with different tools and materials. When I paint thick I use ash from our wood stove or pumice to thicken the paint. I use a wide range of tools from q-tips, squeegees, cake decorators filled with oil paint (not frosting), foam rollers and many other tools. In the newest work, the paint is very thin and built in thin glazes. For many years I have done 6x8 inch pieces on heavy paper where I would use a stylus to scratch into the surface until it was full of marks then intuitively I would begin pulling out shapes until slowly a little painting would emerge. I looked at them not to long ago and said to myself "why don't you do these bigger on wood?" I bought a linoleum cutter and started cutting into the surface and that was the beginning of a new and exciting technique that has taken me to new and exciting places in my work that I am still discovering and enjoying immensely.



**BRENDA GOODMAN (B. 1943)**

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*Siblings, 2017*

Oil on wood  
50 x 72 inches (diptych)



# ANDRÉ HEMER



**The unique energy that New York offers has had profound influence on artists throughout history. In what ways did the city influence the works and your studio practice during your residency at the ISCP?**

I think that the beauty of New York is in its complexity—it's this crazy amalgamation of people and ideas that isn't just one thing or another. So in art terms that's really interesting—it's the idea that anything goes. So in a way it's an extremely liberating place to be an artist—a place where there's not just one contemporary line of practice that you have to fit alongside. I've been fortunate to live and make work in many different places but there's nowhere like New York in terms of being unbound to make the work that you want to make. New York can completely wear you out to the point of breaking you, but it also has the capacity to give you back that energy twofold in a completely different way.

**Your work has a very individual aesthetic, embracing both texture and transformation. How does each work develop from concept to completion?**

What's important in my practice is the idea that everything in the painting begins as a physical object in the studio, and not something that originates in digital form. I begin by 'sculpting' objects made entirely out of paint. These objects are then scanned with a digital flatbed scanner with its lid removed. This creates a digital image whereby the light from sky above and the LED light from the scanner both serve to illuminate the objects—creating depth and colors that are affected by these conflicting light sources. These images then get printed onto canvas which form the background to the paintings—on top of which layers of transparent paint are applied via

airbrush and gestural techniques. The paint becomes more opaque and thick until the original sculpted-paint objects are attached to the paintings—appearing as these strange painterly extrusions from flat areas of the work. So essentially there are all these transformations and transactions between image and material—in every painting there is both this flat digital capturing of three-dimensional paint, and also actual physical areas of the same paint. Technology is something that is simply used as tool for transacting from materialised to de-materialised form, and back again.

Ultimately what I am after is to create a painting that is a complete amalgamation of all these different processes and materialities—and to create something that transcends both the cliché of what a 'digital' process be, and a traditional painting. Essentially using the media of our time to create something new.

**Throughout the past year you have exhibited works in Sydney, Singapore, Los Angeles, and London. Have travel and new experiences influenced the latest works?**

The current process in my paintings comes from a residency that I undertook a few years ago at a foundation in Italy when I was trying to find a way of making 'en plein air' drawings and paintings on the move, but with a practice that always has this digital element. So I began to do these digital scans of painted objects under the midday sun in Tuscany—essentially taking a slow photograph of paint against the backdrop of the Italian sky. Basically these were my answer to the tradition of Tuscan landscape painting! What's great about this process is that in each place there are aspects of the light and colour of the sky that manifest differently in the images.



**ANDRÉ HEMER (B. 1981)**

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*Sky Painting #6, 2018*

Acrylic and pigment on canvas

47 x 33 inches

## HIROYA KURATA



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**When looking at your works the viewer is transported to a world full of playfulness and nostalgia. Are you drawing inspiration directly from past experiences when making these paintings?**

Most of my works are made up scenes inspired by random landscape photos, old monochrome photos, and memories. I tend to find these photos on the web and save them in a folder. I flip through these references later and find an image that inspires me and do a sketch or two. These drawings tend to have a sense of nostalgia, which probably is where my interest lies.

**Baseball has been a recurring subject in your works for years. Japan and the United States both have storied histories and a deep love of the game. Was baseball a pivotal piece of your childhood experience of bridging two cultures as you were growing up between both countries?**

Baseball has been a recurring theme for me since I started painting in the early 2000s. It took me a while to search for the reason for this. I did play baseball in my youth in the U.S and in Japan and I started playing baseball again this summer. What I've noticed is that I'm not too interested in the history, or the pro league or the cultural differences between the east and the west. It has more to do with my personal childhood memories.

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It makes me excited when I think about playing baseball. It still brings me back to the smell of summer, the texture of grass and all kinds of things. So I'm using the theme as a metaphor, a metaphor for liberty.

**The technique with which you're applying paint is very unique: you combine visible brushstrokes and softly blended forms to create worlds all your own. How did you begin painting in this way, and how has it evolved?**

The biggest influence on me as a painter has been my day job as an art conservator. I feel lucky to be working in an environment where I can see and touch multiple types of paintings. We conserve all kinds of work that is considered 'painting,' and since I started working as a conservator in 2008 much of the work we've seen is American art from the 50s-80s. I feel that these works have slowly got into me and made me more interested in different styles. Nowadays, the art world seems to depend more on tools like Instagram where only limited information (like compositions and colors) can be delivered, but essences like textures and brushstrokes are harder to convey unless you see the actual work. I have always been a representational painter so I'm trying to add more essences to make the work I like.





**HIROYA KURATA (B. 1980)**

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*Fence, 2018*

Oil on canvas  
39 x 44 inches

# JOHN KNUTH



**Your work brings forth a stark divisions between the constructed and natural worlds. What role has nature played in your work and how does that inform your direction?**

I am trying to be the landscape painter of the 21st century. What I mean by this is our world is changing and we are changing it. I'm painting those changes. I have made paintings with smoke flares in the middle of the Mojave Desert, staged performance photos in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. I had snakes slither around the floor of the gallery, had a naked man hold a snake like a classical sculpture during an opening. That is all to say that in some way all of my work has to do with the environment. I am always thinking about man in the environment. That can be singular man or the mankind in a global sense.

**The fly works were a very unique and original approach to painting. How did you come to work with flies, and how did you discover that they would create marks on the canvas?**

In 2002, during the lead up to the second Iraq war, there was all this talk about biological warfare and I had an idea to make my own biological warfare air force. I glued tiny paper airplanes to hairs and then put the hairs around the necks of the flies. The flies would fly around towing with the paper airplanes. I had hundreds of flies and I noticed the flyspecks. Flyspeck is fly regurgitation. I saw that I could use that to make paintings.

The fly paintings are a metaphor for LA or I guess any megalopolis. You pack a bunch of nonsocial insects into a tight space and something magical happens. I don't think Eastern cities have this as much but the compositions for the fly paintings are like flying into LAX or the Mexico City Airport at night and seeing the infinite sprawl of humanity spread out across the horizon. As a younger artist I was interested in reiterating the nastiness of the world. As an older artist I am interested in transcending the nastiness of the world.

**The new distorted landscape works have a uniquely Los Angeles feel to them. As you traverse the city on its freeways you're constantly humbled by the mountainous vistas. What is the role of the reflective mylar in these works?**

The Distorted Landscapes are the landscapes of the future. It is important to me that the viewer sees themselves reflected in the painting. The landscape changes as they move around the painting. The person changes the composition as a person changes the landscape. I drive a lot. I drive the 210 freeway, which that runs the length of the San Gabriel and San Bernadino Mountain ranges, end to end a couple times a week. I like seeing how the silhouettes of the mountains change as I drive 80 miles per hour past them. Driving is idea time. Moving forward at high speed gives you better ideas.





**JOHN KNUTH (B. 1978)**

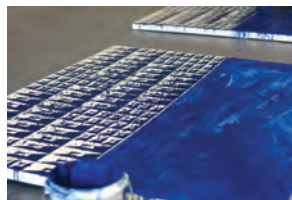
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*Distorted Landscape - Hudson River School, 2018*

Mylar, staples, and acrylic on canvas

32 x 62 inches

## MATT MIGNANELLI



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**Your latest work seems much more influenced by the time you spent at the beach after your daughter was born. It feels like the sea is slowly overtaking the canvas. I was thinking about how much you love Pollock and how he spent a lot of time in the Hamptons, and how it influenced his work. What is going on in your thought process?**

The work certainly did push forward after that summer, it was then I began making the blue works. We spent the majority of that August on Martha's Vineyard surrounded by the ocean. Early mornings were routine, when dawn is just barely breaking through. The blues that reveal themselves at that hour are deep and vibrant, imparting a calmness before the world wakes up. That inspiration at first was just translated in color as the palette shifted to a vibrant navy blue on white, and again as the works were split in half paired with solid blue fields.

The latest works have now taken those fields and built upon those memories and my current experiences as we've continued to return as a family to the beach each summer. As the solid color fields represented a certain serenity, the wash fields bring a new freedom, emotion, and depth to the paintings. These fields also represent an inspirational duality in the work, of both the ocean and dawn light. I want the new paintings to speak to life, an attempt at order amidst the chaos.

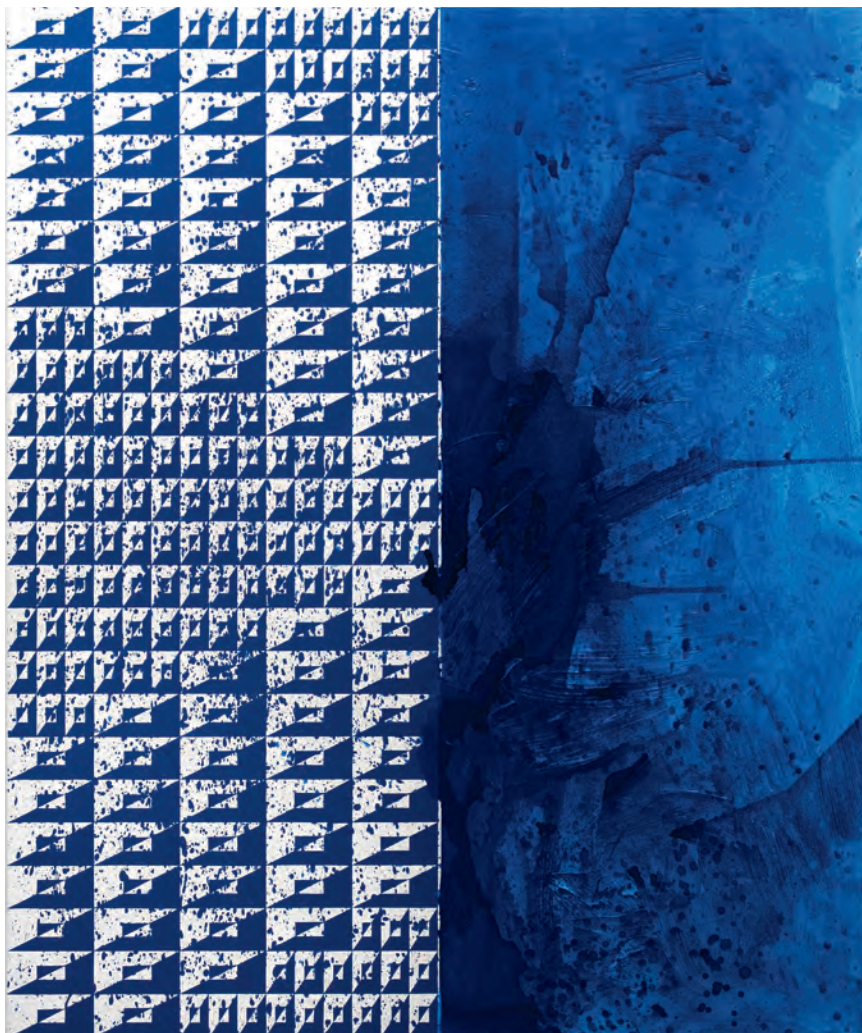
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**Do you feel the split between the two sides of the paintings are city life on one side and beach life on the other, or man made things versus nature, or are you finding a duality within yourself?**

My work has always comprised of nature versus structure, and the way light and shadow interact with architecture. I began splitting the works in order to give myself space within the picture to visually rest, a space of tranquility and solace, a space to be absorbed into, to get lost in. I see the split much more as two parts balancing each other than as a division.

**Your work has evolved significantly over the past few years. What new directions do you foresee moving forward?**

I feel that I have quite a lot to explore with the wash fields, so am looking forward continuing in that direction. I've been learning so much making these paintings as it's a completely new type of paint handling for me. As the washes build up and the paint flows and splashes, many times it yields surprising yet exciting results. Through the use of a large brush attached to a painter's pole I'm able to incorporate sweeping gestures and new types of mark making. I'm watching to see what will reveal itself next.



**MATT MIGNANELLI (B. 1983)**

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*August Tides, 2018*

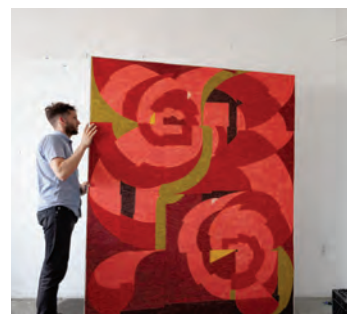
Enamel and acrylic on canvas

72 x 60 inches





## MATT PHILLIPS




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### **Your paintings have a unique surface, how did you arrive at the decision to use pigment on linen?**

For many years I worked strictly with oil paint. About five years ago I started experimenting with making my own paint by dispersing raw pigment into a silica binder. I quickly found that this material added an unexpected layer of visual information to my work. It also allowed me to use very thin layers of paint which help create a luminosity within my paintings. I like the open and irregular weave of linen. It holds the image a little closer.

**There is a rich history in artist's teaching, from Josef Albers at Black Mountain College to Joseph Beuys at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. How has your experience of teaching at FIT influenced your works?**

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Teaching, in many ways, is like painting—it gets more mysterious, challenging, and rewarding the longer you do it. I feel very lucky to get to work with students and watch them achieve things that they thought were beyond their ability. That's a great experience to bring back to my own studio.

### **There is a tenuous equilibrium between rigidity and fluid motion in your paintings. How do you balance these two forces within the works?**

I like this tension and generally feel most excited when there are forces that seem to be at odds within a painting—the rational and the spontaneous; fast decisions that take a long time to actually physically execute; abstract images that teeter on the edge of nameable forms. Contradiction fuels my painting, often the more irreconcilable the better.



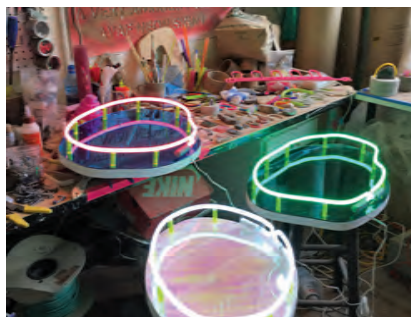
**MATT PHILLIPS (B. 1979)**

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*Untitled, 2017*

Pigment and silica on linen  
30 x 24 inches

## ESTHER RUIZ



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**It's been interesting to watch the works evolve from your signature neon arches in concrete, to the new neon and reflective plexiglass wall works. How has your approach to the act of making changed from the earlier works?**

I thought of the earlier works as tokens from fictional landscapes, their forms taken from studying core samples and the tops acting as horizon lines. The more recent series of wall works I refer to as wormholes or portals into these invented worlds. By showing a warped reflection of the viewers and their surroundings, the Wells, placed above eye level, prompt one to look beyond or through their current place.

**There is a wonderful organic feel to the new works as the neon wobbles around the edge, a surprise within the medium as our eye is accustomed to rigidity in neon signage and other daily applications. What led to your choice to allow that to enter the works and break away from your earlier arch pieces?**

It's funny you say that because I worked in a commercial neon studio in New York for several years. The wall pieces were, I

think, a direct result of seeing so many neon signs and art that I wanted to put my mark on, like the tube supports, wiring and hidden transformer. Their simplicity is derived from a desire to not make a traditional neon sign or art piece.

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**In your current exhibition on view at the Schneider Museum of Art, you are also exhibiting works that incorporate found objects of the natural world, such as stones and minerals. I know these materials have entered your work over the past couple of years. Could you explain what the connection between the man-made and natural world means to you and what you're speaking on in these works?**

I've always admired and collected rocks, but I fell in love with geology after taking a course in college. I love how stones tell stories; they describe time visually. That blows my mind. Juxtaposing an element that took hundreds of years to make with a piece of plastic that took minutes visualizes the vast and intangible idiosyncrasies of time.



**ESTHER RUIZ (B. 1986)**

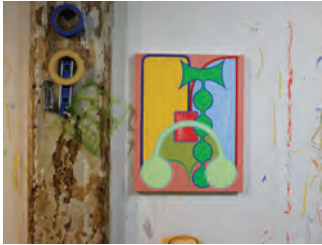
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*Well XIII, 2017*

Neon, plexiglass, MDF, paint, and hardware  
24 x 18 x 3 inches



## ERIC SHAW



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**When viewing your paintings I feel a strong relationship to the digital world, does technology play a role in your process?**

The inspiration comes from the assimilation of common elements which are typical for commercial design and road signs and which are further developed and transported into digital sketches, which in turn gradually become more and more distant from their relation to reality.

**Your works are comprised of a very original color palette, how do you arrive at the color choices while maintaining unity within the work?**

It starts as a choice of two colors. One color for the line and another contrasting color for filling in the particular shape.

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Once there's enough paint on the canvas I start to think about the relationship of the colors and shapes surrounding the first form. Towards the end of the painting I will consider the colors as a whole and try to work in a sort of connection, looking for color relationships that weave in and out across the landscape.

**Through the layering of shape and form, you are thrusting the viewer into an all encompassing environment. What experience do you strive to impart on the viewer?**

I'd like the viewer to gain a sense of familiarity with an abstract language; I've always been fascinated by that.





**ERIC SHAW (B. 1983)**

*Untitled, 2018*

Acrylic on canvas  
40 x 48 inches

# DEVIN TROY STROTHER



**Using sharp wit and humor to speak on serious issues or juxtaposing art historical figures and contemporary slang, the titles of your pieces seem to be an important dimension of the work. How do you approach titling the pieces?**

The titles and the way the piece and title come together all come from different places. I don't necessarily have a method or a process. Sometimes, the titles come to me before the piece is even made. Other times a title comes to me while I'm making the piece, or I'll overhear something and that could start the ball rolling in my head. I feel that there are three ways I can converse with the viewer: the press release, the title sheet, and the actual piece itself. All these are opportunities you have to speak with the viewer; I want to take advantage of them as much as possible.

I've always described the paintings and titles in my work as a two-part joke. The painting acts as the setup of the joke and the title is the punchline, or vice versa depending on how you navigate through the gallery. But usually you see the painting and then you see the title, and it all clicks.

**Collage and assemblage are both crucial aspects of your practice and bring a beautiful tactility to the works. How did you arrive at that technique?**

I initially arrived at collage because I was really bad at painting in college. For a long time, I called my collages "paintings." One, because I felt the pictorial language and the image itself were all trying to act as a traditional painting, when in fact they

weren't. The collages acted as signage for what paintings looked like in reproduction; you couldn't really tell what was what so I thought I would embrace that and fuck with the viewer's established idea of what constitutes a painting and what makes something collage or assemblage. Also, there's a long history of African-American artists using collage and assemblage as a central medium; I think this speaks to African-Americans' jumbled beginnings in this country. Pulled from one place, and stuck onto another. Forced systems of work and hate have been implanted into us, so to cut out and reassemble pieces seems to harken to our past, and form a sort of coping method or form of therapy. Our past shapes what we produce visually.

**Your works have brought a fresh and unique voice to the conversation around the African-American experience in contemporary art. What do you hope the viewer takes away from the work?**

What I hope for and what the viewer takes away are two different things. I neither need nor want to control the latter. If anything, I hope that I'm adding to a dialogue amongst artists, and also that I'm having a dialogue with people who are not artists. I hope to be able to have a more extensive conversation that tries to normalize conversations about race, by trying to disarm it while at the same time using a very charged signage that embraces and shocks. I think in that sliver of space an interesting discourse could happen.





# ARTIST SUMMARIES

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## William Buchina

William Buchina brings together objects, figures, rituals, and spectacles, using de-contextualized found images to build suggestive compositions. Adopting the visual language of comic book illustration and flat color reminiscent of silkscreen, his figures each seem to inhabit their own universe within the wider fever dream of the composition. The multiple charged elements of each work never coalesce into one clear narrative, operating instead at the level of the surreal. Images hover on the cusp on meaning but instead of resolution offer a kind of continuous connotative hum. Buchina's works invite careful study but offer no resolution, remaining enigmatic at every turn. William Buchina graduated from Pratt University and currently lives and works in Brooklyn.

## Elizabeth Cooper

Elizabeth Cooper pours, splashes, and splatters paint onto monochromatic fields, proving the continued vitality of gestural abstraction in the contemporary moment. Her slick, hothouse colors jump off of the canvas, drawing the viewer into her lush paintings. She has not left representation behind, however. Her blue backgrounds recall the hazy blue of a summer sky, rendering the foregrounded passages a kind of ecstatic landscape. Elizabeth Cooper received her BFA from Cooper Union and her MFA from Columbia University. She received The Pollock Krasner Award in 2010 and the George Hitchcock Prize from the National Academy Museum in 2008. She has completed residencies at The Marie Walsh Sharpe Foundation, the Lerman Trust, and MoMA PS1. Cooper has had solo exhibitions in London, Cologne, Basel, and New York City, and currently lives and works in New York City.

## Corydon Cowansage

Corydon Cowansage uses banal forms to create surreal compositions that play with light, color, and the viewer's perceptions. Her seemingly abstract paintings have their roots in the beauty of small everyday delights of the observed world, from architectural details to bodily forms. These referents are transformed through vibrant, hard-edge color and geometric pattern in lush canvases that reveal painterly handling upon close examination. Cowansage also plays with scale, often creating an uncanny, embodied experience for the viewer through the use of large canvases shown off the wall and other tricks of perspective. Corydon Cowansage received an MFA from RISD and a BA from Vassar College. She has participated in residencies at the Bronx Museum of the Arts and the Yale Norfolk School of Art. Her paintings have been exhibited most recently at Miller Gallery in New York, Deli Projects in Basel, The Bronx Museum of the Arts in New York, James Graham & Sons in New York, and Regina Rex in Brooklyn. In 2013 she was awarded the W.K. Rose Fellowship from Vassar College. She lives and works in New York.

## Marcel Dzama

Marcel Dzama draws upon the playfulness of Dada and the intelligent spirit of Marcel Duchamp to create a visual language whose surreal juxtapositions are immediately recognizable. A prolific artist, his oeuvre includes drawings, paintings, sculpture, film, and more. His work often incorporates the imagery of performance, from masks and costumes to circus and commedia dell'arte figures. In 2016 Dzama's creations came to life in an acclaimed collaboration with the New York City Ballet, for which he designed the stage and costumed the dancers for a fanciful new work by Justin Peck. Marcel Dzama received his BFA from the University of Manitoba. He has exhibited widely, and his work can be found in public and private collections worldwide. He currently lives and works in Brooklyn.

## Brenda Goodman

Brenda Goodman plays with the boundaries between figuration and abstraction in works that bring a kind of restrained surrealism into the contemporary moment. Working with contained forms that evoke bodily associations, Goodman creates lush, painterly surfaces that intrigue and inspire. Goodman's paintings are deeply personal, as she uses her own body and past experiences as lenses through which to build the work's organic passages. The surfaces slip between pure form and suggestions of staring faces, twisted bodies, or convoluted interiors, encouraging the viewer to puzzle out their possible referents. Brenda Goodman received a BFA from the College of Creative Studies in Detroit. She has received awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the New York Foundation for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Arts, among many others, and has exhibited consistently since the mid-1970s. Goodman lives and works in Pine Hill, New York.

## André Hemer

André Hemer fuses analog and digital spaces in his practice, introducing the language of the internet into bright, painterly surfaces. His interest in sampling digital media -- including scans, found digital images or systems, and digital drawings -- is born out of a desire to synthesize the concerns of the post-internet age with more traditional methods and techniques. Despite their digital elements, Hemer's paintings have a distinct materiality and often an almost sculptural surface that reflects an intense building up of medium. André Hemer received a PhD in painting from the University of Sydney in Sydney, Australia and an MFA from the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand. He is the recipient of several prestigious awards, including the New Generation Award in 2016, and has had recent solo exhibitions in Los Angeles, Singapore, Wellington, and Sydney as well as group exhibitions worldwide. He currently lives and works in Vienna.

## Hiroya Kurata

Hiroya Kurata's dreamy landscapes are infused with a nostalgic sensibility that recalls the soft abstractions of Charles Burchfield and John Marin. Working from found images, Kurata electrifies everyday landscapes with high color and careful handling of paint to create scenes both familiar and strange. By playing with perspective and color Kurata seeks to offer new takes on the familiar, offering the viewer novel perspectives on what something one thinks is already known. Hiro Kurata grew up between Japan and the United States and earned a BFA from Parsons School of Design. He currently lives and works in New York.

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## John Knuth

John Knuth investigates the relationship between nature and civilization in works that find beauty in base materials and systems. He looks to the landscape of Los Angeles, to the magnificence of its mountain ranges and ocean shores, but also to the awesome sprawl of its built environment, and urges the viewer to consider the impact of one upon the other. Blending painting, photography, collage, and installation, Knuth's practice conjures elemental forces. He makes paintings with burning distress flares, fly regurgitation, and stretched reflective mylar, transforming his humble materials into shimmering, transfixing surfaces. The rippled topography of the Distorted Landscape series places a corrupt reflection of the viewer into the mylar landscape, fully implicating the onlooker in the artist's vision of our changing environment. John Knuth received an MFA from the University of Southern California and a BFA from the University of Minnesota. He has exhibited widely both in the US and abroad, and currently lives and works in Los Angeles.

## Matt Mignanelli

Matt Mignanelli's admirable precision of hand is brought into high contrast in his new works, which pair razor-sharp geometric abstraction with lush, painterly expressionism. The organic chaos of the expressionist passages encroaches upon the strict structure of the geometric, which is often partially obscured by drips and splashes of paint. This battle between containment and freedom speaks to the artist's own interest in process and surface. Even Mignanelli's geometric passages, which take on a machined, three-dimensional look when viewed from afar, reveal a very human hand when examined closely. Matt Mignanelli graduated from Rhode Island School of Design in 2005 and was the artist in residence at the Vermont Studio Center in 2011. He has exhibited across the United States and Europe, and currently lives and works in Brooklyn.

## Matt Phillips

Matt Phillips marries lyrical and geometric abstraction in his softly enigmatic paintings. Mixing his own pigment allows the artist to achieve a soft yet vibrant palette with paint that sinks wholly into the supporting linen, creating a unified surface in which the boundary between medium and support has become meaningless. Phillips works with pure, flat color, and yet a subtle patterning makes its way into the work via the layering of pure pigment. This creates a network of seams across the painting where pigment has been placed on top of pigment, resulting in a kind of archaeological record of the painting's making. Matt Phillips received a BFA from Boston University and has attended the New York Studio School. His work has been included in numerous exhibitions and he has lectured widely on art. He currently lives and works in Brooklyn.

## Esther Ruiz

Esther Ruiz brings together primal forms and new age materials in sculptures inspired by science fiction, pop culture, and natural phenomena. She takes objects of ancient significance -- a water well or the setting sun, for example -- and recreates them in colorful plexiglass, neon, cement and stone. Ruiz is interested in the flashy but dilapidated aesthetic of sci-fi movies of the 1980s and 90s, and in her own work marries natural elements such as cement, stone, or geodes with futuristic materials such as plexiglass and neon. The hot, bright colors of the manmade materials stand in high contrast to the cool grey tones of stone, drawing the viewer in for a closer look at the juxtaposition. Esther Ruiz received a BA from Rhodes College and has exhibited and lectured across the country. Her practice encompasses sculpture, drawing, and digital collage, and she currently lives and works in Los Angeles.

## Eric Shaw

Eric Shaw brings painting into the digital age in his bright, active canvases. Using the visual language of design, Shaw transforms this familiar idiom into something completely unique and abstract. He often works with repetitive forms and creates a kind of system within each composition, bringing to mind the vast and complex machines of the modern factory. Movement is inherent. Each work buzzes with a kinetic energy that is only heightened by Shaw's flat, saturated color. These works begin as digital sketches, which are then translated to canvas in acrylic but retain the sense of line and fill that comes from working digitally. Eric Shaw has exhibited across the United States and currently lives and works in Brooklyn.

## Devin Troy Strother

Across painting, collage, assemblage, and sculpture, Devin Troy Strother's distinctive visual vocabulary both pokes fun at and invites serious critique of issues of race and the art historical canon. Never one to shy away from the outrageous and provocative, he pushes boundaries and dares his viewers to enter his madcap narratives. The artist's careful attention to surface often results in delightful surprises, from his compositions of built-up paint to his fields of grinning faces to his sleek minimalist sculptures that have turned figurative and sport coatings of disco glitter. Strother's works pack a one-two punch, setting up expectations and gleefully subverting them. Devin Troy Strother received his B.F.A from Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California in 2009 and completed a residency at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Skowhegan, Maine in 2010. He currently lives and works in Los Angeles.



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### **Hollis Taggart**

521 West 26th Street 1st Floor  
New York, NY 10001  
Tel 212 628 4000 Fax 212 570 5786  
www.hollistaggart.com

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521 W 26th Street 1st Floor New York, NY 10001