



Idealizing the Imaginary:
Illusion and Invention in Contemporary Painting

Oakland University Art Gallery

Kevin Baker

Trudy Benson

Katherine Bernhardt

Cecily Brown

Jesse Chapman

Matt Connors

Kim Dorland

Mark Flood

Rosy Keyser

José Lerma

Dasha Shishkin

Josh Smith

Denyse Thomasos

Wendy White

Curated by Dick Goody

On front cover:

Cecily Brown

Bye Baby Bunting, 2008-2009

oil on linen

65 x 43 inches, 165.1 x 109.2 cm

© Cecily Brown; courtesy of Gagosian Gallery, New York; photograph by Robert McKeever

Idealizing the Imaginary: Illusion and Invention in Contemporary Painting

Central to the practice of the painters in this exhibition is the expansion of the imaginary as the primary source of their compositions, and, as such, their practice is rooted in invention and the mind's eye.

The resulting works are reflexive of something intrinsic to contemporary painting: creating a surface that is neither a window onto the extant nor a mirror, but rather a platform expressing the interior feelings and thoughts of each artist onto a vital exterior surface. Furthermore, the dimensional, spatial arena in which these artists work is unique to the time and locale of their painting. And to be sure, it is a charged moment when the immense proliferation of images, digital or otherwise, has expanded rapidly outward like an infinite, exploding universe. More information exists than can ever be processed. We no longer live in the information age; rather, we have entered the age of conceptuality. How these artists think and feel has become infinitely more significant to them than recounting what they have seen.

Their work does not explore the seen, the banal, the proliferation, or the explicit; rather, it pursues an ideological trajectory thriving at the intersection between consciousness and the subliminal, and this is implicit in each painting.

No specific signifiers sway or leverage particular doctrines, historical or otherwise. Instead, anyone can enter this painted world: carpenters, factory workers, students or professionals, because the visual traces rooted in the imaginary are universal. We are all educated enough to enter and translate the thoughts and feelings present because they are intrinsic to the universal human condition. Visual art — in this instance painting — reveals something of the truth of its time, but the revelation can only be seen in the future; this exhibition is a prophetic blueprint of our present past.

These painters are also deeply concerned with the physicality of the medium; that is to say the treated, maneuvered, manipulated painted platform, but their surfaces are neither effete nor overworked. Rather, they embrace a fresh, unburdened approach. The treatment, operation and management that wrought their paintings into being, fashioned with reflexive urgency, makes the work energetic and compulsive while retaining the thoughtfulness and eloquence of each voice. Paint, going from wet to solid, becomes integral to the painting as object. We do not merely see paint applied to a ground; rather we see a fully integrated object/platform. There may be an image, a stand-in at the point of embarkation, but the painted surface, imbued with the knowledge, skill and imagination of each artist, is the instrument of change and transformation.

In the age of conceptuality, these artists explore their condition at a place and time when it has become more and more obvious that the provenance of destiny is man-made. They reinvigorate and reintroduce painting as something relevant and interdisciplinary about themselves for everyone to experience. Through painting, they make their thoughts and feelings universally accessible. Painting, in this exhibition, is a transcendent practice, not one defined by image or doctrine, but rather by idealization of the imaginary and the recognition that illusion and invention are the engines of artistic freedom, change and necessity.

— Dick Goody, January 2012

Kevin Baker

Born 1978, Central City, KY | Lives and works in New York, NY

In my paintings, floral oilcloths are transformed into playful environments full of air and movement. It is as if the world was flooded, or that you are viewing the bottom of the deepest waters where only your imagination can venture.

Kevin Baker — Artist Statement, October 1, 2011



Kevin Baker

Tippy's Trippy, 2011
acrylic on oilcloth

40 x 60 inches, 101.6 x 152.4 cm

Courtesy of Kevin Baker Studio, New York



Kevin Baker

Apple Command Nature, 2011
acrylic on oilcloth
60 x 60 inches, 101.6 x 101.6 cm
Courtesy of Kevin Baker Studio, New York

Trudy Benson

Born 1985, Richmond, VA | Lives and works in New York, NY

I like using thick paint graphically, but it still has a physical presence. I like to make the virtual space, and then make a kind of armature, and then hang the thicker paint off it.

Trudy Benson — *NY Art Beat*, 2010



Trudy Benson

Stellar Evolution, 2011

acrylic, flashe, enamel, spray paint and oil on canvas
104 x 78 inches, 264.1 x 198.1 cm

Courtesy of the Artist and Mike Weiss Gallery, New York



Trudy Benson

Pale Blue Dot, 2011

acrylic, flashe, enamel, spray paint and oil on canvas
68 x 63 inches, 172.7 x 160 cm

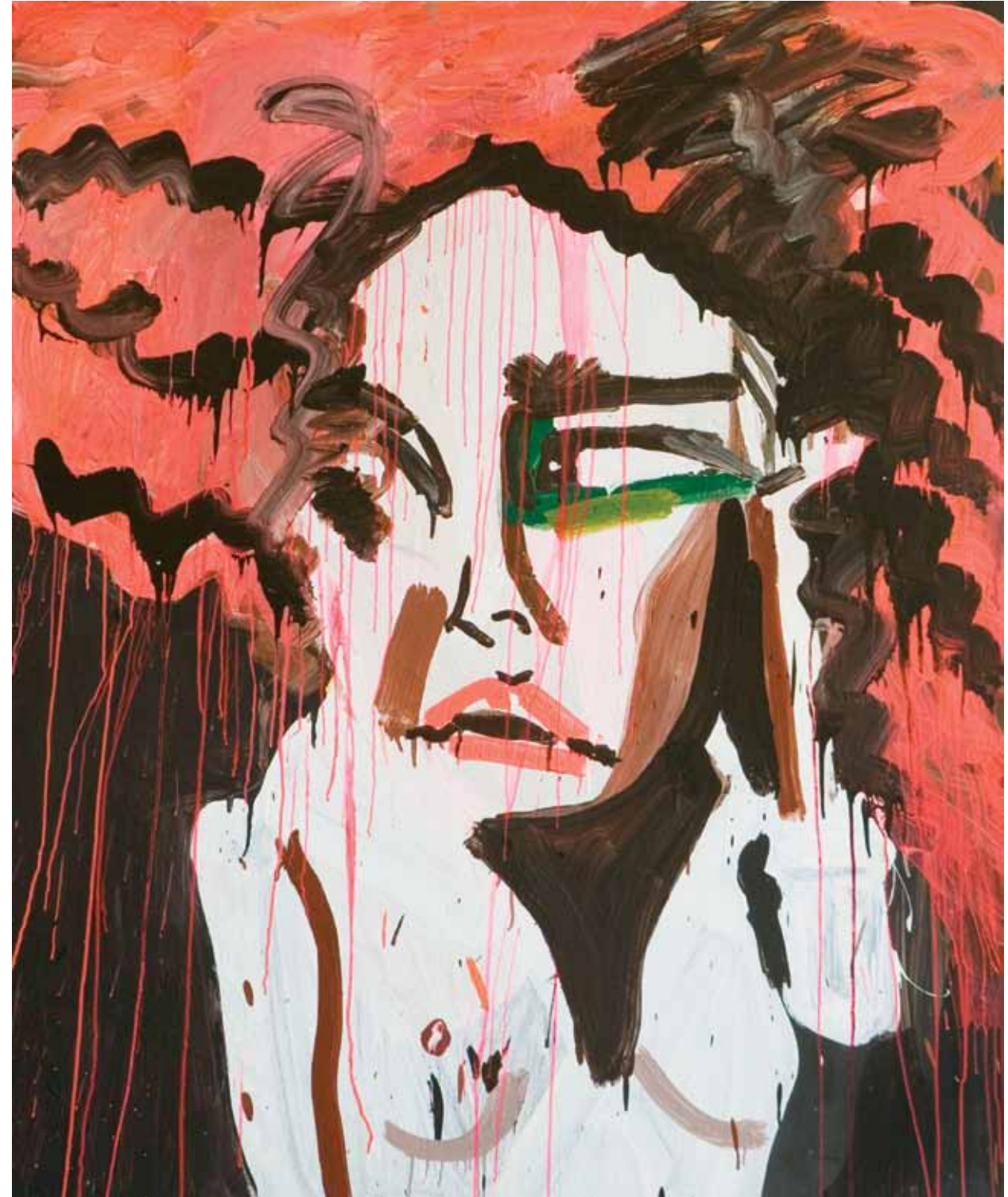
Courtesy of the Artist and Mike Weiss Gallery, New York

Katherine Bernhardt

Born 1975, Clayton, MO | Lives and works in New York, NY

For me, preparing the canvas takes longer than painting. The actual painting takes about half an hour. ... I love fashion and magazines. ... It's pretty random how I choose the images — it's whatever catches my eye or what I find.

Katherine Bernhardt — *Interview* magazine, 2008



Katherine Bernhardt

Blood Orange Juice, 2007

acrylic on canvas

72 x 60 inches, 182.8 x 152.4 cm

Courtesy of the Artist and Canada, New York



Katherine Bernhardt

Nomads and Tents in the Atlas Mountains, 2010
 acrylic on canvas
 96 x 72 inches, 243.8 x 182.8 cm
 Courtesy of the Artist and Canada, New York

Cecily Brown

Born 1969, London, England | Lives and works in New York, NY

It's about looking and what you get from allowing the imagery to shift and change.

There isn't a final destination. ... I want the viewing of it to approximate the experience of being in the world. ... They add up to painting, not an image.

Cecily Brown — "Cecily Brown in Conversation with Lari Pittman," Gagosian Gallery, 2008



Cecily Brown

Why Are There People Like Frank in the World? 2008-2009

oil on linen

97 x 89 inches, 246.4 x 226.1 cm

© Cecily Brown; courtesy of Gagosian Gallery, New York; photograph by Robert McKeever



Cecily Brown

Bye Baby Bunting, 2008-2009

oil on linen

65 x 43 inches, 165.1 x 109.2 cm

© Cecily Brown; courtesy of Gagosian Gallery, New York; photograph by Robert McKeever

Jesse Chapman

Born 1974, Richland, WA | Lives and works in Hudson, NY

The way that I think about these is that they could be copied from a (fictional) frieze, column, mural or tapestry. The fiction in the picture is somewhat compounded — there might be a fictional building, a fictional carver/painter/weaver, fictional subject matter, a fictional situation that would bring about the inclusion of such a thing in a building.

Jesse Chapman — Artist's Statement, November 13, 2011



Jesse Chapman

The Lines, 2007

oil on canvas

48 x 54 inches, 121.9 x 137.2 cm

Courtesy of the Artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York

Jesse Chapman

The Snack, 2010

oil on linen

79.75 x 30 inches, 202.6 x 76.2 cm

Courtesy of the Artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York



Matt Connors

Born 1973, Chicago, IL | Lives and works in New York, NY

I believe that someone can see something and it will change and affect them, almost in a particle physics kind of way. You know the theory that says just by looking at something you actually physically change it? Maybe it's a reverse version of that.

Matt Connors — interviewed by Elodie Evers, in the exhibition catalogue for “Gas ... Telephone ... One Hundred Thousand Rubles” at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 2011



Matt Connors

6 Years, 2010
colored pencil on canvas
21.25 x 19.75 inches, 54.6 x 50 cm
Courtesy of the Artist and Canada, New York



Matt Connors

Maid of Orleans, 2009

oil, acrylic and pencil on canvas

43 x 46 inches, 109.2 x 116.8

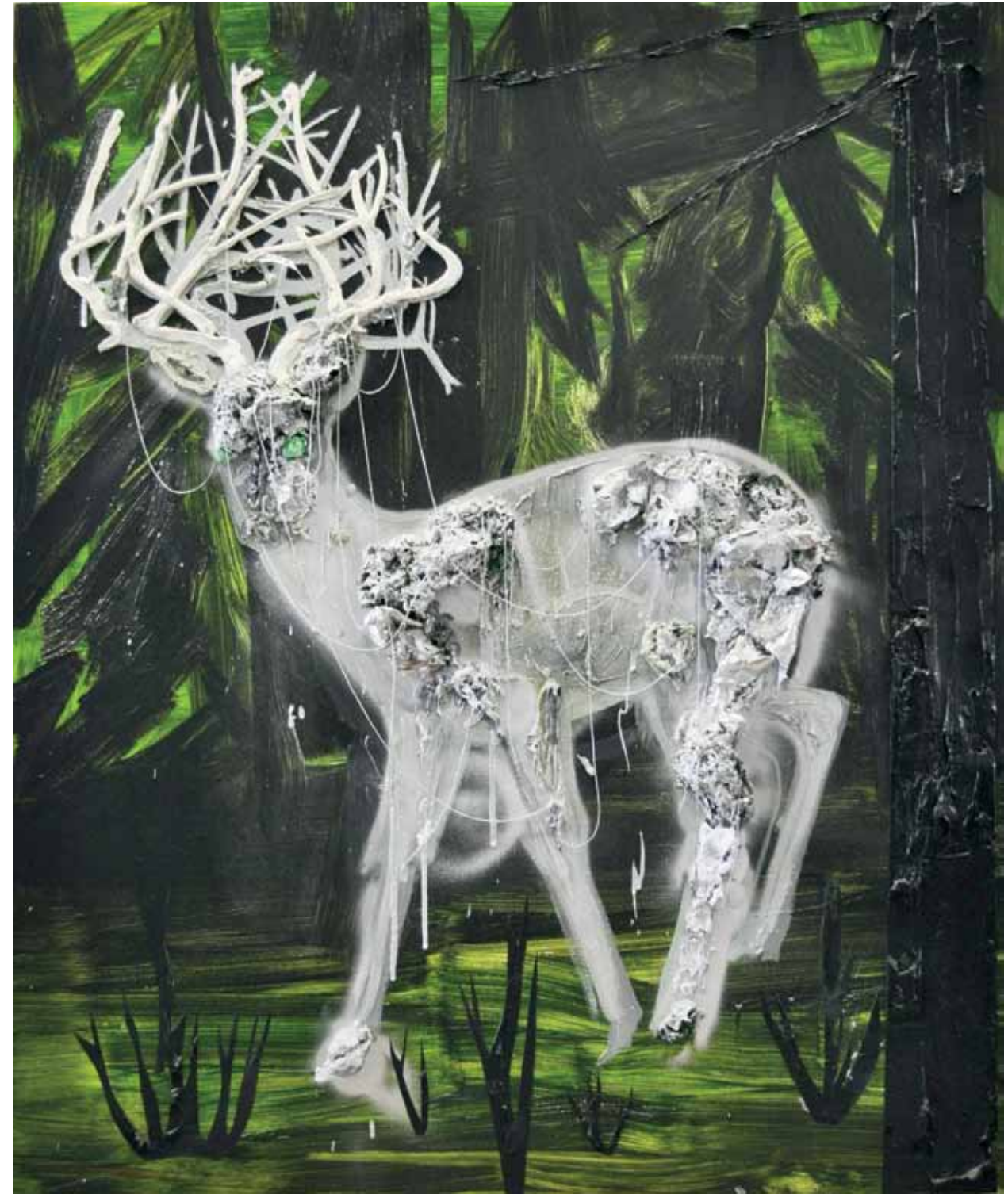
Courtesy of the Artist and Canada, New York

Kim Dorland

Born 1974, Wainwright, Alberta, Canada | Lives and works in Toronto, Canada

Material is obviously the thing that I'm very interested in. And, for me, painting in a "realistic" way looks weird. It doesn't fit me. I want the paint to become like the flesh. ... And it generally doesn't work until the paint becomes — the only word I can think of is "explicit." ... It doesn't work until the material is expanded and built to a point of almost falling apart.

Kim Dorland — interviewed by his wife, Lori Seymour, in conjunction with his exhibition, "Kim Dorland: For Lori," Mike Weiss Gallery, June 2011



Kim Dorland

Ghost (Deer), 2010

oil, glitter and string on wood panel

72 x 60 inches, 182.8 x 152.4 cm

Courtesy of the Artist and Mike Weiss Gallery, New York



Kim Dorland

Ghosts, 2010

oil, acrylic, nails, string, yarn, glass, paper and spraypaint on wood
60 x 48 inches, 152.4 x 121.9 cm

Courtesy of the Artist and Mike Weiss Gallery, New York

Mark Flood

Born 1957, Houston, TX | Lives and works in Houston, TX

It's all smoke and mirrors.

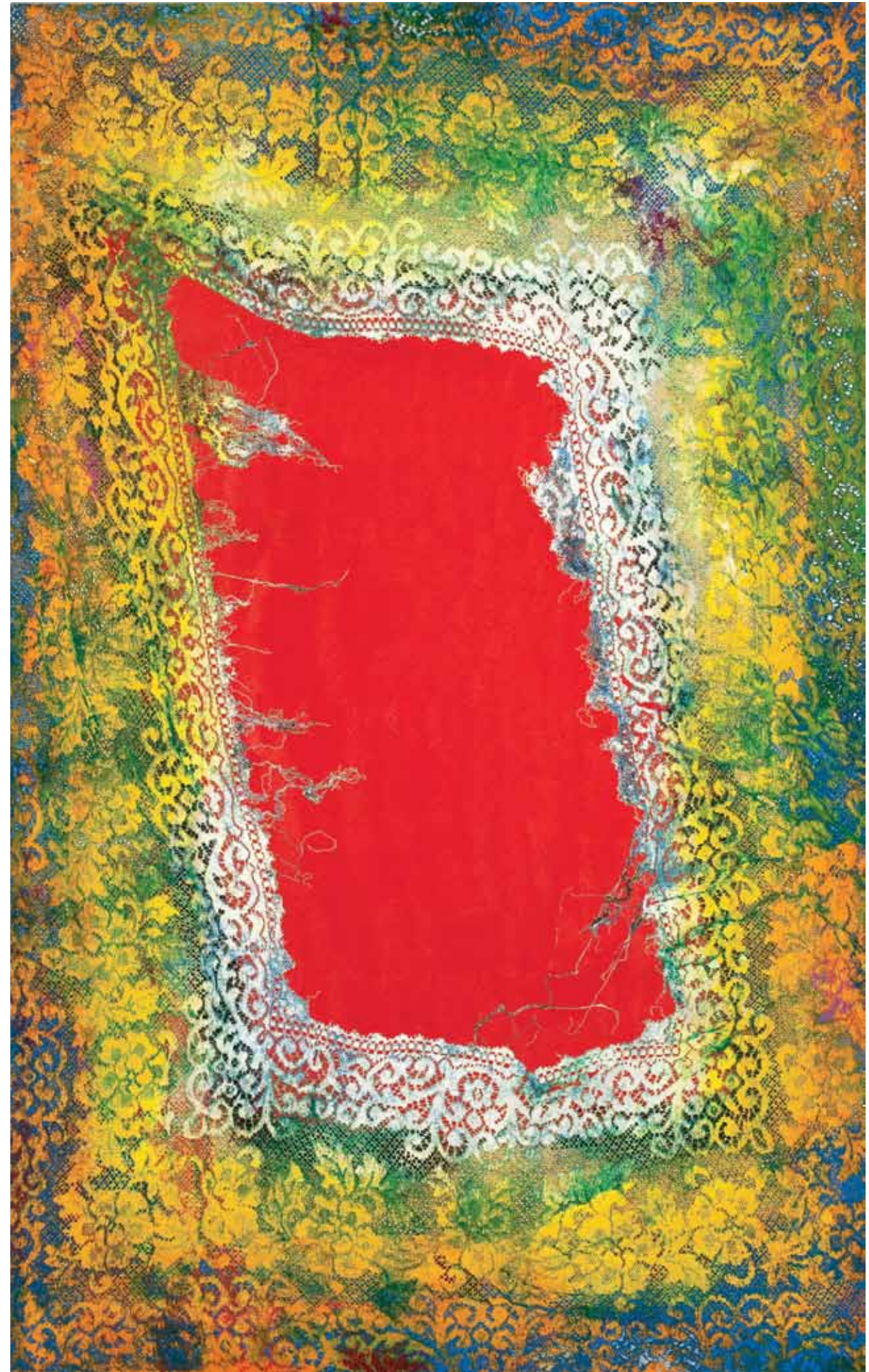
Mark Flood — attributed to Mark Flood in an interview with Nadja Sayej, *ArtstarTV*, December 1, 2010

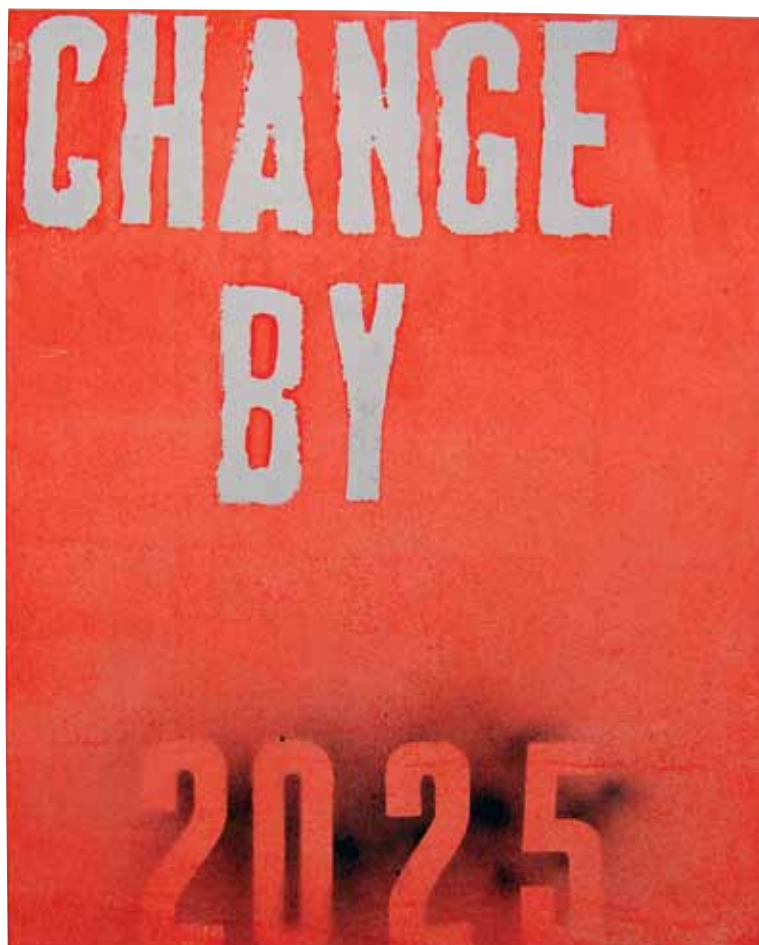
Mark Flood

Open Window, 2009
acrylic on canvas

77 x 48 inches, 195.5 x 121.9 cm

Courtesy of the Artist and Zach Feuer Gallery, New York





Mark Flood

(above)

CHANGE BY 2025, 2010

acrylic on canvas

40 x 32 inches, 101.6 x 81.3 cm

Courtesy of the Artist and Zach Feuer Gallery, New York

(right)

The Bacchae, 2009

acrylic on canvas

96 x 60 inches, 243.8 x 152.4 cm

Courtesy of the Artist and Zach Feuer Gallery, New York



Rosy Keyser

Born 1974, Baltimore, MD | Lives and works in New York City and Medusa, NY

To believe that objects have a net charge.

To listen for the humming of that charge.

To let that humming reanimate materials so they may be self-moving.

To encourage a concrete immateriality.

Rosy Keyser — Artist's Statement, December 12, 2011



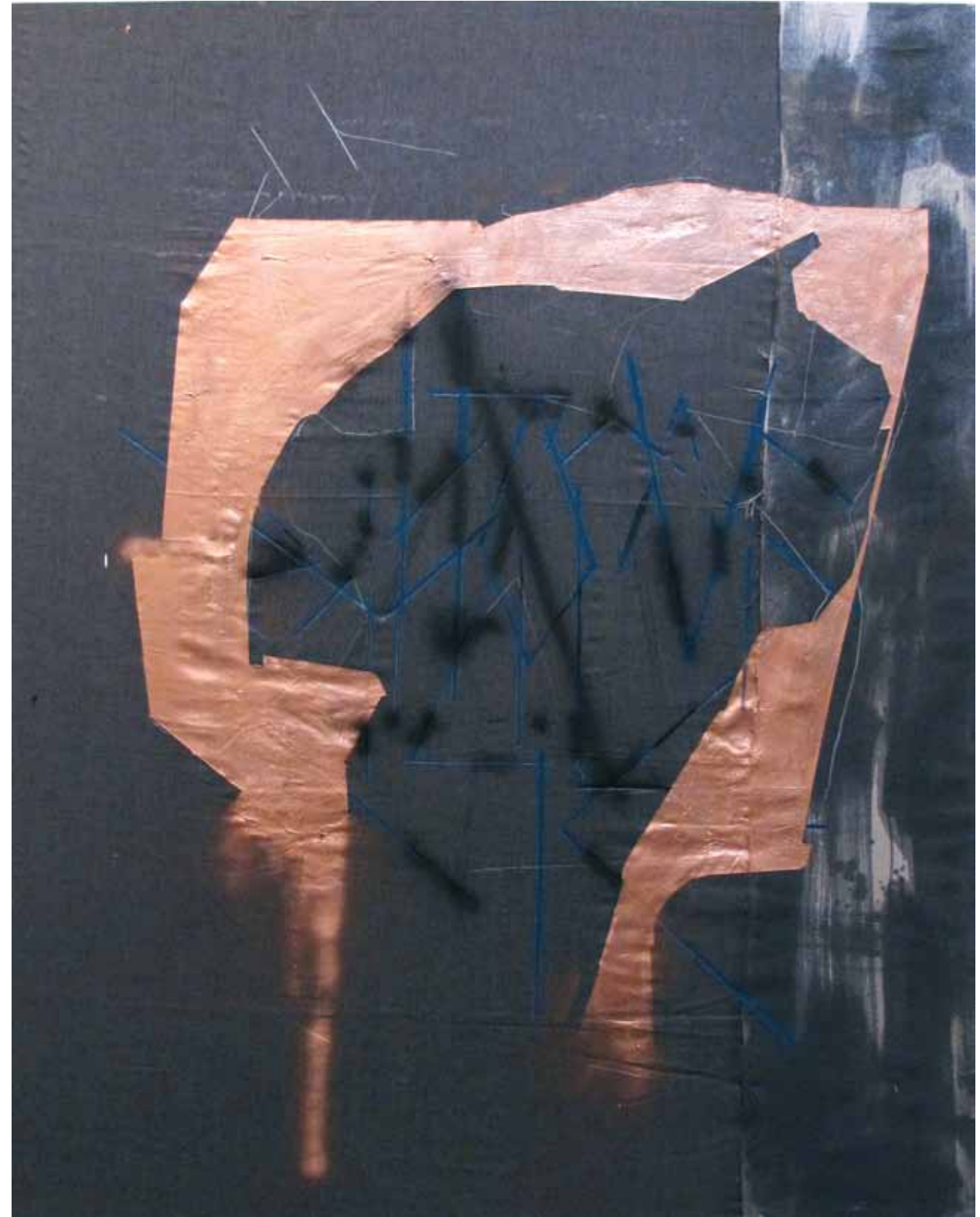
Rosy Keyser

Finger Missing Hand, 2010

enamel, spray paint and obsidian on linen

90 x 72 inches, 228.6 x 182.9 cm

Courtesy the Artist and Peter Blum Gallery, New York



Rosy Keyser

Pull the Trance in After You, 2011
copper spray paint and house paint on linen
80 x 64 inches, 203.2 x 162.6 cm
Courtesy the Artist and Peter Blum Gallery, New York

José Lerma

Born 1971, Seville, Spain | Lives and works in New York, NY

My work has always either been painting, or works about painting. Initially I was attracted to it because it was a very direct way of exploring personal mythology. ... In reality, most of my works deal with the tension between the heroic and the pathetic.

José Lerma — interviewed by Amanda C. Schmitt, amateurartcriticnyc.blogspot.com, January 1, 2011



José Lerma

John Law, 2010
acrylic and silicone caulk on canvas
102 x 78 inches, 259.1 x 198.1 cm

© José Lerma; courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York; photograph by Jessica Eckert



José Lerma

OLL KORRECT, 2010

acrylic on canvas

49.5 x 43.5 inches, 125.7 x 110.5 cm

© José Lerma; courtesy Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York; photograph by Jessica Eckert

Dasha Shishkin

Born 1977, Moscow, Russia | Lives and works in New York, NY

I once was told by someone, “You have a canvas, you have a brush — this is painting; that’s what painting is.” But I wonder whether that’s what a painting is. Is graphite to paper immediately a drawing? You can make a drawing with whatever on whatever. I think it’s more of a question of language rather than of process. ... Some materials are underdogs of an art shop or a studio — torn, wrinkled paper, ripped canvas, leftover fabric — and I feel their neglect. But it is not out of mercy and in no way a condescending step down that I use them. It is a “what if” and “why not” thought, along the lines of “equal opportunity” for art supplies.

Dasha Shishkin — interviewed by Gio Marconi, *artinfo.com*, April 1, 2010



Dasha Shishkin

If less is more, nothing is everything, 2001

acrylic and ink on canvas

51 x 68.25 inches, 129.5 x 173.4 cm

Courtesy of the Artist and Zach Feuer Gallery, New York



Dasha Shishkin

I don't want any problems, none what so ever, 2007
pastel and acrylic on canvas
53 x 72 inches, 134.6 x 182.9 cm
Courtesy of the Artist and Zach Feuer Gallery, New York

Josh Smith

Born 1976, Tennessee | Lives and works in New York, NY

Everything comes from a weird place that I don't understand. I make a piece of art just to prove that I exist in my own way. And I can't make something nice. I have to make something that makes me uncomfortable.

Josh Smith — interviewed by Harmony Korine, *Interview* magazine, June 7, 2011



Josh Smith

Untitled, 2008

oil and acrylic on canvas

60 x 48 inches, 152.4 x 121.92 cm

Courtesy of the Artist and Luhring Augustine, New York



Josh Smith

Untitled, 2010
oil on canvas

60 x 48 inches, 152.4 x 121.92 cm

Courtesy of the Artist and Luhring Augustine, New York

Denyse Thomasos

Born 1964, Trinidad | Lives and works in New York, NY

I've always worked with structures that have been used to confine people of colour. Slave boats, prisons and burial sites are three structures I've expanded on for a long time.

Denyse Thomasos — interviewed by Leah Sandals, neditpasmoncoeur.blogspot.com, March 4, 2010



Denyse Thomasos

Stealth, 2010

acrylic on canvas

60 x 72 inches, 152.4 x 182.8 cm

Courtesy of the Artist and Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto, Canada



Denyse Thomasos

Condor, 2010

acrylic on canvas

60 x 72 inches, 152.4 x 182.8 cm

Courtesy of the Artist and Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto, Canada

Wendy White

Born 1971, Deep River, CT | Lives and works in New York, NY

My idea of the conceptual is very much the visual. I'm not somebody who has an idea for a painting and executes a painting. They're very much a record of a moment, a period — three or four hours.

Wendy White — in conversation with Amanda Browder and Tom Sandford, *Bad at Sports* podcast, September 19, 2010



Wendy White

Doyers & Pell, 2011

acrylic on canvas, wood

79.5 x 121.5 inches, 201.0 x 308.6 cm

Courtesy of the Artist and Leo Koenig Inc., New York



Wendy White

Tietz, 2011

acrylic on canvas, metal, foam

72 x 144 inches, 182.8 x 365.7 cm

Courtesy of the Artist and Leo Koenig Inc., New York

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Katherine Bernhardt	Mark Flood	Denyse Thomasos
Cecily Brown	Rosy Keyser	Wendy White
Jesse Chapman	José Lerma	



Curated by Dick Goody

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