

Art Review:

Reviews: Besides, With, Against, and Yet

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By TJ Carlin

REVIEWS: USA

*Besides, With, Against, and Yet:
Abstraction and the Ready-Made Gesture*

The Kitchen, New York
13 November – 16 January

Painting is certainly not 'all dead' (see *The Princess Bride*). If we run with the analogy of its being mostly dead, its hope for resuscitation and direction is definitely through recontextualisation. If painters today both benefit from and struggle with the double-edged sword of historical hindsight, they are still doers (and there are plenty of them), but they are wading in a much larger and more unwieldy morass of languages than ever before. It may be that visual cross-pollination of languages is the way of the future for painting; certainly group shows hold great potential to activate this. And *With, Against, and Yet: Abstraction and the Ready-Made Gesture* seems to edge upon that possibility.

The show certainly represents a collection of relevant galleries, such as Miguel Abreu, Greene Naftali, and Taxter & Spengemann, but it is also a very difficult exhibition to take in, both with regards to the amount of work and to the juxtaposition of conceptual and affective approaches that it represents. The many attitudes to painting in the show seem to edge each other out in their competition for the viewer's sympathy; it's almost impossible not to choose the readymade over colour-field painting, or vice versa, simply to block the proximity of the one in order to have some integrity of experience with the other. A viewer determined not to put on blinders might instead seek formal associations. Uneasy pairings stand out: two fabric pieces, two paintings incorporating a readymade and, bizarrely, more than one metallic painting — all compelling works but diminished in their splendour somewhat by unintentional companionship, like two girls at the prom wearing the same dress.

Perhaps one solution may have been simply to show less work. Nearly all of the pieces are very good, and there are more standouts than could be listed here — the mixed media in Keltie Ferris's *Astroland* (2009) renders, in its contrast of materials, a materially scintillating quality worthy of its namesake amusement park; Rebecca Quaytman's optically sumptuous *Exhibition Guide for the Kitchen: Chapter 15* (2009) provides a geometric fulcrum that anchors the back room. There are also some successful pairings that enhance the individual pieces by their associations — the aridity of, and the physical surface tension effected by, Cheyney Thomson's split-panel *Chronochrome I-IV* (2009) brings a low, restrained but clearly audible hum to the dashing explosion of Kerstin Bratsch's gigantic drawing *Preprospective* (2009), which exudes a dark, unfettered gush of painting, and also pennies, which lie, unstuck from the paper, on the floor.

Ultimately the exhibition is a bit frustrating, as the abutting conceptual and expressionist approaches bring out what are at once the crucial factors and the vulnerabilities of each: their potential insincerity. But the organisational premise of assembling a collection of diverse approaches is achieved, and the questions it raises of how curation can best serve painting are crucial to our understanding of the medium's future. *T.J. Carlin*



Keltie Ferris, *Astroland*, 2009, oil, acrylic, spray paint and oil pastel on canvas, 152 x 119. Photo: Mark Woods. Courtesy Broom Gallery, New York, NY

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