

New American Paintings

JURIED EXHIBITIONS-IN-PRINT

84



October/November

Juror's Comments

Terrie Sultan

Executive Director, The Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, NY



People often ask about my dedication to painters and painting as a mode of artistic expression. I didn't make it as a painter myself, but having spent four years in a university studio art program I can attest first hand to how difficult a medium this is to master,

and how tough it can be to find an individual voice amid the competing cacophonies of historical tradition and incessant calls to make it "new."

Painting has been one of my curatorial constants for the better part of my 20 year career as a museum professional. As curator of contemporary art at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, it was my charge to organize the *Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting*—an assignment that brought me in contact with hundreds of artists who, by sharing their creative process, helped inform my curatorial vision. Painting is a seemingly simple process; witness Chuck Close's tongue-in-cheek description of his principal studio activity as simply applying wet colored mud onto a stiff ground. But as his imagery attests, the results of this activity carry a magical, alchemical ability to change the way we think about the world. The immeasurable variations of the artists' hand, the visual tactility of "wet, colored mud," and the challenging and stimulating decoding of the artists' intent unite within a planar arena to offer any number of overwhelming aesthetic experiences.

Houston was my home base from 1988 through 2000, where I directed Blaffer Gallery, the Art Museum of the University of Houston. Thus, I was pleased to be invited to jury the Western competition for this round of *New American Paintings*. I am happy to be reminded that no matter how well informed I try to be, there is always much more to learn. In full disclosure, I am familiar with more than a few of the artists who participated in this current competition. However, I was pleasantly surprised to come across so many new artists whose work combined both formal acumen and conceptual rigor.

In reviewing these submissions, I was impressed by the high quality and rich diversity of painterly approaches. This made my job harder, and I found it difficult to make a tight selection. It was only after running through the submissions several times and finally selecting my top picks did I look back at the overall aggregate of the selected artists to notice certain recurring themes. A number of artists, in addition to my Juror's Pick, Tommy Fitzpatrick, explored the intersection of abstraction and representation through the lens of urban architecture, land interpretation, and environmental and social engineering. The mythologies and realities of urban landscapes continue to provide compelling subject matter for Nathan Abels, Michael Bernhardt, William Betts, Brian Dehart, Sara Frantz, Hedwige Jacob, Jonathan Leach, Sarah McKenzie, B. Moss, Joseph Phillips, Brian Porray, Todd Pospichal, Cheyanne Ramos, and Melissa Wilkinson. Each artist, in his or her differing approach, paints cityscapes and built environments as fundamental to understanding the life and imagination of contemporary society.



Bernhardt p17



Fontenot p45



Leach p85



Varner p152



Phillips p124



Betts p25

"...I can attest first hand to how difficult a medium this is to master, and how tough it can be to find an individual voice..."

Bodies, posed alone or in groups, portrayed as allegorical figures, or playing out absurd social dynamics, form another distinct focus for contemporary painters. Whether depicting dreamscapes, lived experience, or steeped in memory and nostalgia, the people represented in paintings by Brian Dehart, Heyd Fontenot, John Hartley, Haley Hasler, Alan Kitchen, Heidi Landau, Laura Lark, Linda Lopez, Olivia Lundberg, Jenny Mullins, Nancy Morrow, Anne Austin Pearce, Beth Secor, and Justin Varner all compelled long contemplation, causing me to return to them to look, and look again. Erin Westenskow Berrett engaged in a different kind of portrait, applying a painterly, focused eye on representing mundane objects to tease out rich gestures that paid homage to the artist's hand.

The intellectual and philosophical underpinnings of unadulterated, organic abstraction have been a mainstay of Modernism. Therefore I was pleased to see several artists engaging in fresh tactics in this vital arena, such as Fidalis David Kanoanikie Buehler, Lucinda Coble, Andrew Long, Kathy Robinson-Hays and Michael Tole plumbed a broad vocabulary of divergent abstract themes. Others like Erik Gonzales, Robert Green, Dave Malone, Katherine Veneman and Ellen Wagener focused in on the particulars of real and imagined flora and fauna. Each brought formal sophistication and an eye-popping color sensibility to the ongoing dialogue surrounding painterly abstraction.

One thing is clear from this competition, and from the many years I have served as a part of the *New American Paintings*' team: the population of artists who express their love of art through paint is rich, deep, and ever-renewing. ■

Q&A

- Q** What is the first painting that made an impact on you?
A Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. Version O)*, which was the first thing I saw the first time I stepped into the Museum of Modern Art in New York.
- Q** What is the best painting that you have seen in the past year?
A I don't know if it was the best, but seeing Martin Kippenberger's 1996 *Raft of the Medusa* series again really moved me.
- Q** If you could have any artist paint your portrait who would it be?
A Mary McCleary created an amazing portrait for me that I love living with.
- Q** What painting would you most like to live with?
A Some paintings are meant to reside in museums. I could spend a lot of time with Courbet's *The Artist's Studio*, but my walls aren't big enough and I could never get it through the door.
- Q** What artist(s) has most influenced contemporary painting?
A Joseph Beuys and Andy Warhol form the antipodes of how most living artists approach artmaking.
- Q** What has the greatest effect on contemporary painting: the Internet, MFA programs, or photography?
A Probably photography, which has influenced every aspect of contemporary life, including the internet and MFA programs.

Noteworthy:

Tommy Fitzpatrick

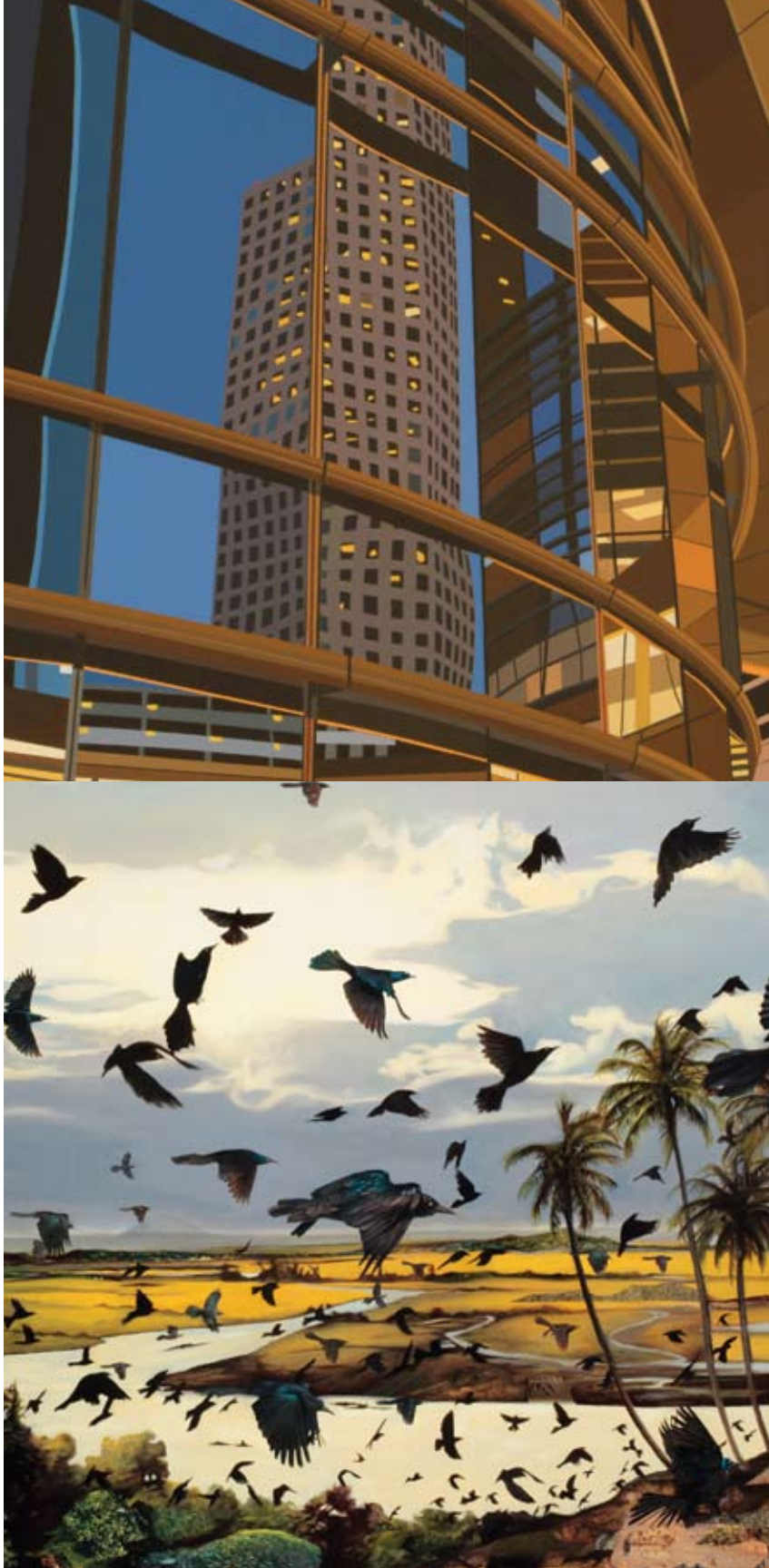
Juror's Pick p40

I selected Tommy Fitzpatrick for his sophisticated approach to composition, keen eye for detail, and ability to re-imagine the urban landscape. I'm particularly drawn to the visual tactility of rendered glass and steel; the disorienting and mirrored reflections that dominate, but do not overwhelm, his captivating confections of abstraction and representation. In the three works represented here (*Dawn at Chevron*, *Weightless*, and *Dematerializing*), he deftly hones the disjunctive convergence of multiple perspectives, challenging the cognitive certainty often granted to photography. In Fitzpatrick's hands, our understanding of the built environment is both dematerialized and made resolutely concrete. His is a vision of the urban environment pristine in its beauty, unencumbered by a gritty narrative of urban life. It is a vision of a city of dreams.

Cheyenne Ramos

Editor's Pick p136

The paintings of Cheyanne Ramos are art historically savvy and her work reflects a keen knowledge of the history of landscape painting. However, her large images are anything but just pretty pictures. Ramos is interested in the collision of man and nature, and to this end her paintings treat flora and fauna as both apocalyptic and sublime. Working with a variety of media, Ramos draws from real, perceived and imagined experiences to generate works that are at once beautiful and horrifying.



Abels
Bernhardt
Berrett
Betts
Buehler
Cobley
Dehart
Fitzpatrick
Fontenot
Frantz
Gonzales
Green
Hartley
Hasler
Jacobs
Kitchen
Landau
Lark
Leach
Long
Lopez
Lundberg
Malone
McKenzie
Morrow
Moss
Mullins
Pearce
Phillips
Porray
Pospichal
Ramos
Robinson-Hays
Secor
Tole
Varner
Veneman
Wagener
Wiley
Wilkinson



Winners: Western Competition 2009

Juror: Terrie Sultan, Executive Director,
The Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, NY



The following section is presented in alphabetical order.
Biographical information has been edited.
Prices for available work may be found on page 172.



Tommy Fitzpatrick
Dawn at Chevron | acrylic on canvas, 30 x 50 inches



Tommy Fitzpatrick
Weightless | acrylic on canvas, 50 x 80 inches



Tommy Fitzpatrick

Dematerializing | acrylic on canvas, 90 x 60 inches

Tommy Fitzpatrick

Arlington, TX
 817.706.7110 (artist) / 713.526.7800 (Inman Gallery)
 tcfitz22@aol.com / www.tommyfitzpatrick.com

b. 1969 Dallas, TX

Education

- 1993 MFA, Yale University, New Haven, CT
- 1991 BA, Fine Arts , University of Texas at Arlington, TX
- 1989 RISD Summer Painting Program, Providence, RI

Solo Exhibitions

- 2009 *New Paintings*, Michael Schultz, Seoul, South Korea
- 2008 *Dematerializing*, Inman Gallery, Houston, TX
- 2007 *Spectacle*, Charles Cowles Gallery, New York, NY
- 2006 *Bridge*, Michael Schultz Berlin, Germany
- Facade*, Holly Johnson Gallery, Dallas, TX
- 2005 *Working Spaces*, Inman Gallery, Houston, TX
- 2004 *Looking up*, Charles Cowles Gallery, New York, NY
- Object Lesson*, 1997 - 2004, Arlington Museum of Art, Arlington, TX
- Object Lesson*, 1997 - 2004, Galveston Arts Center, Galveston, TX
- 2003 *New Paintings*, Charles Cowles Gallery New York, NY
- 2002 *Twilight*, Inman Gallery, Houston, TX
- 2001 *New Work*, Charles Cowles Gallery, New York, NY
- 2000 Inman Gallery, Houston, TX
- 1999 Inman Gallery, Houston, TX

Collections

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
 Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, TX

Represented by

Inman Gallery, Houston, TX
 Michael Schultz Gallery, Berlin, Seoul, Beijing
 Holly Johnson Gallery, Dallas ,TX

In this work, I explore the language of architecture but focus on a particular building: Chevron Texaco (formerly Enron). Although this building is an icon of corporate greed, it is a very appealing futuristic structure. This type of duality and its relationship to progress is of great interest to me.

The relationship of color and light is something that has always intrigued me—the transformation of form as the light shifts around a given structure. In each painting, the entire composition is consumed by corporate architecture. In essence, the building becomes the landscape. Much as the Romantics focused on the landscape, so I am focused on painting an urban reality.

My titles are based on economic terms that relate directly to oil speculation created at this building (*Upside Down*, *Dematerializing*, *Weightless*). In addition, some of the paintings' titles were based on Roman goddesses, like Luna (moon), and Aurora (dawn). In my work, complexity is coupled with distortion; I want to present a clear but confusing image of the present—a type of crisis of perception.





Cheyenne Ramos

Future Prospects | acrylic and paper on canvas, 24 x 60 inches



Cheyenne Ramos

Grackle Flock, Stone Mountain, California | oil, collage, Prisma color on canvas, 35 x 53.5 inches



Cheyenne Ramos

Gyre | oil and collage on canvas, 58 x 96 inches

Cheyenne Ramos

Houston, TX
713.526.1551 (Joan Wich & Co. Gallery)

b. 1980 Concord, CA

Education

- 2009 MFA, University of Houston, Houston, TX
- 2005 BFA, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA

Solo Exhibitions

- 2009 *Lost Paradise*, Joan Wich & Co. Gallery, Houston, TX
- Wish You Were Here*, Projects Gallery, University of Houston, Houston, TX
- Luck of the Draw*, DiverseWorks, Houston, TX
- MFA Thesis Exhibition*, Blaffer Gallery, Houston, TX
- It's Out There in the Air*, Joan Wich & Co. Gallery, Houston, TX
- 2008 *Dramas*, Williams Tower, Houston, TX
- Dis, Dat, Deez, Doz*, The Joanna Gallery, Houston, TX
- Beyond the Wasteland*, Domy Books, Houston, TX
- 2006 University of Houston Student Exhibition, Blaffer Gallery, Houston, TX

Awards

- 2008 Bunker Graduate Scholarship
- Delores Welder Mitchell Fellowship
- 2007 Friends of Art Fellowship
- 2006 Presidential Graduate Fellowship, University of Houston

Represented by

Joan Wich & Co. Gallery, Houston, TX

My paintings are amalgamations of real, perceived, and projected experiences built from the fragments of found and personal photographs, objects, memories, and art history. I fuse these unstable, divergent, and often conflicted sources into new fictions. People and places appear as remote apparitions, distorted or idealized memories, fabrications or projections. Together they conflate time—the present exists in the discomfort that lies between a nostalgic past and a foreboding future.

My primary interest is our increasing disassociation from the natural world. Disasters expose our vulnerabilities to forces from which we mistakenly believe ourselves exempt. Extreme natural events, often shown here against a backdrop of majestic landscapes, provide a disturbing confluence of beauty and horror. Through them, I convey our underlying human fears while portraying the natural world as the unrelenting and sublime force that it is.

Ramos



Spotlight

Aaron Parazette Speaks to Evan J. Garza

Aaron Parazette is not afraid of change—he’s just normally too busy for it. For nearly 20 years his paintings have masterfully juggled color and form, and his career is marked by sporadic changes to his approach, brought on by unique challenges and infrequent lulls in his studio. The result is a playful body of work that is perpetually expanding—in its conceptual rigor, in the marketplace, and in the eyes of the artist himself.

A native of Southern California, Parazette spent 22 years growing up surfing the waters of Hermosa Beach, and received his MFA in Painting from the Claremont Graduate University in 1990. Since 2004, when he was featured in a solo exhibition in the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston’s *Perspectives* series, Parazette has focused primarily on word paintings, composed of humorous and colorful stretched letter configurations whose lines and shapes resemble vague geometric forms that make up a single word.

“The attraction is not about letter forms, lines or necessarily colors as a subject matter for the paintings,” Parazette tells me in an interview, “but rather seeing them as a way to create dynamic rectangles and squares... or as my friend Mark Flood [says], ‘color juggling.’ ...I did it as a way to engage myself in the studio... I thought of [the downstairs gallery at the CAMH] kind of like a project space, in that it was in my hometown, the place where I’ve kind of come of age as an artist, and I felt like the primary audience for this show are people that I know. I should take this as an opportunity to shift the work radically and surprise my audience and myself... I very deliberately said ‘I’m going to make word paintings now.’”

Five years after his exhibition at the CAMH, following a successful string of shows with the word paintings—including solo exhibitions with Marlborough Gallery, McClain Gallery, Dunn & Brown Contemporary, and Gregory Lind Gallery—the artist was struck by another challenge: no immediate shows to make work for.

“It was the first time in a long time that I didn’t have another show scheduled, and there was this pause in the studio. It was similar to when I had the CAMH show... when I started really thinking about the work and asking, ‘Is it time to shift the work and try something else?’”

The ensuing body of work, or what Parazette calls his *Color Key* series, takes his understanding of corresponding forms and adds an additional dimension—a vaguely sculptural one at that—pushing his colorful figures outside the four-sided stretcher.

“Painting is a dead end creative practice with endless possibilities...”



Color Key 6
2009
acrylic on linen
30 x 30 inches

The paintings are, quite simply, some of the most interactive and compelling works Parazette has made in recent years.

“I thought, ‘I’m going to make some shape paintings’, sort of in the same way that I thought, ‘I’m going to make word paintings’... The forms themselves are very insistent, that is rectangles and squares—those are shapes that we don’t see [as insistent] because they are so calming, you just don’t look at them that way. You don’t notice that form—that container—it doesn’t have any insistence about itself.”

The images of geometric forms painted on the surface of the *Color Key* works are both at odds and in harmony with the shape of the works themselves, often featured in elliptical diptychs and triptychs. Colorful figures, like blue and white rectangles inside an oval, appear to resist the form of the panels that contain them and ultimately surrender to the limitations set forth by the stretcher. Yet the assertiveness of the painted images persists—as if they could reveal larger, more complete forms if only they could free themselves from the restrictive, tyrannical confines of their containers.

It’s a witty practice, and one that Parazette’s work has for years appeared to beckon for. *Superbank* (2006), a commission for the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, Houston Branch, features a 29-foot-wide stretch of rich blue lines that reach and roll out of the work itself, spinning around a central tube-like vortex that the edges of the painting struggle to contain.

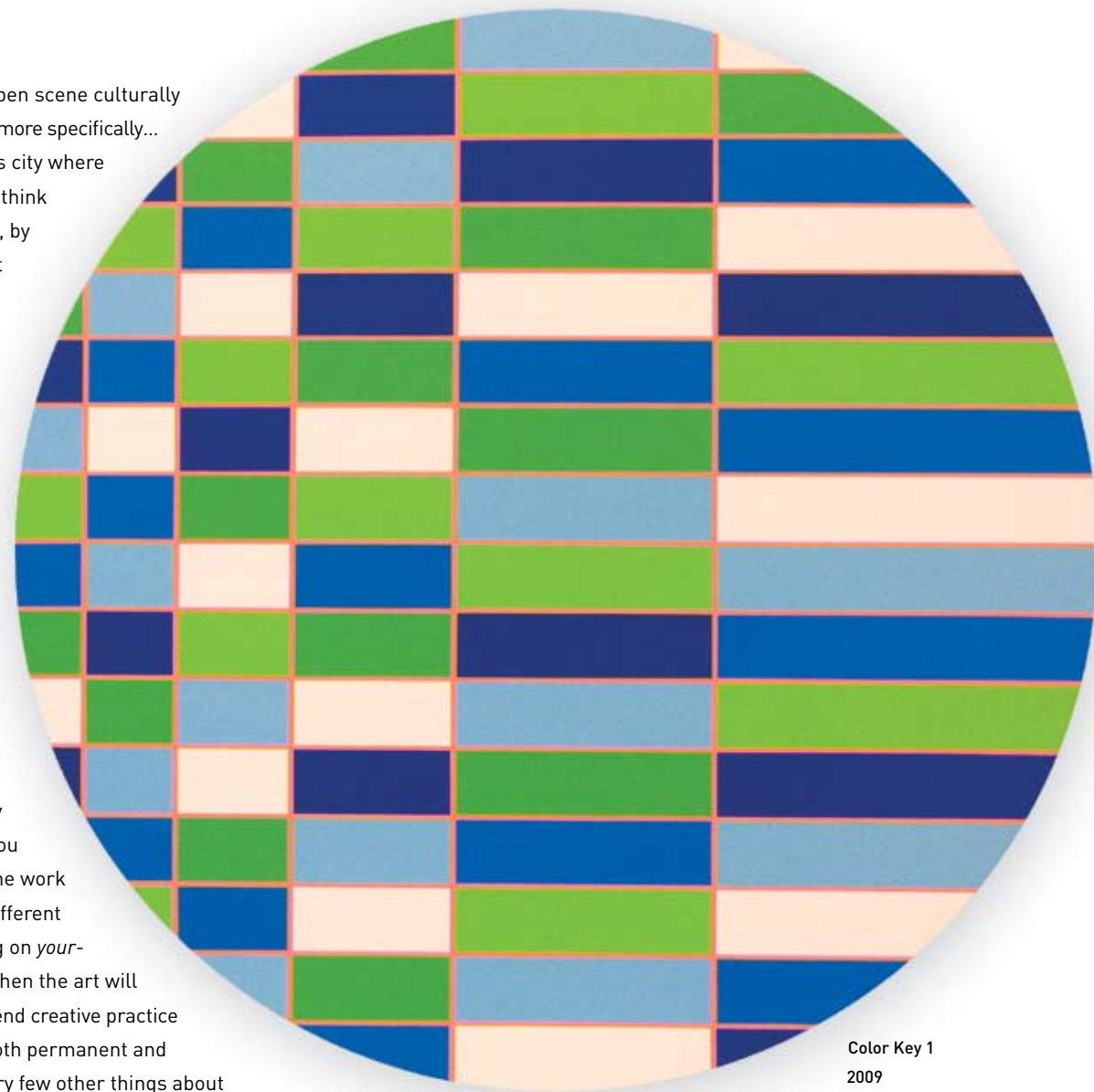
“While [*Superbank*] is instantly recognizable to surfers for what it is,” Parazette says, “to non-surfers, they see it as a cool giant expanse of gradations of blue and green... For most people it’s a non-representational painting, and for surfers it’s instantly representational... I think of my practice and motivation as a synthesis of my beach/surf/ocean experience/passion, and my learned interest and engagement with art in general and painting in particular... the learned part comes from watching how my family made things, and seeing the fetishistic quasi-spiritual way in which surfboards are made and cared for... The way I make my work, and the attention to and reverence for detail and finish, gains license from all of that.”

Throughout his career, Parazette has made Houston his home, and Texas has had much to do with his success. He was a two-time residency fellow in the renowned Core Program at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston’s Glassell School of Art in the early 90s, and he has exhibited in some of the strongest private galleries in the state. >

"I think of Texas as a more open scene culturally and in terms of the art world, more specifically... [Houston] is a really generous city where it's easy to make work, and I think that's true of the whole state, by and large... You're kind of left to your own devices most of the time... I think if I would have stayed in L.A. after graduate school, I don't feel like I would have been as satisfied or productive or interested in my work as I am having made a go of it here in Houston.

"I understand my own thinking and feeling about the range of things that are possible in my studio now in a way that I didn't for 10 years, and maybe as recently as 5 years ago... I thought, 'You should stop thinking about the work and how to make the work different and better, and start working on *yourself*. Work on your *head* and then the art will change... Painting is a dead end creative practice with endless possibilities... both permanent and ephemeral, and there are very few other things about which that can be claimed."

Like a surfer, Parazette expertly glides on the edge of something larger than himself, completely open to wherever he is taken—less concerned with where he directs himself and accelerated by what moves him. ■



Color Key 1
2009
acrylic on linen
27 x 27 inches

brian wilson loves you.
david x. levine
october 22 – december 5, 2009



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www.stevenzevitasgallery.com / 617 778 5265 x22

Insight

Lester Marks

By Evan J. Garza

Anyone in the West will tell you the collection of Lester Marks is one of the most important in the country, if not in the world. Art patrons will even go so far as to call his Houston home a 'mini-museum'. An annual presence in the ARTnews Top 200 Collectors (as in top 20), the Texas native has been collecting contemporary art for nearly 20 years. President of International Art Advisory Services and a trustee for the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Marks was recently named Director of Deborah Colton Gallery.

Among several mediums (and countless legendary artists), the Marks collection boasts some of the finest names in modern and contemporary painting in recent history, including works by Jean-Michel Basquiat, Mel Bochner, Louise Bourgeois, Francesco Clemente, Chuck Close, Jeff Koons, Elizabeth Peyton, Robert Rauschenberg, Ed Ruscha, Julian Schnabel, Kiki Smith, John Wesley and Andy Warhol.

Lester and I spoke recently to discuss painting, his collection, and his thoughts on being a collector from the West.

EJG: Who are some of your favorite painters in your collection?

LM: Well, What I try to do is collect art that primarily fits into three different categories; artists who take the weird and turn it into the wonderful, artists who take the simple and turn it into the sublime, and artists who take the ordinary and turn it into the extraordinary. What I love most are those artists who are able to accomplish the most with a minimum of means. My collection has a great deal of Minimalism, but it's not a collection of Minimalists. I do most appreciate those artists who are able to use simple, everyday materials and whose work often has a rough,

raw—some would even say an unfinished—appearance.

My favorite painter is Jean-Michel Basquiat and my favorite works that are in my collection are my Basquiats. I think the piece that is possibly my personal favorite is a remarkable [untitled] piece he did in 1982 on a shipping blanket. It has exposed stretchers, so its not framed in a traditional manner. It's done in a raw unfinished look that, as far as I know—to the best of my knowledge—Basquiat is the only painter whose done contemporary work in these unfinished stretched materials. The shipping blanket is tied with twine up and down the supporting wood plank on either side of the piece... [Basquiat] didn't frame it in the traditional manner that artists frame—he left it exposed. Where the canvas is tied to the stretcher bars, the holes look like wounds, the blanket looks like pink flesh... It's all a very visceral, exposed, organic work that I think sums up so much of what Basquiat was all about.

EJG: How does your fondness for Minimalism influence your collection of paintings?

LM: Well, in terms of Minimalism in paintings in my collection...

most of the Minimalists were not in fact painters, so I don't have a great selection of Minimalist paintings... I have had three Agnes Martins, which have all been truly heavenly works, not currently in my collection. I think that Agnes Martin will go down as one of the greatest Minimalist painters of all time. Her work has the ability to do what any great work of art should do, which is to transform and take you to another place, be it spiritually, psychologically, mystically, perceptually... and Agnes Martin's Minimalist work does all that. I have, also, a very early and a remarkable painting by the somewhat Minimalist painter John Wesley, who really deifies categori-

zation. He is part of the Chinati Collection, he was best friends with Donald Judd and Dan Flavin, and yet his paintings are not minimal in the sense of an Agnes Martin. [Wesley] kind of straddles the line between—as no other painter in history has done—between pop and Minimalism... it's a little bit of Minimalism with a wry sense of humor. And he's not the easiest painter to get to know, but he is certainly one of the most remarkable contemporary painters to have ever lived. While not a Minimalist in the sense of a Brice Marden, he has a clear affinity with the ideas of Minimalism and the people who made up that movement.

EJG: Is there a painting—or even a painting movement—that has influenced the way you collect?

LM: I would say the Neo-Expressionists, that wave that began in the 80s with Basquiat and Schnabel and Keith Haring. I felt like the intensity of what they were doing excited me in a way that I had never been excited by visual art before. The Abstract Expressionists—it might be my age, I might be a little bit young to have been a big fan of the Abstract Expressionists—but to me their paintings were very transcendent. I wanted something more and I felt like the Neo-Expressionists were doing work that was both visually exciting and also socially relevant. Ross Bleckner, Keith Haring, Basquiat, Schnabel, all those [artists] that addressed issues that were going on in society, from AIDS and being an openly gay person, to issues of persecution based on the color of your skin or on the type of social background you came from.

EJG: How has living in the west influenced your collection?

LM: Hmm... That's a very interesting question because we find that we're influenced by where we are and when we're there and the circumstances that we find ourselves in that are beyond our control. I do think that being in the Southwest has had an influence on my collecting taste. Bruce Nauman, Donald Judd—two of my favorite artists. Probably my most significant holdings are Donald Judd. I feel that there is something about the openness and the vastness of the West, which has had an influence on art-

ists such as [these]... Having grown up in Houston, in the Southwest, not having gone to school in the East, I've never been an East Coast person. And so I do have a certain affinity in my collection, and I guess you would say in my heart, for the wide-open spaces and the vastness of an Ed Ruscha, who I collect... There's a certain wryness, a kind of tongue in check to the West Coast painting that's a little different from the East Coast painting—and this is a huge generalized statement that anyone could take issue with—but I find both a calmness and/or a humor in much of the painting that is done by West Coast artists, as opposed to the finesse of some of the most well known East Coast painters, such as Brice Marden for example.

I think that Houston has one of the most active art scenes in the United States, second only to New York. And there are a couple of cities, obviously Chicago and LA, that will give us a good run for our money, but the thing about Houston is that it is a very active art community in that it generates great artists. I think that some of our residency programs here have been responsible for planting the seeds of greatness, through the Glassell Core program at the MFA or the residency program at Lawndale... We have so many fertile breeding grounds where artists take up residency and show their work. There are new ones every day.

EJG: I know that you've touched somewhat on the 'weird to the wonderful' and 'the ordinary to the extraordinary', but what would you say makes a great painting?

LM: To me, a great painting is a painting that is able to help you see the world in a different way. And its not just what you see in the painting, but what you're able to see after you leave the painting, and the way that the painting is able to expand your ability to see the world in new and different ways. ■

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