

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

BLAKE RAYNE

selected texts & press

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Blake Rayne's work emerges at the confluence of a decidedly materialist approach to painting – Robert Ryman, "Supports/Surfaces" – and a linguistic turn in which certain terms or words become pictorial operators.

Rayne's basic orientation is to question the terms 'painter' and 'painting' and to treat them as signs—that is, as fictions. They have no stable material definition, but rather are shaped by semiotic, institutional, and physical relations. Rayne's mode of abstract painting is irrevocably marked by conceptual art. Here, context is constitutive.

A cryptic accumulation of references culled from esoteric historical figures, archival images, literature, personal relationships, and network television are, in Rayne's body of work, united under the structuring sign of cinema. Each exhibition is staged like a sequence in a film, necessarily informed by and in dialogue with those that came before it. 'Scripts' drawn from film production that call for folding, spraying, stitching, and looping govern the work's material formation. The patterns that appear on its surface always have a relationship to the structure of the pictorial support.

For *The Disappearance of Red Pistachio Shells / The Dawn of the Californian Nut Industry* (1979) (2007), a loop of canvas was acted upon with protective films, rollers, and spray paint, then cut and stitched into individual works. In *Dust of Suns* (2008), Rayne deployed the cut alongside the fold, this time hanging canvases alongside their corresponding crates in what amounted to a spatial 'trailer' for a future film. This dialectic between the word and the painterly gesture was again taken up in *Folder and Application* (2010), which overlaid white monochrome canvases with projected text and a cascading felt letter 'a'; the exhibition staged a job 'application' for the position of painter. In *On Fridays We Have Half Days* (2014) recast aspects of the movie theater apparatus—box office, concession stand, projection booth—within the space of the gallery: paintings functioned as 'posters' and promotional tools and a stop-motion digital 'trailer' projected them in miniature on live bacterial culture. In 2018, Rayne initiated a series of four exhibitions beginning with *DOGSKULLDOGS* at Miguel Abreu Gallery, centered around painted appropriations of famous Neanderthal skull remnants, engaging while simultaneously suspending the material realities of archeological, cultural and political history, linguistic reference, and the expressivity of painting within an individual art object.

Blake Rayne continually engages the history of painting as a field of tensions that compose the practice of painting as cultural sign. He attempts to work through the need for historical competence in understanding the possible relevance of painting for both the painter's level of self-consciousness *and* for forces of legitimation within a corporate culture of information. The sign 'painting' is on the one hand always compensatory for other cultural interests, at the same time that it also suggests a field of evasions and deflections, a material practice in which the artist is constantly displaced by language while being administered by institutional demands for certain types of artistic subjects: whether the latter be the hack *enfant-terrible* or the artist intent on legitimizing his/her endeavors with a trove of cultural reference.

Blake Rayne (b. 1969, Lewes, Delaware) lives and works in New York. He attended the California Institute of the Arts, received a fellowship from the American Academy in Berlin (2010), and has taught at Columbia University's School of Visual Arts (2003-09).

In 2016-17, Cabin of the Accused, the first survey exhibition of Rayne's work, was held at the Blaffer Art Museum in Houston, Texas. Recent solo exhibitions include Reserves, Miguel Abreu Gallery (2025); Archives I: Blake Rayne, Emanuela Campoli, Paris (2024); Bad Maps, Galeria Nuno Centeno, Porto (2023); Blake Rayne, 1301PE, Los Angeles (2022). His work was included in L'Atelier du Sud, Fondation Vincent van Gogh, Arles (2023-24); Collected by Thea Westreich and Ethan Wagner, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2016); Chat Jet: Painting <Beyond> the Medium, Künstlerhaus, Graz (2013); Nikolas Gambaroff, Michael Kriebler, R. H. Quayman, Blake Rayne, Bergen Kunsthall, Norway (2010), and in numerous other group exhibitions, including at The Kitchen, SculptureCenter, Artists Space, Gladstone Gallery, Reena Spaulings, Greene Naftali, and American Fine Arts, all in New York, and at Gagosian Gallery, Paris.

Rayne's work is held in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; FRAC – Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain Poitou-Charentes, France; Pinault Collection; the Portland Museum of Art; and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, among others.

Tense and Spaced Out: Polar Nights, Glacial Chaos, and the Ecology of Misery, a monograph on Rayne's work, with texts by John Kelsey, David Lewis, Jaleh Mansoor, Laura Owens, Sean Paul, and Javier Sánchez Martínez, was published in 2017 by Sequence Press/Blaffer Art Museum/Sternberg Press.

ARTFORUM

HOUSTON

Blake Rayne

BLAFFER ART MUSEUM

I have seen the work of Blake Rayne in bits and pieces over the years, and in each instance I have been puzzled by what I like to call the ugly ducklings nestled within his installations. By this I mean the one work out of a gaggle of beauties that seems to be deliberately, aggressively out of place. For example, the yogurt container-cum-projection screen perched on the windowsill of Campoli Presti's London gallery back in 2012 (*Yogurt Cinema*, 2014). In a mostly pristine exhibition, it stood out like a sore thumb.



View of "Blake Rayne,"
2016-17. Foreground:
A Line, 2013. Back-
ground, from left:
Untitled, 2010;
Untitled, 2010.
Photo: Peter Molick.

Sometimes the clash makes sense. The decision to hang paintings next to their wooden transport crates worked marvelously in the 2008 exhibition "Dust of Suns" at Miguel Abreu Gallery in New York, reminding us, once again, that canvases are objects, too. I therefore waited with bated breath for Rayne's midcareer retrospective, curated by Javier Sánchez Martínez, in which the ugly ducklings, with the additional context that only such overviews can provide, would finally become glorious swans.

Or so I thought. Instead of finding peaceful resolution, Rayne's oeuvre seems at war with itself. Take, for example, the atrium-like entry gallery, the first of the show's two rooms, in which Rayne's well-regarded series of canvases that have been folded, sprayed, and sewn (in that order) are understandably highlighted. However, as if to slight their elegance, a gang of incompatible objects—a book of felt (*A Line [Almanac]*, 2013), glasses on a wood table next to a plant in a cardboard box (*Table of Contents*, 2010), a plastic bottle (*Untitled*, 2016)—loiters at the center of the room. I suppose the two sets (paintings and things) share a readymade quality. But even so, their visual incongruity overshadows any sense of filiation.

The placement of works in the second room only accentuates the discord. A small squiggly red, white, and blue canvas, *Untitled*, 2012, neighbors five of Rayne's iconic wall works from the series "Cover Letter," 2010, featuring felt letter *a*'s drooping off their canvases onto the floor. Since I don't think an homage to Brice Marden's "Cold Mountain" paintings or Robert Morris's antiforms is intended, I can only assume that the disjunction between pictorial and sculptural, smooth and textured, line and letter, is the goal here.

Everywhere you turn, unlike is pitted against unlike, most jarringly whenever one's gaze crosses a towering, eclectically composed mobile of T-shirts, 3-D letters, and a bicycle hanging in the middle of the room. One corner of the room does, however, approach legibility: A pair of Day-Glo, dye-sublimation-printed abstract canvases draped with equally garish vinyl garlands, both *Untitled*, 2010, are a canny criticism of the arbitrary, decorative impulse underlying so much of today's computer-generated painting. Bracketing these is a pile of the aforementioned felt *a*'s, *A Line*, 2013, and an André Cadere-esque pole. Altogether, the trio surveys the multiple ways in which color can be used as a sign.

Coming from a lesser artist, such cacophony might indicate a confused mind. But works such as *Untitled*, 2011, a panel onto which a chart from Cynthia and Harrison White's art-historical text *Canvases and Careers* (1965) has been silk-screened, show that Rayne is no dummy. The graphic lists by year the number of paintings that each of the Impressionists made over the course of their careers, documenting in numeric form their respective moments of breakthrough. Rayne is all too aware of the complicity between the making and the marketing of art. And indeed, interpretations of his work have tended toward over-cerebralization, earnestly shrouding it in a cloud of semio-speak (abetted by Rayne himself, it must be said). While there is something admirable and even necessary about linking such an artistic practice to the digital and the socioeconomic, I fear that this body of work's most striking feature—namely, the violence of its juxtapositions—has been somewhat downplayed in the artist's critical reception.

It is exceedingly ironic that an oeuvre so hostile to any overarching narrative should so often be explained by one. For it is hard to find a practice with a comparable level of purposeful discontinuity and obfuscation. Rayne's work is neither pastiche nor bricolage, neither assemblage nor pure shock. It would seem that the artist seeks above all to preempt totalization of his practice by any interpretive system, going so far as to refuse to establish a system in the first place. The interpreter's frustration would be akin to sexual frustration, were it not for the fact that the work is so decidedly unerotic. Therefore, the closest thing I can come up with is that emblem of mechanized frustration, the bachelor machine, minus Duchamp's irony and duplicity.

—Paul Galvez

HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

Proposing Painting as a Form of Refusal

Blake Rayne's first midcareer survey is full of linguistic disruptions and quiet repetitions, bringing to mind Bartleby the scrivener's disarming resistance.



'Blake Rayne: Cabin of the Accused,' exhibition view, Blaffer Art Museum at the University of Houston (all photos by Petee Molick unless noted)

"...even in his catatonic or anorexic state, Bartleby is not the patient, but the doctor of a sick America."

—Gilles Deleuze, "Bartleby; or, the Formula"

HOUSTON — As our 45th president's chief white house strategist tells the [media](#) to "keep their mouth shut," as the newly appointed press secretary [chastises everyone](#) for unfairly misrepresenting the 2017 inauguration crowds, and as Kellyanne Conway transmutes alternative facts into reality, one wonders what kind of refusal might counter refusal itself. Given a political machine working overtime to silence any competing versions of the truth, how does one counterattack a far right-extremism that touts falsehoods as "telling it like it is"? Like Tom Huhn, chair of Visual and Critical Studies at the School for Visual Arts in New York, put it in a recent [piece](#) in the *New Yorker*, "Part of what makes Trump attractive to many is that he practices a kind of great refusal himself, saying no to just about everything, and thereby appearing to be on the side of human beings liberating themselves from restrictions and hierarchies." As we enter a global political climate where the alt-right is on the rise and a large constituency is convinced that it's being "liberated" by a particular form of refusal, how does one form a refusal of *another* kind, one that resists and retrieves difference?

One avenue might be something akin to Herman Melville's infamous "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street." In it, a Wall Street lawyer hires a new clerk who, after an intense period of impressive work, simply refuses to make another copy or do any of the other office tasks expected of him. Whenever the lawyer asks Bartleby to do something, Bartleby quietly utters, "I would prefer not to." The phrase beguiles the lawyer: It's not exactly a bold-faced rebuttal, nor is it walk-out, a workers' strike on the streets. While the lawyer continues to press Bartleby to do various tasks, the scrivener instead does less and less. Bartleby eventually starts living in the office as he maintains his staunch and paralyzing "I would prefer not to."



'Blake Rayne: Cabin of the Accused,' exhibition view, Blaffer Art Museum at the University of Houston

I thought about Bartleby while viewing [*Blake Rayne: Cabin of the Accused*](#) at the Blaffer Art Museum at the University of Houston. Rayne's first midcareer survey is full of linguistic disruptions and quiet repetitions, bringing to mind the scrivener's disarming resistance. Wall Street doesn't know the act of "preferring not to" — the simple statement has so much power not just because it interrupts but because it also creates a lingering silence in its lack of alternatives. For me, Rayne's oeuvre and exhibition embody a similar act in the various refusals.



Blake Rayne, "Untitled Painting No. 32 (Cover Letter)" (2015) (photo by Thomas Müller, courtesy of the artist, Blaffer Art Museum, Houston, and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York)

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Take the series “A Line (Cover Letter)” (2011–16), in which felt letter “a”s spill gently off of five large canvases and onto the floor. The way the huge monochrome vowel exceeds the frame does more than simply break the rectangular format; it forces speech into the exhibition space. But it’s a particular kind of speech act: the five canvases in a row become almost like a kind of stutter. As the letter “a” shifts from purple to tan, then to olive green, a deep red, and finally a kind of royal blue across the wall of canvases, it loses its singularity as a letter in the alphabet, becoming instead a sound, an interruption, a shape.

Part of what makes Rayne’s work so interesting is this lingering between things — this neither/nor. One of my favorite moments in the exhibition occurs in the second room, on the back of the long wall that slices the room in half. Rounding the corner, one finds a lone piece propped against the wall, “Self Addressed Stamped Envelop” (2010), which consists of a seven-foot-tall aluminum rod wrapped with two sections of cotton painted in red and yellow acrylic. The bright primary-colored cotton has the texture of washcloths. Casually leaning there, the piece feels as though it is waiting to be activated. But, given the title, is it a reminder to the artist to do something? Or a confirmation that something was already done?



‘Blake Rayne: Cabin of the Accused,’ exhibition view, Blaffer Art Museum at the University of Houston



‘Blake Rayne: Cabin of the Accused,’ exhibition view, Blaffer Art Museum at the University of Houston

For me, “Self Addressed Stamped Envelop” exemplifies the power of Bartleby the scrivener. It seems itself to be saying, “I would prefer not to” — prefer not to be a painting, prefer not to let you in on its secret, prefer not to let you know whether it has been used or is about to be. And it serves as an invitation to consider the before and after, the silence around the object. Rayne’s work and curatorial fellow Javier Sánchez Martínez’s skillful arrangement has created an environment that curates silence and silent refusal into a whole organism.

In his powerfully lyrical essay on *Bartleby*, philosopher Gilles Deleuze writes of the way in which the phrase of refusal creates a “music in its stuttering language” and nearly “carves out a kind of foreign language within language.” While Rayne’s more painterly 2008–09 “Untitled” works can at first appear a bit decorative, if you stay in them a little longer, the spray-painted patterns on gessoed linen start to look like pre-linguistic hunks or ruins of a forgotten typeface. Patterns, yes, but in the context of the show as a whole, they are broken alphabets, paused screensavers looping endlessly between letters appearing and disappearing. Suspended in different pre-linguistic states, Rayne’s paintings start to feel like this “foreign language within language.”

At times like this, one wonders what the future holds for painting. What can painting *do*? In a moment where versions of reality that don’t line up exactly with that of the current US administration are being silenced; in a moment where Donald Trump’s tweets and bullying remarks toward a handicapped reporter get remixed with Snapchat face-swaps and cat videos, maybe painting can “prefer not to.” This is not to say that painting production should ignore the unending mashups, resting aloof and outside of a culture that, day by day, appears to be increasingly like an episode of *Black Mirror*. Rather, it’s to say that painting can still enact a haunting a neither/nor, a silence that bewilders and pauses us in the vein of Rayne and Bartleby the scrivener.



Blake Rayne, “Almanac (2013) (photo by Florian Kleinfenn, courtesy of the artist, Blaffer Art Museum, Houston, and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York)

[Blake Rayne: Cabin of the Accused](#) continues at the Blaffer Art Museum (120 Fine Arts Building, Houston) through March 18.

Hollywood Texas The Movie Myths of Hubbard Bricker

In One of William Blake's First Works, the Engaged Trials of an Unfortunate Soul

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: Blake Rayne, *These Pellets Here This Powder There*

Location: 36 Orchard Street, New York, NY 10002

Dates: May 1 – June 19, 2016

Reception: Sunday, May 1, 6 – 8PM

Miguel Abreu Gallery is pleased to announce the opening, on Sunday, May 1st, of *These Pellets Here This Powder There*, Blake Rayne's fifth solo exhibition at the gallery. On view at our 36 Orchard Street space, the show is comprised of the following:

3/4 inch wide steel banding designed to be used to secure crates to their pallets during overseas shipments is here unspooled from its coil and employed to form a drawing in the space, made from the front to the back of the gallery. Once established, this drawing is held together by paperclips and compressed into a frame that shares a dimension with the series of paintings that adorn the walls.

A group of 60 x 45 inch paintings are the result of a similar steel banding drawing, albeit one produced in Rayne's current Navy Yard studio. The banding was again compressed within a temporary frame around the edges of the paintings and utilized as a soft stencil to create a white looping line lightly dusted with aerated acrylic paint in layers of various colors. The paperclips that initially held the banding together were released to allow for expansion into final shape of each of the line compositions. They now appear as silhouettes, while 8 1/2 x 11 inch US letter-sized portions of the white canvas are left exposed, containing short texts traced in graphite.

Two large 8 1/2 x 11 foot acrylic polymer and pigment paintings that evoke the endpapers that bind a book's cover to its content bracket the smaller paintings and function within the exhibition's scenography as quasi-backdrops against which the steel banding and gallery staff are positioned.

The gallery desk, having been rotated 90° and moved from its usual position to the adjacent wall, such that it appears to be a pier extending out into the gallery, is covered by a sheet of thick glass, straddling the divide between a museum vitrine on the one hand, and, on the other, a bar.

The name of the exhibition, spelled out in Helvetica, is painted in glossy acrylic polymer on the gallery wall with the use of a vinyl stencil, disappearing into the wall and visible only in raking light.

The gallery shelves, cleared of most of their content, will display several copies of Rayne's *Gangs of New York City* artist's book zip tied together so that only one copy is perusable. The book itself juxtaposes historical images of New York City police uniforms with drawings made with the fat Rayne collected from his semi-regular pig roasts at his former studio.

A looping 6 minute film, transferred from video to 16mm, will project against the wall. Entitled *La Libertad*, after the municipality on the coast of El Salvador where it was shot, the film depicts a sounder of pigs at the beach, eating clams.

For Rayne, painting is not only to be defined through its material components, it also exists as a fleeting sign that requires testing, stretching, and constant reassessment so as to remain alive in permanently renewed cultural circumstances. Taken together, the works in this compact exhibition, which expand from drawing to sculpture, performance to painting, and film to scenography, demonstrate Rayne's ambivalent, constantly reimagined and dynamic relationship towards the medium of painting, while also recalling the constituent parts of the gallery's inaugural exhibition ten years ago, *Empedocles/Hölderlin, Cézanne/Gasquet, Straub/Huillet, Dominique Païni & Blake Rayne: two films, one text & paintings*.



Blake Rayne, "These Pellets Here This Powder There"



Blake Rayne's show ranges across a variety of mediums and processes in its quest for the continued utility of painting as a discipline. A low-key challenge to art's ingrained expectations around representation and reflection, the work here is connected in ways that are sometimes hermetic and sometimes playful.

POSTED: MONDAY MAY 30 2016

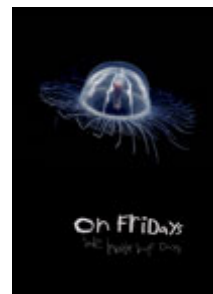
MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: Blake Rayne
On Fridays We Have Half Days

Dates: May 9 – June 25, 2014

Reception: Friday, May 9, 6 – 9PM



Miguel Abreu Gallery is pleased to announce Blake Rayne's *On Fridays We Have Half Days*, opening at the gallery on Friday, May 9th, 2014.

In his fourth solo exhibition at the gallery, Rayne unveils a sequence of events, or media studies, as he calls them, that build upon a series of recent solo exhibitions including *Blake Rayne* (2013), *Almanac* (2013), *Wild Country* (2012), and *This is New York City* (2012).

Here, the exhibition begins with an architectural intervention comprised of an amendment to one of the two bookshelves that have been inside the front windows of 36 Orchard Street since the gallery's inaugural exhibition in 2006. Creating a passage between the gallery's two locations, the exhibition moves from this deinstallation to a consideration of painting as a spatial practice, materially displacing a series of cinematic terms into a group of at once familiar, yet surprising objects.

For instance, the "dissolve" presents a single work comprised of ten pieces of paper individually dyed with Kool-Aid, and printed with an adhesive, which, while drying, is dusted with a layer of 7.66 ounces of walnut shell powder distributed across the individual prints until exhausted. Turning from the gradually dissolving legibility of the still (a desktop frame grab), the print series is completed by a C-print selected from Rayne's ever expanding catalogue of iPhone image captures of the transparent glass border between the projection booth and the reflective screen in the cinema, in this case showing popcorn aligned on a narrow cill below it.

This image of an overexposed projection leads to the cinema scene itself, the following room featuring a mobile made of a bicycle frame rescued from a previous show featuring a constellation of prints. Live "culture", further, is manifested by an upturned bucket of yogurt positioned on a pedestal of stacked rectangular cardboard "files" upon which a 108 minute looped video is projected.

The video loop opens to a composition of ten acrylic and oil paintings, each recording streams of movement and editing like a stuttering shot sequence, or "stop action" animation. The exhibition then concludes with a second architectural amendment to complement the first, an iris-sized shot through one of the gallery's ten eastwardly facing windows, looking back towards the window alteration on Orchard Street where, along with the films of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, Rayne had the inaugural exhibition.

For more information or for visuals, please contact the gallery:

Miguel Abreu Gallery

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Hours: Wednesday – Sunday, 10:30AM to 6:30PM and by appointment

Subway: F to East Broadway; B, D to Grand Street; J, M, Z to Delancey / Essex Street



Blake Rayne, "On Fridays We Have Half Days"

The reasoning behind Rayne's work can seem inscrutable, meta to the point of incoherence, but he's proved himself adept at creating compelling objects, no matter the thinking behind them. This show, for example, includes architectural interventions to Abreu's space (some fussing with a bookshelf in the Orchard Street location; a hole shot through one of the windows in the Eldridge Street gallery); a mobile made from a bicycle frame; iPhone photos of the projection-booth window at a movie theater; and a video projection on a bucket of yogurt. A "consideration of painting as a spatial practice"? So Rayne claims.

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

ARTFORUM

Blake Rayne

FORMALIST SIDEWALK POETRY CLUB

235 12th Street

December 1–January 12

As if there wasn't enough art to buy at Art Basel Miami Beach, this year's edition marked an unprecedented move into retail. While several artists teamed up with luxury brands for limited edition purses (Anselm Reyle with Dior, Liam Gillick with Pringle of Scotland), Blake Rayne's understocked exhibition at this gallery, with its three variations on one simple yet declarative sentence, took the whole fiasco to task. The piece, *UNTITLED*, 2011, features this single line replicated on two canvases displayed in a vertical column, and in an enlarged version projected onto the gallery's back wall. In a font that brings to mind California (or at least its license plates), they each read: THIS IS NEW YORK CITY.



View of "Blake Rayne," 2011.

Rayne culled the text from New York's first international advertising campaign, which began in 2007 with the sentence superimposed on stock images of the metropolis. The hurried, handwritten font extends Rayne's previous work with typescripts, last seen with the giant serif a sliding off the wall at a 2010 show, titled "Folder and Application," at Miguel Abreu Gallery in New York. By marrying identity to a font, the advertising campaign seems like the corporate shadow of work like Josh Smith's "Stage Paintings," 2011, and Joshua Abelow's "Call Me Abstract," 2010, both faux-Expressionistic series made up solely of the letters in the artist's name or phone number. As such, Rayne's show tries to identify a dividing line between style and brand.

As Rayne's new paintings were copied from the original advertisement, the projector here serves as an anthropomorphic representation of the artist engaged not in creation but in broadcasting. The projector itself, which remains in its Styrofoam packaging, is also trained on an empty wall. The packaging is a metonymic entrée into the exhibition as a whole. Like the aforementioned font issue, it lampoons a recent trend through reduction: in this case, the packaging versus storage meme set up by Seth Price with his *Holes*, 2003, and continued by Cory Arcangel's *Volume Management*, 2011, both of which feature televisions still in their boxes. It also underscores the exhibition as a waypoint on the larger traffic of commodities, which could be defined as objects that require Styrofoam. Rayne updates David Joselit's 2009 essay "Painting Beside Itself" for the holiday season; painting has now been put on layaway.

— Hunter Braithwaite

TEXTE ZUR KUNST

Blake Rayne, "Shade Subscription", Captain Petzel, Berlin, 2011, installation view



MODE OF PRODUCTION

John Beeson on Blake Rayne at Captain Petzel, Berlin

We sometimes talk about painting being dispersed – of its logics of production and reception entering into the forms of installation, sculpture, photography, etc. But there are still grounds for its criticism in these expanded forms. In Blake Rayne's recent exhibition "Shade Subscription", his painting permeated a variety of processes and products, and it ranged in quality. Serving to complicate such an evaluation was the fact that in the case of some works, the artist appeared not to be trying, at least not in earnest. In the case of others, he assumed a critical attitude toward contemporary painting.

Scattered throughout Captain Petzel's spacious gallery were several parts from a bicycle, a motif that aptly relates to the mechanism of Rayne's

artistic output. If his production is in fact conceivable as a mechanism, or if his process could be conceivable as the manipulation of established procedures, then what is more present: functionality in producing meaning, functionality in producing paintings, or style? The bike – a Raymond Poulidor, a fancy racer named after a famous French rider, and in an attractive purple color – has plenty of style. So does Rayne. Some of these works exhibit characteristic traits; "RSVP" (all works 2011), with its overlaid text element laser cut from a large swath of felt, and "Felt Kind of Fun", with its paint-soaked towel wrapped around a chrome pole, recall similarly constructed works included in the artist's exhibitions "Folder and Application" at Miguel Abreu Gallery in New York in 2010 and "Coastal Graphics" at Sutton Lane in Paris earlier this year. But do these new works offer something unique, or uniquely meaningful?

Blake Rayne, "Blake", 2011



The works in this exhibition in fact prompted a concern for value, since many of the artist's canvases contained pages collaged from the *The New York Times* featuring ads for such luxury commodities as Rolex and Cartier watches and Chanel, Gucci, and Prada accessories. As highlighted by Sam Lewitt's work "Templates: sequence 01/.../10" included in his exhibition at Galerie Daniel Buchholz in Berlin last year, such ads recur systematically. In the case of Rayne's works, on top of the pages of newspaper and extending onto other areas of the substrate, the artist silkscreened tables of information from the

famous study "Canvases and Careers" (1965) by Harrison C. White and Cynthia A. White addressing the relative output of Degas, Pissarro, Sisley, and Manet. What we can glean from these charts is that those painters produced much more work at the heights of their 40- to 50-year careers – Pissarro created 27 oil paintings between 1861 and 1865 and 203 between 1871 and 1875; Manet painted 16 works between 1856 and 1860 and 80 between 1876 and 1880. In such a way, Rayne critiques the habit of over-production that apparently sets in when an artist achieves widespread recognition.

And in one fell swoop, he implicates his peers in this criticism at the same time that he thus considers them – himself included – raised to that level of accomplishment. To pointed effect, the series “Rest in Shade 1–5” co-opts the signature of R. H. Quaytman, which is collage and printmaking methods on wood-mounted dibond. By lining up five panels that repeat the same construction and sometimes reuse the same screens, Rayne invoked seriality, reproductive processes as a mode of creation, and the progression moving from panel to panel. Still, from another perspective, having reproduced information that he could have supplied on just one panel, Rayne in fact embodied the very notion of increased production with its connotation of commercial incentive. Thus, by comparing the series’ title with the exhibition’s, one could deduce that the “shade” to which the artist alludes is a leisurely, perhaps luxurious retreat.

Distinct because of the idiosyncrasy of its means, “Blake”, an installation comprising the two wheels of the bicycle, twigs, and leaves arranged on the floor, constitutes “a portrait of the artist as autumnal still-life” – a mere smiley face. Fragile but unconcerned, the assemblage suggests a method of production based on the treatment of available elements. These elements are categorically readymade, and their facile arrangement has as little command on aesthetic primacy as did the traditional examples of that method, without any of their conceptual primacy. Call it irony or call it abuse, this is a brazen vulgarization of the readymade gesture.

Another field of installation comprises “Untitled” – the bike’s frame, standing upside-down; next to it “Felt Kind of Fun”, a painted-cyan bench shrouded in a felt stencil version of “Table

8: Year-by-Year Count of Impressionist Paintings”, beside it a chrome rod wrapped in a lime-green paint-soaked towel, and the red light cast through a filter by one of the gallery’s overhead bulbs onto a white wall. Here, the emphasis is on the composite aesthetic of the works in installation. They do have a certain intrigue, especially in that Rayne attends relatively subtly to forms that are quite distant. As an addition to his palette by means of the gallery’s standard light fixtures, the red light on the wall emphasizes the space’s physical specificity and the work’s complicity with its context in determining its presence.

Works that supported a dialogue on viewing and on the artist’s act of submitting material to be viewed maintained a particular connection to exhibition venue. “Slöt”, which concerns this topic from multiple perspectives, is a series of canvases wedged lengthwise between two parallel, temporary walls. A canvas collaged with newspaper sits flush with the walls on one end. Set slightly back from the opposite end is a canvas, also facing out, but which is blank, white, and wrapped in clear plastic. Raised above the ground, cordoning off the space behind it, and given its appearance as a door set between the two walls, the form contributes to the delineation of a stall-type space, generally, and, specifically, a stall in a public bathroom. The installation thus deridingly implies that either for having sought this privacy (of contemplating objects in a gallery) or given the natural inclination to peer into the space hidden within this construction, the viewer’s motivation is furtive. This voyeuristic narrative was extended as viewers ascended the staircase to the showroom-style gallery’s upper level. No works were displayed here, but the mezzanine offers a view of the top sections of

the eleven other canvases wedged inside “Slöt”, which obscured one another. Up above, at a point from which one could both see and be seen, one was drawn into a dialogue with the artist on the negotiation between revealing and concealing.

What was earlier referred to as Rayne’s critical attitude toward painting could also be considered a wayward self-reflection. In this exhibition, Rayne’s recourse was to enact a scatological interpretation of painting that metaphorically engaged our understanding of the artist’s interiority. The viewer’s space was recurrently bracketed into a type of stall or stalls – such was the case with the three painted-white cardboard boxes lined up along the back wall of the gallery space, all of which have two squares of toilet paper draped over their forms. Naturally, they are titled “Stall 1, 2, 3”. Beside them hung a canvas that had been smeared and scratched, daubed and splattered with complementary colors, resulting in a rather energetically treated brown. One of the bicycle’s tire tubes also encircles the canvas, entitled “Goat (Back in the Tube)”. Into this constellation of elements it is difficult not to read a reference to Robert Rauschenberg’s “Monogram” (1955–59), his combine including an Angora goat donning a tire around its middle. This reference teeters so precipitously over the work that Rayne’s activity seems unable to get a word in otherwise, to carve out space for anything like sincere, autonomous meaning.

From here, one can justly return to the initial query. To what end does Rayne’s activity in producing “Shade Subscription” most prominently point? The response: from a starting point of painting, by methods that are tried and true – if abused – and back to production that bears the name Blake Rayne and the current year. When

taken individually, Rayne’s diverse products did not always stand on solid grounds. And their interaction was not harmonious but rather cumulative. As nameable subjects combined with the artist’s multifarious points of reference as well as the particulars of the exhibition space, the works began to address something that was not founded on the painter’s interiority (or accessible by an analysis of the artist’s activity as earnest expression) or on what was contained on the painted surface. Rayne’s treatment of references and processes spoke distantly but in a way gainfully in an artistic language – in fact in several languages – about those traditions that are neither formal, nor conceptual, but which are rather practical or procedural.

Blake Rayne, “Shade Subscription”, Capitain Petzel, Berlin, September 17 – October 29, 2011.

art agenda

Blake Rayne's "Shade Subscription"

CAPTAIN PETZEL, Berlin

September 17–October 29, 2011

Shade Subscription

by BRUNO MACAEB
Shade Subscription

October 11, 2011

An autumnal smiley face—made out of two bicycle wheels, some tree twigs, and some dry leaves (freckles from summer?)—is the first thing greeting the viewer of Blake Rayne's "Shade Subscription." Once we go behind the wall abutting this work, named after the artist himself, *Blake* (2011), it seems only appropriate that we should now come upon the hapless bicycle frame, turned upside down: a true downer, a bike going nowhere.

The logic of the readymade dictates as much, as Rayne illustrates with his series *Shade Subscription* (2011). There are literally endless issues of the *New York Times* that could have been used here, a new one being produced every day. But Rayne has chosen to show us only the reverse side of the front page, which has its daily constants: Chanel, for instance, has a monopoly on the upper-left-hand corner of page two. But by superimposing these newspaper pages with a scholarly graph showing us the number of paintings produced each decade by some famous Impressionists, Rayne wants to suggest that the same logic—endless production across a spectrum of variations—was at play in their work. On this point the current show adds an intriguing suggestion. Perhaps there is more in common between the readymade and abstraction than one might surmise at first: they are both interested in the relatively formless space of possibility: the space before reality takes an individualized shape.

The main work in this show, *Slöt* (2011), could be described as a machine for artistic production. Wedged tightly between two gallery walls, Rayne has aligned thirteen canvases in such a way that only the two outside works can be seen from the ground floor, and one of these outside canvases is wrapped in plastic packaging. From the mezzanine above, the impression is of a gigantic canvas container. The small visible portion of the fifth canvas shows us what looks like an organic shape, part of a plant or bird. Indeed, two of the partially hidden works refer to old themes of the artist, even if the visitor would not necessarily know this. What do they matter, these old ideas? They are now in the past, replaced by the next big thing. While dramatizing the slightly embarrassing concept of an artistic career, this piece is also a reflection on the fall from grace which is an essential part of every artwork. What started as limitless possibility becomes one work among millions, and from this surrender to the world it can never recover. It is not a mechanical process, of course, as Rayne tries to show by including and thus depicting a number of accidents along the way.

Blake Rayne grapples here with important questions, thoughtful questions. He is still, as in previous shows in New York and Bergen, deeply concerned with the status of painting in the age of mechanical reproduction, but he seems to have reconceived what the main challenge to painting really is. Rather than reducing painting to its material medium, Rayne has reduced it to its immaterial beginnings: his work makes explicit and visible the moment when a painting could have become anything. By moving in this direction, Rayne is forced to move further away from painting than he was ever willing to before. He has not abandoned it: his installations are still largely composed around the theme of painting itself. And perhaps possibility is not formless after all—or the artist would not have succeeded in including so many alternatives within a single work, like a garden of forking paths.

Bruno Macaeb is an adviser to the Portuguese Prime Minister. He is on leave from the European College of Liberal Arts in Berlin. He has previously published art reviews in *Texte zur Kunst*.



1 Blake Rayne, *Rest in Shade 4*, 2011.



2 Blake Rayne, *RSVP*, 2011.



3 Blake Rayne, *Slöt*, 2011.



4 Blake Rayne, *Stall 1, 2, 3*, 2011.

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: Blake Rayne
Folder and Application

Dates: May 9 – June 26, 2010

Reception: Sunday, May 9, 6 – 8PM

Miguel Abreu Gallery is pleased to present Blake Rayne's *Folder and Application*, the artist's third solo exhibition at the gallery. On view are a new series of paintings and floor works that are collectively structured by the protocols of application writing. Rayne's work deftly traverses this organizing principle with its inherent semantic play. The "application folder" is modulated and distorted throughout the exhibition in a variety of slips and puns that signal broader contexts of material production, word processing, and employment. Indeed, one imagines that the figure who circulates throughout this exhibition (perhaps named "the folder") is an artist in the situation of either only being precariously capable of applying his or herself to the vagaries of artistic self-representation, or one who is nimbly able to dodge its mandates. Out of this ambiguity, Rayne re-programs the application of the painter's resources – computer, canvas, paint – as they are scripted within the social domain of artistic production.

The paintings in *Folder and Application* oscillate between strict chromatic reduction and the decorative logic of the applied arts. In much of this work, the activities of folding, spraying and stitching that have featured as dominant components in the construction of Rayne's work for the past several years reappear in this exhibit as codified and elastic terms. These productive procedures surface here in a strangely distanced guise; as if to offer confirmation of a subject as much enveloped in a field of painting's historical forms as he is preoccupied with applying himself to the task of employing them for use.

Rayne engages painting's history as a field of tensions that compose the practice of painting as cultural sign. He attempts to work through the need for historical competence in understanding the possible relevance of painting for both the painter's level of self-consciousness *and* for forces of legitimation within a corporate culture of information. This suggests that the sign "painting" is on the one hand always compensatory for other cultural interests. Nevertheless it also suggests a field of evasions and deflections, a material practice in which the artist is constantly displaced by language while being administered by institutional demands for certain types of artistic subjects: whether the latter be the hack *enfant-terrible* or the artist intent on legitimizing his/her endeavors with a trove of cultural reference. To some degree, Rayne attempts to organize a recognition of this dislocation by focusing on its more mundane and marginalized aspects: the laborious task of arranging one's self-presentation for the filing of an application. Yet Rayne explodes the fixity of the terms of this arrangement in an attempt to open the possibility for examining the conditions of artistic self-enablement and perhaps, for agency.

For more information or for visuals, please contact the gallery:

36 Orchard Street (between Canal & Hester), New York, NY 10002
Tel 212.995.1774 • Fax 646.688.2302 • post@miguelabreugallery.com

Gallery hours: Wednesday – Sunday, 11:00 AM to 6:30 PM

Subway: F to East Broadway; B, D to Grand Street or J, M, Z to Delancey / Essex Street

Things to do or see in New York
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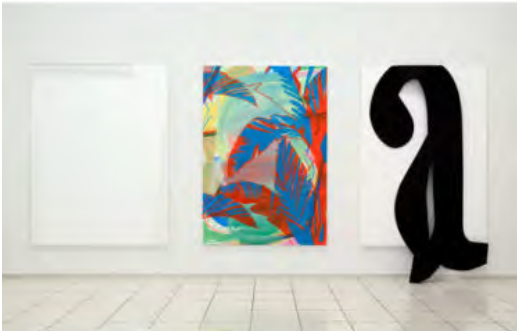
All dates
All dates

All areas
All areas

Blake Rayne, "Folder & Application"

The artist gets worked up over the idea of work.

By Howard Halle



Painting is enjoying something of a revival lately, especially in Lower East Side galleries. Although I've mentioned this trend in past reviews, it's worth adding that this is only the latest in a series of periodic resuscitations the medium has experienced since Minimalism and Conceptual Art supposedly threw the last shovelful of dirt on its coffin in the late 1960s. To begin with, Minimal Art had its own coterie of painters, but over the decades, the craft has waxed and waned in various forms. The 1970s, for example, saw something called New Image painting, briefly entertained in a survey of the same name at the Whitney Museum. In the '80s, members of the so-called Pictures generation turned to painting, launching Neo-Expressionism as an international vogue. The '90s gave rise to the schools of Luc Tuymans and Neo Rauch in Europe, to Peter Doig in the U.K., and in New York, to the figurative weirdness of John Currin and Lisa Yuskavage, along with a ragtag bunch—the late Steven Parrino, Steve DiBenedetto, Fred Tomaselli and Bill Komoski, among others—who kept plugging away on canvas, or something like it, in idiosyncratic fashion. For a corpse, then, painting has been exquisitely reanimated—and reanimated—time and again (and I haven't even bothered to mention the painting stars coming out of China, India and elsewhere). Still, if the medium wasn't killed off by Conceptualism, it's been forced into a defensive crouch. Although many of the younger artists picking up the brush today do so intuitively, or with an anything-goes attitude, there are others, notably a small group around Miguel Abreu Gallery on Orchard Street, who employ elaborate, conceptual stratagems to justify their work. Blake Rayne is one of them, and his current outing showcases both the strengths and weaknesses of their approach. Rayne, who's been on the circuit since the mid-'90s, isn't a painter so much as he is a "painter," whose bag of tricks has included film and installation. In his previous exhibit, he presented wooden shipping crates alongside a series of compositions—sporting a geometric pattern created by successively folding and spray-painting canvas—for which they were presumably made. Or was it the other way around? Chicken-or-egg conundrums, couched as double or even triple entendres, are something of a staple for the artist, and they are deployed here as meditations on the notion of work in its different manifestations—not just as artistic oeuvre, but in the more mundane senses of busying oneself, or employment. More importantly, perhaps, the objects in this show also pivot on the differences between "fine" and "applied" art, as well as on the historical place of the monochrome in modern art. If that sounds like a lot to masticate, it is: As this exhibit's title suggests, the items here at first blush play on the words *folder* and *application* in their varying noun and verb forms. All-white versions of his folded paintings reprise his previous show, while other pieces—like *Cover Letter*, another all-white number draped with a giant letter *a* cut out of black felt—pun on the rituals of the job search. As an added jolt, Rayne has included images of bright tropical flora appropriated from textiles, and a sort of lo-fi take on Barnett Newman's *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue* done with paint-soaked towels. The overall effect is both maddeningly convoluted and endearingly dopey. Clearly, Rayne's aim is to revisit reductive painting, however roundaboutly, and in this respect his methodology is like the one laid out in the fall 2009 issue of *October*, the art journal for hundred-pound heads. In an essay called "Painting Besides Itself," Yale professor David Joselit argues for something called "transitive painting," in which the canvas or panel or whatever is merely one node in a network of associations or visualizations that exist outside the object itself—and without which the work can't really function as art. Beyond rehearsing a catchphrase to replace relational aesthetics as the critical chew toy du jour, Joselit seems to be making another in a long and somewhat repetitive line of having-your-cake-and-eating-it-too arguments for painting. As we all know, it's the most comestible of art-market commodities, and therefore the serious artist must always carry the silver crucifix of difficulty to ward off the dark bite of easy money. Never mind that this is done precisely to sustain the puncture marks of success. Rayne, interestingly, is not mentioned in Joselit's piece, but he's following the transitive recipe to a tee. He whips up a metaphorical soufflé—enforced leisure as a blank-slate state—but what you're really left with is an elegant tableau in crisp white, punctuated with color. The creamy formalist center may be covered with a thin theoretical shell, but it's still eye candy.

frieze

Blake Rayne

SUTTON LANE - PARIS, PARIS, FRANCE



There are four paintings on display at Blake Rayne's new Sutton Lane exhibition: three on the left wall, one on the right. At first glance these appear to be rather similar - blandly decorative, even. Each is made from three panels of canvas and each panel has been pleated and spray-painted, forming geometric bands that have been sewn together to make the painting. The upper and lower panels are not completely primed along their horizontal edges, so each painting is bracketed by a small stretch of raw canvas. The works are also framed, however, and one notices that not all of the frames are the same: the three paintings on the left wall are framed in white while that on the right is in red. One notices, too, that this highlighted painting is hung much higher than the others. This has the effect not only of again singling it out but also of activating the space between the walls, so that one's attention moves within each painting as well as between them, looking around the gallery to where — if one hadn't already noticed — shipping crates are displayed. These block much of the room and mask, or mark, the fourth corner of the gallery.

Exhibition: BLAKE RAYNE*Opening Reception, March 23, 6 pm**Gallery Closed, April 13, 6:30 pm**Reopen, April 19, 11 am**Closed, May 18, 6:30 pm***Dates: March 23 – May 18, 2008**

Blake Rayne's second exhibition at Miguel Abreu Gallery revolves around a number of paintings, each of which results from a standard operation of construction. Rayne unfolds, primes, folds and directs an aerosol spray of pigment onto a roll of linen from which sections are then chosen, sewn and cropped into a consistent scale. Rayne's paintings, which situate themselves between a history of reflexive material procedures and structures of linguistic description, produce the canvas as a site of conflict between an impossible autonomy and a dispersed referentiality. If Rayne doubles the readymade weave of his canvas in a *textile* patterning, one whose folding and merging he chromatically designates, then these paintings are also *textualized* as scripts of production: displacing the material process into the flat, graphic space of linguistic signs. (Indeed, one might be forgiven for perceiving the spatial structure of distorted majuscules as a result of the folding process through which the paintings are produced.)

Displayed alongside these canvases are the crates in which they were shipped. The latter, hung on the walls alongside their supposed content, are cast as the gestural co-presence of painting's movement from studio, to display, to storage. During the exhibition Rayne will extend the weft which binds his particular type of textile/textual processes, reaching from the material sign of "painting" to yet another container: the gallery will be closed for a set duration of the exhibition, to be re-opened for its final four weeks.

The logic of painterly abstraction which Rayne deploys, thus extended into a gesture of folding – of closing and re-opening – the gallery, weaves container and contained in an imbricated and inextricable relationship: one structuring the other according to the un-sutured fabric of cultural abstraction. Neighborhood gentrification, that which envelopes the gallery as a specific sort of place in a specific time, could be a potentially enfolded element, its cycles and un-even developments closing and opening to certain classes of people and certain types of investment. Far from neutrally designating these cycles, Rayne claims the title of F. Scott Fitzgerald's first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, as an emblematic textual element, inscribing a stance onto canvas positioned to one side of the line demarcated by his folds. Rayne describes the novel as illustrating "a moment at which a certain class reflexively discovers the hollowness of the conventions and means of self-representation upon which it is founded, just at the moment before the depression," and this seems topical enough with Bear Sterns throwing-in the devalued chips that they had so recklessly invested in the sub-prime mortgage debacle. It is *that other side*, relative to but *definitely not* paradise, which appears in Rayne's work as the breakdown of historical projects of painterly abstraction. But this reiteration of breakdown comes latent with new conditions for work to be done, ones which Rayne suggests urgently need to be unfolded.

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ARTFORUM

Blake Rayne

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

In planning the Blue Tower, a luxury-condominium complex on Manhattan's Lower East Side, Bernard Tschumi Architects faced, according to the firm's website, a particular challenge: "to create an original architectural statement while simultaneously maximizing the zoning envelope." To meet this challenge, the architects designed the structure to cantilever over the commercial space to the south so that its upper floors are larger than its footprint but within its sanctioned "envelope." The Blue Tower thereby redefines a squat tenement-building skyline by pushing up against its confines. In Blake Rayne's second exhibition at nearby Miguel Abreu Gallery, however, the building lay flat, under glass, in the form of an architectural rendering. In the tower itself, square footage and monetary value have been inflated to the highest numbers possible; in Rayne's appropriation, they have been compressed: neat, clean, almost insubstantial.

Placed on the reception desk, which Rayne had moved to the center of the gallery, the image was folded into the show's fabric, as it were. Folding was, in fact, in play throughout. Each of the seven paintings on view is made up of three panels of gessoed linen that had been spray-painted while folded. Reopened and stitched together horizontally, the panels feature flat, graphic friezes of geometric shapes (some similar to the silhouette of the Blue Tower) that alternate with the white gesso backgrounds in colors including taupe, mauve, and gold. Most of the canvases have additional touches (handpainted lines, stenciled letters). Alongside these large works hung panels taken from the wooden crates used to transport them, the pairings both suggesting

another spatial collapse (this one between container and contained) and implicating the gallery in the same rapid, perpetual turnover that happens on the streets around it. More forceful in the latter regard were the various incarnations the show took: For about a week midway, Rayne closed the gallery and allowed Megan Fraser to shoot a film inside it. After this, he reopened it in still another form, having added a small found image (depicting a man on a bicycle that has been altered so as to double as a knife sharpener) and repositioned the desk and the screen on which was running Fraser's *Tour d'Ombres* (Tower of Shadows), 2007, a film he had left on view from the previous exhibition.

The Blue Tower's glass facades are "meant to reflect the multiple realities" of the surrounding neighborhood, and this show seemed to have similar intentions. Rayne put together a cool presentation that, if it offered a critique (of gentrification, of making "machines for living"), did so understatedly, by adopting the fabric of the world around it, one less like patchwork than like origami. The exhibition design, the works themselves, and the compositional details were presented as overlapping, their meanings compacted and partly concealed. Playing across the surface, however, were a few allusions that lent the selection a darker finish. Rayne's *Untitled Painting No. 7*, 2008, for example, portrays the number five, in both word and numeral form, in gold paint—the same subject found in Charles Demuth's famous watercolor, *The Figure 5 in Gold*, 1928, which itself refers to William Carlos Williams's poem "The Great Figure" (1921), where a golden five speeds through traffic on a red fire truck. *Untitled Painting No. 2*, 2008, displays, as its topmost paint layer, the title of F. Scott Fitzgerald's first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1921). That these visually prominent references are rooted in the 1920s did not seem coincidental. To part the folds was to recognize the moment before a crash.

—Kyle Bentley



View of "Blake Rayne," 2008.

ART PAPERS



BLAKE RAYNE NEW YORK

Writing on Eva Hesse's *Contingent* in 1979, Rosalind Krauss isolates a peculiar possibility for painting, which she calls "double perspective." For Krauss, Hesse bridges the gap between painting and sculpture by positioning her canvases at a ninety-degree angle from the wall. Cloth hangs from the ceiling, near the wall; its edge sweeps across the floor as it blows in the breeze. Moving about the space of the gallery, the viewer simultaneously encounters sculpture and painting.

The exhibition *Blake Rayne: Dust of Suns* departs from this implicit double perspective, although the slide is not between media [Miguel Abreu Gallery; March 23–May 18, 2008]. Rayne's work deploys borderline objects to examine space and economic value.

Here, one is visually bombarded with large wooden crates and gigantic paintings consisting of six pieces of canvas stitched together. The binding of the canvas surfaces indexically reveals the process of their production. Traces of the painter's process are mapped out on the surface of the works: priming, folding, spraying, unfolding, splicing, and threading together linen. These steps produce textile-like paintings whose warped rectilinear shapes lean and tilt against one another.

Rayne adds a textual layer to some of these paintings. In *Untitled Painting No. 2*, 2008, the expression "This Side of Paradise" appears over the textile background. The sharp contrast between spray-painted ground and font-like graphic triggers a question. Which side of the canvas are we looking at? The front, the back, or a space in-between? Which is left and where is right? The hard edges of the letters prevent the painting from enacting the traditional marriage of figure and ground insofar as the objecthood of the layered font atop casts the primed painting as a backdrop. What's more, "This Side of Paradise" gestures to the space that the painting occupies in the gallery. Like a Carl Andre floor tile, which draws out space on the floor and investigates the space

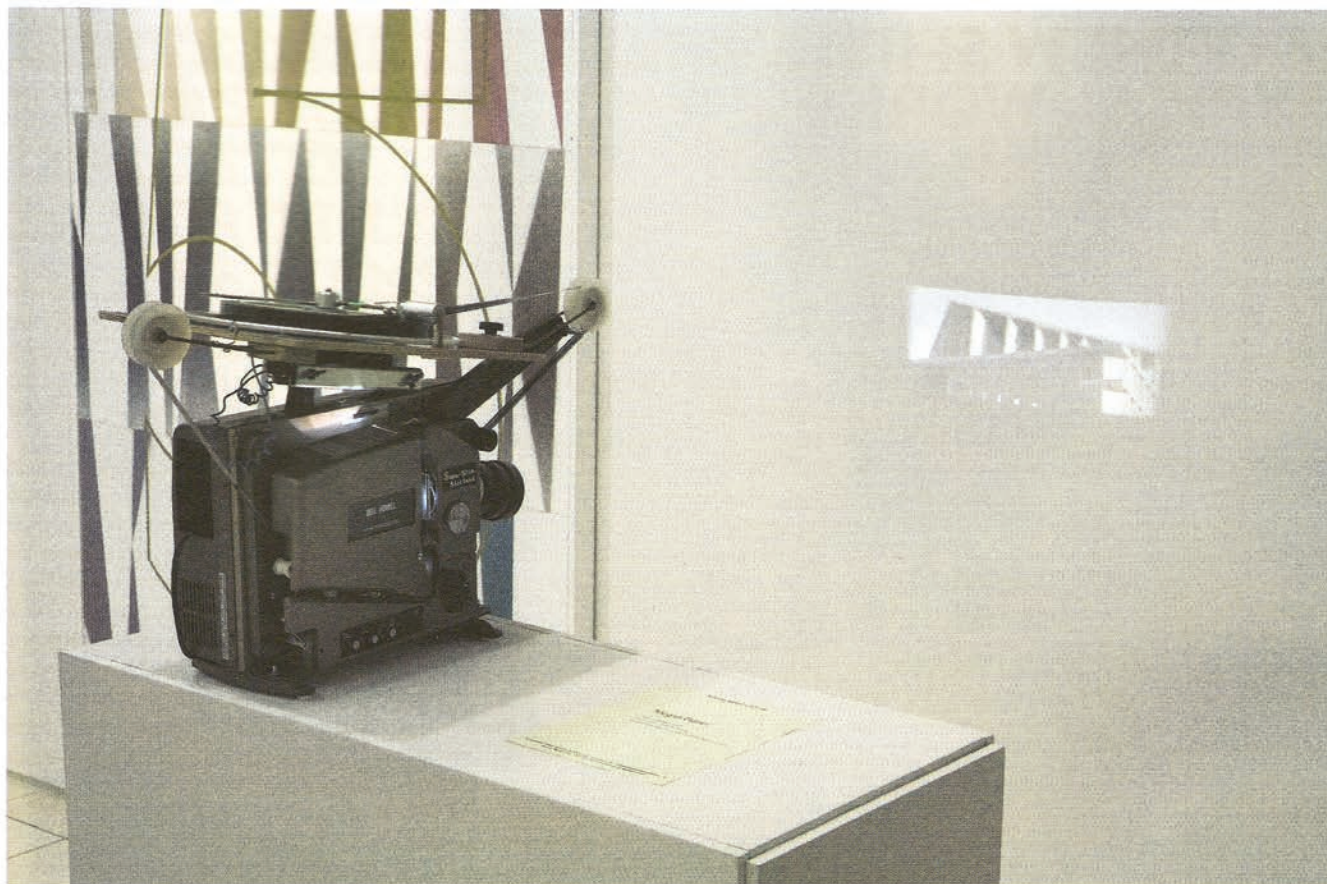
between floor and tile, or Hesse's work, which seeks the areas between media, the relationship between font and background twists the concept of paint into an object.

If Rayne articulates the painting's material surface, he also draws attention to it as both a painting and an object in space and economics. The pairing of wooden crates and canvases produces the double perspective. Spatially intrusive, these wooden crates function rhetorically: their smooth large rectangles initially dodge interpretation but eventually cannot be separated from the adjoining paintings. This produces a rupture insofar as the proximity of such differing surfaces challenges the process at play on the surface of the canvases. But, rather than an investigation of the painterly process, the rupture enacted by the wooden crates speaks to the spatial and economic conditions of the artwork. The presentation of storage uncovers the hidden in-between stages of exhibitions, the space between studio, gallery, and vault, the space of transit. In juxtaposing crates and canvases, Rayne empties out the use-value of the crate and assigns it art-object value. The crate's display inserts it in the realm of restrictive economics.

While the deadpan crates critique the economics of art objects, their strategy is one of reenactment. Whether the paintings and crates are sold separately or together, the crates beg a number of questions: do they now need a crate? Can the canvas be sold separately? Where does the art end? Where does the object begin? The specter of Hesse's double perspective haunts Rayne's exhibition. Here the doubling projects into the conceptual realm, where Rayne spatially and economically explores the space-between of art and object, graphic and paint.

—J. Piper Marshall

Art Review:



BLAKE RAYNE: DUST OF SUNS

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY, NEW YORK

23 MARCH – 18 MAY

Dust of Suns, 2008 (installation view). Courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

Conceptualising Blake Rayne as a painter would require acknowledging (all post-historical caveats aside) the extent to which the artist has rather uniquely streamlined the sum total of a discourse into a quantifiable set of operations, which he executes with such deliberate sufficiency as to suggest labour (and its determinants) to be the actual subject of his enquiry. For *Dust of Suns*, the American artist's second solo exhibition at Miguel Abreu Gallery, Rayne deploys a series of parameters that produce – stage, we should say – his most disinvested paintings to date. Long pieces of linen are cut, gessoed and folded, sprayed in gradients of secondary colour, unfolded, sewn together and pulled taut over stretcher bars proportioned to A4 dimensions. Rayne occasionally layers text over the resulting canvases or hand-paints a line or two corresponding to the local colour of the folded pattern, thus keeping with the under/overpainting structure of earlier paintings yet replacing their juxtaposition of representational and abstract content with that of depersonalised and subjective mark-making.

There's a history to these tactics, which can be drawn back to French artists like Martin Barré and Simon Hantaï, as well as Supports/Surfaces, a subsequent group of practitioners intent on endowing painterly experimentation with the force of leftist social critique. While Rayne's practice seemingly aspires to exhibit all the right aesthetic references and none of their ideological trappings, it is also evident that folding here

functions not simply as a formal method of reappraising the discursive terms of painting, but as a conceit through which to acknowledge the conventionally invisible structures framing the realm of art as art; from the practical and institutional identity of the gallery to the social realities of its enclosing neighbourhood.

To these durational, ephemeral conditions of spectatorship and urban change Rayne brings degrees of transparency: hanging storage crates alongside their paintings; shifting the work desk to a more presentational place in the space; retaining a 16mm projector from the previous exhibition, in part to acknowledge the presence of two projectors in his first solo show at the gallery; and most significantly, closing the space for a week in the middle of the show, thereby (allegedly) highlighting the Lower East Side's rapid gentrification and Miguel Abreu's tenuous place in the development storm (the gallery space previously served as a dumpling shop, Buddhist temple and synagogue).

What this set of moves may offer, beyond a reprisal of vintage institutional-critical strategies (and a spectacle of referential showmanship), remains vague – perhaps purposefully so. No answers are suggested and few marks are made, but in an elegant way, *Dust of Suns* offers us a proposition for a practice lived beyond the bounds of the canvas, in a collapsible space between past and future tense. *Tyler Coburn*

TEXTE ZUR KUNST

CUT PIECES

Sarina Basta on Blake Rayne at Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

One way to approach Blake Rayne's second solo exhibition at Miguel Abreu Gallery is to unpack two concepts which have long dominated his thinking about art and culture in general: cultural abstraction and scripts. He himself offered what must be considered his most explicit description of the latter term in a press release that was available only for the first few days of the exhibition prior to being replaced by a subsequent revision.

"Select a fabric," "Cut to size," "Mark off the pictorial space," "Fold. Paint. Unfold." "Re-hang," "Reconfigure," "Sew. Stretch. Mark again. Crate. Ship. Place in the gallery. Unpack it or not ... Hang it or not ... Sell it or not ...". Seven large-scale paintings are a result of these series of operations. On their surfaces, lightly applied shapes, tones, and loose outlines seem to somewhat repeat, reflect, and flicker like blades in slightly transparent hues of blue and complementary colors. They are all numbered "Untitled 2 through 8 (Dust of Suns)", 2008.

The painting motifs echo each other because they are created through a similar technique; the canvas is folded at intervals before being sprayed with different hues of paint. This particular process of folding first could be traced back to techniques of Simon Hantaï or Michel Parmentier. In Rayne's case the canvas is then sewn into three horizontal strips, mounted, stretched, and framed.

The number of paintings multiplies when considering the crates also present in the gallery. Made from mahogany stained plywood, they act as a signifier that the temporal moment of the work is not limited to the duration of its exhibition in the gallery. The dark semi-opacity of the crates contrasts with the light flurry of motifs on the canvas paintings, emulating their proportions, a blown-up version of an A4 page. Lids and containers are hung side by side, above or below the canvases, and form a free-standing wall to the right of the gallery. Behind them a canvas is effectively hidden (though the significance of this particular gesture may be slightly literal.) The gallery desk has been displaced to the center of the room – on its surface is mounted a small image of Bernard Tchumi's latest architectural addition to the neighborhood, a housing complex, colloquially referred to as "The Blue."

The building in proximity of the gallery is impossible to miss on the journey between the artist's studio and the exhibition space. It invited a painterly reading from its inception: [1] John Kelsey, Jutta Koether, and Emily Sundblad proceeded to make mock Georges Seurat pointillist versions of "The Blue", and it has become a signifier of the rapid changes occurring in the neighborhood. In placing the image within the exhibition Rayne announces a concern with spatiality that goes beyond the walls of the gallery and the space of the frame in the paintings.

A script, considered as a noun, is familiar enough as a stage in cultural production underlying the realization of a performative event, theatrical, or cinematic, or a set of formalized instructions in the realm of conceptual art. The idea of script in Rayne's work carries its productive moment over from the preparatory stage, refusing to relinquish its verb form and its ossification into the static form of the noun. In this case, the script is linked to the specificity of the neighborhood – previously a retail, garment district – and the acts of folding, shipping, cutting, and selling that might have taken place there. Creating such a homology is an attempt at connecting this particular set of paintings with a certain historic fantasy of what might have been. But it also serves in pointing out the connection between the gallery and the retail space.

Intimately linked to the notion of script is that of cultural abstraction – and in Rayne's deployment of the concept, one clearly hears a version of Adorno's critique of the culture industry, as well as Guy Debord's critique of abstraction. [2] It considers the process that captures the production of any image as a series of transferences from one support to the next, or as a series of scripts. Script is also used in the parlance of software programmers – in which the relation between script and content is undone in the script-as-algorithm form. The script-as-algorithm is a structure that will process any material it is instructed to. It is indifferent to its content.

While the paintings that Rayne has produced for this exhibition are clearly the most abstract to date, the elements of representation that do figure, belong to other systemic forms of exchange and information, other forms of "cultural efficiency": linguistic and numeric signs. One painting for example, "Untitled Painting Number 5 (Dust of Suns)" is adorned by the number "5". The form of abstraction which is altogether more relevant for Rayne's exhibition is that which precisely cannot be pictured. In this Rayne puts forward a definition in process – that of cultural abstraction – of extracting the stages of production of an image through transferences – and capturing these relations, of which the actual end image is only one manifestation. The second press release puts it like this: "these paintings are textualized as scripts of production: displacing material processes into the flat, graphic space of linguistic signs."

In the work of Rayne, degrees of arbitrariness as an added layer of representation have their place in a tight visual organization. One of Rayne's paintings in particular frame the words "This Side of Paradise" in reference to the novel of the same title by F. Scott Fitzgerald, dated in the early Twenties. To Rayne, the novel describes "a moment at which a certain class reflexively discovers the hollowness of conventions and means of self-representation upon which it is founded, just at the moment before the Depression." [3] Rayne's depiction of the number five in a deco typography was previously used by Charles Demuth in 1925, and later by Jasper Johns and Robert Indiana. Rayne is referring to *Is 5*, a book of poem by E.E. Cummings (published circa 1926), while the number fives of the Demuth and Indiana most probably refer to William Carlos Williams's poem, "The Great Figure" (1921), a short poem depicting a moment in the citiscape. [4] All these dates preface the beginning of the Great Depression that occurred in the US in the late 30s.

The inclusion of the Megan Frazer piece "Tour d'ombres, Tower of Shadows" (2007) beyond the closing of the previous show suggests time as another script within the exhibition format. In the invitation card, Rayne also engages with the general run of the present exhibition, announced as a series of operations – or non-operations: Opening reception (date), Gallery close (date), Reopen (date), Closed (date). [5]

The real emblematic element of the show resides in the black and white photograph of the knife sharpener, probably taken in the 30s, that Rayne added weeks into the exhibition. The figure is riding his bicycle and sharpening a knife on a rotating plate in a relative state of insouciance; a fictional historic subject oblivious to the fact his livelihood will disappear, at the wake of a potential economic crisis. Rayne uses the idea of the knife sharpener as a metaphor for the intentions of the exhibition: refraining from an overtly articulated critical discourse, the attempt is rather to "sharpen the tools," before actually "performing the cut." [6]

As the exhibition unfolds, the most decisive elements of the show are the paintings themselves and the will to further an expansive practice. Blake Rayne's new series of works present multiple entranceways to understanding the ongoing shifting, and rising complexity in the current agenda of critical abstraction.

Blake Rayne, "Dust of Suns", Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York, March 23 – May 18, 2008.

NOTES

- [1] Architecture critic Nicolai Ouroussoff in his New York Times article of September 4th, 2007 described the tonality of the building's "acqua-blue panels" as "a matrix of dark and pale blues" evoking "the shifting rhythms of Mondrian's painted ode to New York, "Broadway Boogie Woogie.""
- [2] Cultural abstraction, in that light, would be the process of turning into a script the modality in which capital, and the specific form of exchange value it promotes, instrumentalizes what was once experienced as a lived relation.
- [3] As quoted in the press release.
- [4] The Great Figure
Among the rain and lights I saw the figure 5 in gold on a red fire truck
moving tense unheeded to gong clangs siren howls and wheels rumbling through the dark city.
William Carlos Williams, *Sour Grapes: A Book of Poems*, Four Seas Company, Boston, 1921.
- [5] The temporary closing of a gallery by an artist certainly has its origins in the Sixties onwards – and not least recently by Storm Van Helsing at American Fine Arts in 2001; or Karin Schneider's closing of Orchard gallery, streets from Abreu's, a few months ago.
- [6] In conversation with the author prior to the exhibition, March 18th, 2008

NEW YORK



Blake Rayne's looming new show is very full and very good. The large-scale paintings look like Pattern & Decoration crossed with fabric design, geometric abstraction, and Russian folk art. Near the paintings—which are hung cheek-by-jowl, salon style—are dark-brown wooden rectangles. At first these come off as comments on the wood-paneled rooms of the gilded age and seem to echo the rampant gentrification of the Lower East Side. They turn out to be packing crates for the paintings. This turns the actual artworks into something like transient or displaced visitors—personalities that you connect to. This is Rayne's clearest, most optically satisfying show in some time.

— Jerry Saltz



Blake Rayne



Miguel Abreu Gallery, through
May 18 (See Lower East Side)

For theoretically inclined painter Blake Rayne, self-reflexivity is something of a contact sport. In this lucid and lively show, Rayne puts painting up against two heavyweight Conceptualist strategies: process art as practiced by such artists as Robert Ryman, and the institutional critique of Daniel Buren and his successors.

The canvases—produced, like Rayne's earlier work, according to predetermined steps—have undeniable visual punch. Here, using a technique borrowed from Simon Hantaï (an artist much admired by Buren), Rayne folds pieces of primed linen, spray paints the exposed surfaces and cuts the material into strips, which are sewn together. The results, executed in muted ochres, purples and blue-greens, are reminiscent of typography, tribal textiles and early Ellsworth Kelly. Each painting is customized, sometimes with just a drip of paint; other times with high-modernist quotations—an Art Deco numeral five in one work, for example, references both Charles Demuth's *The Figure 5 in Gold* and e.e.



cummings's *Is 5*. Rayne's installation situates these paintings in an economic, cultural and temporal context by staining and hanging the work's shipping crates like paneling, moving the gallery office to the center of the space and including a film from the previous exhibition here.

The show's most intriguing element is a vintage photograph depicting a bicycle retrofitted as a stationary machine for sharpening knives. Its message seems unmistakable: In repurposing painting to Conceptual ends, Rayne suspends the modernist ideal of forward progress, even as he creates the conditions in which new possibilities might unfold.

—Anne Doran

The New York Times

★ BLAKE RAYNE The abstract paintings in this show, an important one for this impressive New York artist, were made with aerosol spray directed at folded, cut and stitched-together canvas. And the pictures are only part of a larger conceptual package that includes the display of the paintings' shipping containers and has involved closing the gallery for a week. Mr. Rayne's taking apart of art conventions is erudite, visually effective and of a piece: the installation looks like a cross between a paneled library and a spreading bruise. Miguel Abreu Gallery, 36 Orchard Street, Lower East Side, (212) 995-1774, miguelabreugallery.com, through May 18. (Cotter)

ARTFORUM

Sufficient Grounds

JOHANNA BURTON ON THE ART OF BLAKE RAYNE

IN 1966 JOAN DIDION wrote an essay for the *New York Times Magazine* profiling Joan Baez, who at twenty-five years old was nearly as famous for her activism as for her folksinging (which is to say very). Baez had opened her own school—the Institute for the Study of Nonviolence—in California's Carmel Valley, and Didion's piece detailed the legal proceedings initiated by some of that area's less "liberal" occupants after finding the organization in their immediate vicinity. But, however focused around this local issue, the essay ultimately crafts a subtle portrait of a figure produced by and for a public. Baez, as depicted by Didion, is shown to have filled a role—for fans and detractors alike—in the cultural theater of politics. "Joan Baez was a personality before she was entirely a person," Didion writes, "and, like anyone to whom that happens, she is in a sense the hapless victim of what others have seen in her, written about her, wanted her to be and not to be."

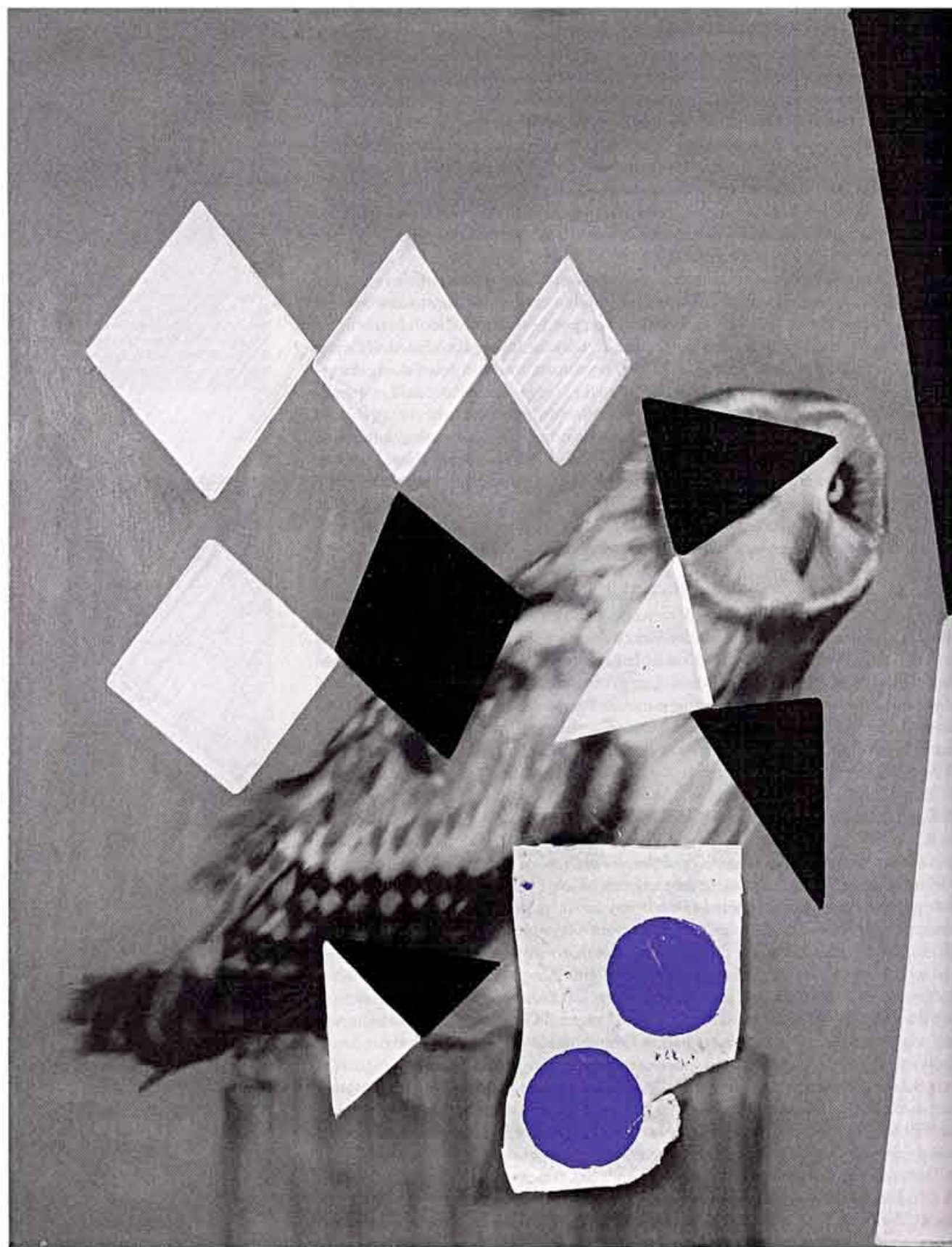
Perhaps the era when lawsuits were filed against hippie chanteuses eager to spread the teachings of Gandhi and Thoreau (to say nothing of Krishnamurti) is all but impossible to imagine today. Even so, there's little question that the manufacture and consumption of personality observed in Baez by Didion has, in the past forty years, only intensified exponentially. And if there is such a countercultural figure for our time, it would have to be Julia Butterfly Hill, who in 1997 (at the age of twenty-three) scaled an ancient California redwood and

lived in its limbs for 738 days in order to keep loggers from cutting it down. Hill—a fresh-faced eco-activist from Jonesboro, Arkansas—had enthusiastically volunteered to "sit" the tree when none of her fellow Earth First! compatriots stepped forward. In a video interview conducted in her roost almost two hundred feet from the ground, she took no pains to conceal that her still-forming convictions, however fiercely held, were also imprecise to the point of ethereality. "I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt I was meant to be up here," she explains breathlessly. "I wasn't quite sure why; I just knew I was meant to be in the forest doing *something*..."

This year, nearly a decade after Hill's vigil began, the painter Blake Rayne exhibited work at the newly opened Miguel Abreu Gallery, a small storefront space on New York's Lower East Side. During the run of his show, Rayne received a slew of phone calls from friends who, having been to the exhibition, thought he would be interested to know that Hill, now in her early thirties and founder of the activist group Circle of Life, was back up a tree; this time, she was protesting the sale of a plot of land in South Central Los Angeles used mostly by poor immigrants as a community garden. Rayne *was* interested, but only mildly and bemusedly so—a surprise, perhaps, given the ostensible theme of the works he had just hung. While the show at Abreu's space loosely focused

Opposite page: Blake Rayne, *Untitled Painting 29*
(for Julia Butterfly Hill), 2006, oil on canvas, 44 x 34".
This page: Blake Rayne, *Untitled Painting 27*
(Pacific Lumber Company), 2006, oil on canvas, 44 x 34".





on a kind of shared structuralist impulse between Rayne's work and that of the filmmakers Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet (two of whose films were shown during special screenings throughout the monthlong exhibition), the painter offered his own unusual press handout in addition to the gallery's, in the form of an appropriated, slightly altered Wikipedia entry on one Julia Butterfly Hill. Rayne's handful of paintings would, from the looks of the checklist, seem to take Hill's granola glamour and the events surrounding her flowering conscience as their "subject." All untitled but each bearing parenthetical subtitles (including "automated dicing saw," "California redwood," and the like), the works established themselves as constellating this minor modern drama in its scant details. Yet for all his seeming attention to his narrative source, Rayne's canvases weirdly shed such content even while evoking it.

In part this shedding expressed itself materially, in the literal lack of depth characterizing Rayne's more or less representational canvases: ghostly black-and-white, quasi-photorealist underpaintings depicting, say, an old-fashioned tape measure or an ecelebrity shot of Hill, with thin washes of brightly colored geometric abstraction painted atop. But even more striking in this regard was the artist's decision to test the one-to-one relationship between captions and images we've learned (à la Walter Benjamin) to naturalize—and in particular to see how such operations might play out when it comes to paintings whose "style" is meant to be recognized immediately as "nonobjective." Borrowing tactics from Martin Barré, Simon Hantaï, and Daniel Buren, Rayne has recently adopted a variety of techniques for producing—rather than conceiving or authoring—abstraction: folding or crumpling his canvas, spray painting or using a roller on the exposed areas, and then flattening it out again. Two of these gestureless, self-consciously abstract paintings were included in the exhibition, in addition to the works that were representational (if obliquely so). But in the Abreu show Rayne's overtly anachronistic, "conceptually driven" abstract images, even given their clearly broadcast allegiance to a particular breed of reflexive nonobjectivity, were not afforded any immunity from the artist's referential frame. The aforementioned designation "California redwood" had been given to a diptych of the crumpled, sprayed, and stretched variety that looked a lot like early James Welling photographs of

rumpled foil; similarly, a chunky composition that came across as a by-the-book Hantaï, while managing to look an awful lot like a Franz Kline at the same time, took its own titular aside from the date of Hill's ascent ("December 10, 1997").

If Rayne's strategies in constructing his painterly blow-by-blow of Hill's travails and triumphs seem to amount to an almost perverse exercise in indirection, they do serve to underscore a salient if not key fact—which is that, for Rayne, Hill is, in a sense, totally beside the point. In other words, while the construction site of her "personality" offers a fruitful ground for a kind of object lesson in the vicissitudes of—and allegory inherent to—production, it demands no fidelity in and of itself. Indeed, the details of Hill's story operate on Rayne's canvas much the way her actual body did high up in the redwood: as a signifier able to exert actual material presence. And while, given the description above, it might seem tempting to think of the artist's aesthetic attention to Hill as providing an illustrated primer on the squirrely nature of signification or a cheeky final blow to the abstraction/representation binary, Rayne's project should be understood as primarily occupied with those worries about "viability" that have both haunted and driven painting at least since Édouard Manet. Indeed, in a sense, *this* is in and of itself the subject of Rayne's work, which would seem to take to heart a proposal put forward by Yve-Alain Bois some twenty years ago: The specter of painting's irrelevance—and incapacity for "newness"—potentially offers up its very lifeblood.

Along these lines, then, the fact that Rayne picks recognizable, even clichéd, motifs (whether by way of popular culture or typologies of abstraction) correlates suggestively with a phrase he uses—"simply good enough"—to characterize his approach to transcribing photographic image to canvas. ("No fancy footwork" is another phrase he uses to explicate his underpainting process.) By "simply good enough" Rayne means, I think, not that lazy painting is the way to go, but that he takes seriously the value of exploring—and exposing—the minimum requirements needed to produce a painting. These aren't what they used to be: Clement Greenberg worried that artists would soon tack raw canvas to the walls and call it painting, but the idea of "minimum requirement" now pertains more to taste and genealogy—that is, to whether a painter exhibits enough

From left: Blake Rayne, *Wallace Nutting and Julia Hill, Untitled Painting 37*, 2006, acrylic and oil paint on canvas, 44 x 34". Blake Rayne, *Wallace Nutting and Julia Hill, Untitled Painting 38*, 2006, acrylic, pencil, and ink marker on canvas, 44 x 34". Blake Rayne, *Wallace Nutting and Julia Hill, Untitled Painting 39*, 2006, acrylic and oil on canvas, 44 x 34". Blake Rayne, *Wallace Nutting and Julia Hill, Untitled Painting 40*, 2006, acrylic and oil on canvas, 44 x 34".



historical and aesthetic savvy for his or her work to be meaningful (or, to put a slightly different spin on it, *consumable*). Interestingly, Rayne's own descriptor of minimum requirements resonates with the famous prescription for good parenting popularized by the psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott, who argued, with his formulation the "good-enough mother," that the best-adjusted individuals are—counterintuitively—products of parents who, rather than doting on their offspring from birth to adulthood, gradually withdraw their attention from their children. If this is an association that perhaps seems far afield, it also seems surprisingly apropos: The process Winnicott describes amounts to a careful balancing act; hardly advocating neglect or disregard, the theory of "good enough" is shown to be extremely generous in effect. The child ostensibly making up for the "failures" of the mother is actually put into the position of making his own decisions—supported, but not dictated to, by the authority figure whose grip on the reins grows ever less taut.

Extrapolating from Rayne's own use of the phrase "simply good enough," one might say that in his case this principle—the adequacy principle, so to speak—applies on the level of content as well as of technique. Always selecting overt typologies (whether that of the "liberal" activist or that of "critical" abstraction), the artist uses motifs that elicit the identificatory impulse of their viewers, only to intentionally leave any expectations of satisfaction unmet. This is not to say that the paintings aren't full of visual pleasure, which they are, but rather that they are so overdetermined in their means that the pleasure is, if not guilty, at the very least extremely self-conscious. And as seen in the works shown at Abreu's, Rayne expends no energy on papering over the intentional gaps both within and between canvases. While the artist's recent attention to Hill marks a particularly acute example of a figure both produced and emptied out by its public, one need only look at the roster of image-types privileged by Rayne over the course of his career thus far to see that this foray into biopictorialism is merely the extension of long-standing concerns: Cats. Bicycles. "New technology" from the nineteenth century (i.e., a coffeemaker). Scenes of the "everyday urban," including monuments to minor public figures (James Fenimore Cooper and the like). Handwritten signage—announcing language lessons or garage

The details of Julia Butterfly Hill's story operate on Rayne's canvas much the way her actual body did high up in the redwood: as a signifier able to exert actual material presence.

sales—stapled unceremoniously to lampposts, simultaneously conjuring Walker Evans and Lawrence Weiner.

Perusing this catalogue of subjects, most ubiquitous to the point of banality, one gets the sense that Rayne follows the logic of Google more closely than that of conventional painterly decision making—privileging objective statistical values over subjective value judgments. If "content" has always haunted those artists who play with the space shared by representation and abstraction (Gerhard Richter comes most forcefully to mind), Rayne's refusal of anything beyond the "good enough" renders the question moot and does the same to viewers' speculations vis-à-vis the artist's own "interest" or interiority. Interiority is dismantled by way of transparent, even didactic procedure, especially in his most recent "representational" works: Every quasi-photorealist image (executed well enough to indicate technical skill but not well enough to exude the brio of the true virtuoso) is adorned with geometric abstraction in some way derived from the image, which is to say isolated within its structure and then attended to through repetition and chromatic emphasis. The effect is something like the layered anatomical transparencies in old encyclopedias—a picture that, in parsing itself into layered strata, becomes a self-reflexive maxim about the construction of its own meaning before it is "about" anything else. Yet, unlike those comprising the pedagogical tool, Rayne's superimpositions don't work to reveal the structural exigencies holding something *together*. Never laying bare the

From left: Blake Rayne, *Wallace Nutting and Julia Hill, Untitled Painting 41*, 2006, acrylic and oil on canvas, 44 x 34". Blake Rayne, *Wallace Nutting and Julia Hill, Untitled Painting 42*, 2006, acrylic and oil on canvas, 44 x 34". Blake Rayne, *Wallace Nutting and Julia Hill, Untitled Painting 43*, 2006, acrylic and oil on canvas, 44 x 34". Blake Rayne, *Wallace Nutting and Julia Hill, Untitled Painting 44*, 2006, acrylic and oil on canvas, 44 x 34".



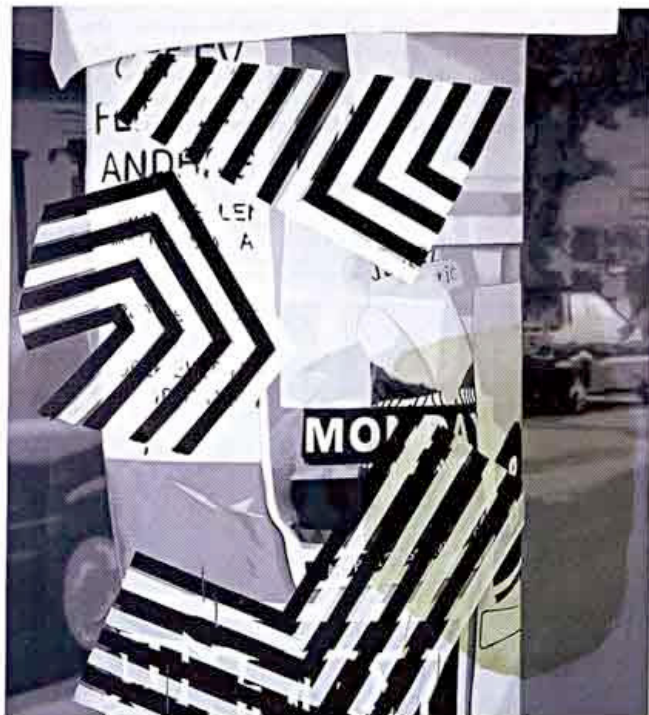
"guts" of his subjects—or even painting proper—he peels seemingly insignificant details off the strictly "surface" images not to explicate the makeup of this thing or that but, rather, to get to the machinations of production more generally. Born of a kind of assembly-line logic, his canvases bear the traces of a haywire Fordism: The worker has internalized his solitary, infinitely repeated task so well that it becomes completely abstracted from the "goal" it has been enlisted to achieve.

This hardly means all Rayne's representationally leaning works look the same (any more than do his abstract ones, which, for all their predetermined process, are anything but predetermined in effect). In some instances, the "top layer" of composition, pilfered and unmoored from the photographic source it now both elaborates and obfuscates, is hard-edge, graphic, and linear, as in the case of the triangles borrowed from, and then applied back onto, the picture of an owl in *Untitled Painting 29 (for Julia Butterfly Hill)*, 2006. In other cases, loose washes of color seem to pool on the surface of images, as with those of Cooper. What these seemingly distinct operations have in common is the way they are both utilized to decorative ends—but decorative in a particular sense, one that connects with the serial and the mass-produced while insisting that the "artistic" pertains to both. This impulse—and Rayne's implication of predecessors similarly inclined—was made explicit in the artist's most recent show (at Sutton Lane in London) in which the canvases were dedicated to both Julia Hill

and Wallace Nutting, the turn-of-the-century populist photographer best known for tinting his photos. Nutting understood what an alluring supplement color could be, but his career also illustrates color's loaded or suspect status (it is telling that his photos, though wildly popular for some years, were rather abruptly deemed "gimmicky" and largely rejected as outmoded by the same public). For Rayne, utilizing modes of the decorative to structural ends leads to productive crossed wires: If not exactly slowed down, these are certainly images interrupted, as though the process of making their structures clearer (or at least prodding them into visibility) has opened up spaces for an incessant, disruptively supplemental chatter.

In the late '70s, Rosalind Krauss argued that contemporary abstract painting should be understood—somewhat unexpectedly—as responding to the conditions of photography (or, rather, as responding to one condition of the photographic, its promise of "indexicality"). Representational painting, too—and a lot less surprisingly—had long been involved in a discursive engagement with photography, but here Krauss was hoping to flesh out what was changing about abstraction: namely, as she proposed, its move toward context. Abstraction was relating to its surroundings (the artist Lucio Pozzi nicely illustrated her claim with his contribution to the 1976 exhibition "Rooms" at P.S. 1 in New York, in which his "abstract" paintings took their design and palette from the walls upon which they hung). Today, the gambit of photography, as beautifully

This and opposite page, from left: Blake Rayne, *Untitled Painting 11 (Monday)*, 2005. Blake Rayne, *Untitled Painting 12 (September 20)*, 2005. Blake Rayne, *Untitled Painting 13 (Cat Looking Left)*, 2005. Suite of three paintings, acrylic and oil on canvas, each 86" x 78".



explained by Roland Barthes ("The photograph belongs to that class of laminated objects whose two leaves cannot be separated without destroying them both . . ."), is, like all things analogue, nearing obsolescence; it has largely ceded to a language of *code*, of dissemination, of immersion—and painterly abstraction has followed suit. There is, it would seem, no longer a distinction between content and context, which is to say that everything always has to do with everything else. There is no holding things apart, much less insisting on distinctions. (Here, Wikipedia and Google embody the mother lode of content while also decimating its *thickness*.) This is so despite, or really because of, the barrage of imagery that might qualify as nomadic, even perpetually homeless—liberated (and thus dissociated) from any one technological platform or base. Such seeming abundance has viewers of art and television and movies and websites searching all the more fervently for images with which to identify. Rayne's decision to initially meet this need in his paintings only underscores the failure (on this level) he intentionally commands.

To wit: In a 2005 show at Kevin Bruk Gallery in Miami, the graphic effects of Stella-like lines and Kellyish diamonds ricocheted among eight of Rayne's paintings. A pair of canvases was given over to feline models—tabbies cute in a kind of everycat way, in the sense that we have all had, met, or at the very least seen an approximation of them before. These two large-scale works—both untitled but respectively supplemented with the obvious "Cat Looking

Right" and "Cat Looking Left"—found their subjects nearly obliterated behind differently executed fretworks of abstraction. The animal that, of all the domestic creatures, is saddled with the heaviest psychological baggage (forced as it is to alternately embody creepiness and cuddliness) had been rendered little more than background. Still, however coolly Rayne reflected on the cats' artificially endowed cultural and physical characteristics, some sentimental patina persisted, since it is hardly so easily purged. It was the otherwise emotionally reserved William S. Burroughs, after all, who, late in life, wrote a book professing his deeply earnest love of, and identification with, cats. "[Q]uite simply and quite literally," he wrote, "cats serve as sensitive screens for quite precise attitudes when cast in appropriate roles." But awareness of this dynamic didn't render its effects on him any less powerful. One looking to the right, the other glancing to the left, Rayne's cats refuse to meet the eye, all the while courting ours. They are not so different from Didion's Baez or our Hill, at once fecund and infra-thin, sites upon which so much is projected but very little is made to stick. Yet whether idols, hapless victims, or simply grist for the mill, Rayne coaxes from them unexpected dimension. No matter how seemingly "deconstructive," his paintings—to borrow a phrase Didion used to describe the folksinger—still work, "perhaps unconsciously, to hang on to the innocence and turbulence and capacity for wonder, however ersatz or shallow." No small feat. □

JOHANNA BURTON IS A NEW YORK-BASED ART HISTORIAN AND CRITIC.



Today, the gambit of photography is, like all things analogue, nearing obsolescence; it has largely ceded to a language of *code*, of dissemination, of immersion—and painterly abstraction has followed suit.

ART PAPERS

BLAKE RAYNE

MIAMI

Blake Rayne's paintings get going through a series of false starts [Kevin Bruk Gallery; November 12, 2005—January 28, 2006]. He begins by copying street flyers and snapshots of lounging kitties, rendering the imagery as if it came from a pre-Technicolor world of limited grays—think early Fassbinder or *Interfunktionen* magazine. Ultimately, however, he delivers these often-clichéd images only to cancel them out. Hard-edge patterns and diaphanous stains of somewhat sickly caramels and lavenders are laid over them, disrupting any effort on the part of the viewer to simply read what's on the surface. Even if the copied images are still visible, these floating fragments of black and white stripes, irregular triangles, and diaphanous color grids and stains forcefully stand in for the very idea of cancellation. They metaphorically block the message and cut the lines of communication. Whether he begins with a kitten, an old bicycle, or a flyer announcing an Italian tutor, Rayne runs interference on the image. In the process, he reveals a sense of ambivalence about a number of things: his relationship to studio production; painting's continued operative potential; the possibility for all of us to participate as agents in today's multiplying channels of communication.

Rayne's paintings provide instances of broken communication without much subjective or narrative filler. They have had all of the self's concerns—something that seems to be coming back in the age of the MFA all-star—drained out. They enact a presentational objectivity that treats painting as an analytical tool. In this, Rayne aligns himself with a tradition of materialist painting whose proponents use the medium to investigate its own institutional, social, and historical conditions. In fact, one of the more interesting aspects of Rayne's paintings is their invitation to bypass interpreta-

paintings lead us to assess the material preconditions and the social situation from which they arise. In other words, they require that we think of them in relation to the fantasies of participation and the foreclosure of political engagement that characterize our communicative capitalism. As such, they converge with the work of political theorists who are beginning to zero in on the fact that, in our age of communication, there may not be as much room as we once thought for actual communicative exchanges. There are too many inputters, too many channels for information to flow through. We may all get to post our message or critique, but there is no guarantee it will reach anyone. We think we're participating in the public sphere when we plug in, but this sphere itself has fractured into so many unconnected channels that we are always preaching to our own congregation.

Two black and white abstractions rounded off the show. Each of these elegant and even stoic works is made by painting the canvas black, folding it randomly, and repainting exposed parts white. Pilfered from French heavyweight painter Simon Hantaï, this technique is a false start as well. While it may steer us to focus on the painting's formal aspects, this technique is relevant precisely for the historical baggage it carries. Through the inclusion of these two paintings, Rayne concisely clarifies his position vis-à-vis painting. For him, painting involves a de-subjectification and de-naturalization of the medium (Hantaï's very contribution to modernist painting) that, in turn, opens a materialist horizon against which paintings are cast to reveal the conditions of their production.

—Gean Moreno

PRESS RELEASE

Professor Barton Byg
Graduate Program Director
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510 Herter Hall
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Amherst, MA 01003

January 9, 2006

Dear Barton Byg,

Our mutual friend, Sally Shafto, recently told me about you and your book "Landscape of Resistance: The German Films of Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub," so I wanted to take this opportunity to write to you and introduce myself as well as let you know about my soon to open art gallery in New York's Lower East Side.

I was personally introduced to the work of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet by Thom Andersen, one of my teachers when I was a film student at Calarts close to fifteen years ago, so I was particularly glad to find out that you know Thom, an excellent man indeed. Since that time, I have had the luck - and the privilege - to see almost all of Straub/Huillet's films, mostly in Paris. And I should say that it seems that not a day goes by without thinking about them in some way. When I decided to open a gallery, it felt appropriate and almost necessary to try to do something with Straub/Huillet's exemplary work, that is first and foremost show their films to the best of my ability, sporadically, repeatedly, sometimes in careful combination with the work of other artists, in brief, to attempt to give them a life in New York outside of the usual festival, museum or retrospective environment.

As you might be aware, there is an emerging gallery scene in the Lower East Side / Chinatown, and a small group of artists, critics, curators and friends, who are beginning to operate and show their work in the area, are already very interested in the films of Straub/Huillet (perhaps partly because of my somewhat obstinate return to their films in conversations!) My point is that offering this keen public an opportunity to actually see, study and discuss some of these films over an extended period of time will be beneficial to all.

As Sally must have mentioned to you, the inaugural show/event I am planning for the gallery in mid-March consists of screening in tandem "The Death of Empedocles" and "Cézanne" in a series of 3 two-evening events over a period of 3 weeks. In addition to seeing the films, each member of the audience will receive an English translation of "Straub, Hölderlin, Cézanne," Dominique Paini's formidable essay on this film diptych. As you might remember, Paini is also the producer of "Noir Pêché," which I was thinking of showing at first, but decided against since I was informed that no English subtitled version of either "Cézanne" or "Noir Pêché" was in circulation.

In conjunction with the films and the text, I have invited Blake Rayne to contribute a series of paintings to the show. He seems prepared to take on the challenge of distant confrontation with the masters, my own claim being that his work is best apprehended when traced back to Cézanne, and that within the separate realm of the still image of painting, he increasingly shares some of Straub/Huillet's formal concerns. In short, I look at this proposed show as a staging of distinctive exchanges and exercises in admiration in different mediums, which in turn have produced some of the most potent and mutually reinforcing cultural objects I know. As it were, the exhibition covers 2500 years of Western history, and, arguably, is traversed by one idea, an unswerving commitment to a singular ethic of the image.

In light of the above, I wanted to invite you to New York to introduce "The Death of Empedocles" on the night of the first screening of the film. It goes without saying that your participation and presence among us would be greatly appreciated.

I shall take the liberty of calling you in the next few days to discuss this project further.

With best regards,

Miguel Abreu

Blake Rayne's series of paintings is dedicated to Julia Butterfly Hill, in recognition of her victory in saving Luna, the 2000 year old Redwood tree in Northern California, from its cutting by the logging industry.

In 2005, Rayne had solo exhibitions at Reena Spaulings Fine Art, New York and Kevin Bruk Gallery, Miami. He teaches painting at Columbia University.

Special thanks to John Gianvito for providing the English transcript of "Cézanne," to Daniel Stedman for the projectors, to Moira Tierney for projecting the films, to Linda Duchin of New Yorker films, to Joyce Kim, to Stewart Cauley, to Jimmy Raskin, and to John McLaughlin for everything else.

The New York Times

Art in Review

BLAKE RAYNE, "August Evening Walkout,"
Greene Naftali, 526 West 26th Street,
(212) 463-7770 (through June 8). There is one
lightweight knockout of a picture in this exhi-
bition of semi-abstract paintings in a style you
might call postmodern Impressionism.
Across the 10-foot-wide sky-blue expanse of
"Radically Casual Fridays" stretch two
strings of white, green and orange pennants
(like those decorating a used car lot). A merg-
er of Pop and Color Field, it's as ephemerally
perfect as a sunny spring day in New York
(Johnson).

**Blake Rayne,
"August Evening Walk Out"**
Greene Naftali, through Jun 8
(see Chelsea).

In *Radically Casual Fridays*, the largest painting in Blake Rayne's new show, two bright-colored car lot pennants traverse a dusky blue expanse. A fiery fuchsia cloud hangs ominously suspended. The latest installment in a series of thematic exhibitions collectively titled "Three of Four Seasons," "August Evening Walk Out" allies Rayne with artists who have turned to the sky for inspiration. (The great English precursor to Impressionism is invoked in one work's somewhat anomalous title, *J.M.W. Turner vs. London*.)

Sourced from digitally composited photographs, Rayne's new canvases depict ambient summer atmospheres. As if through a camera lens shifting its depth of field, a wavering shoreline is discerned, distant nocturnal city skylines

are located, details of plant life are registered up close. Graphic elements derived from traffic signs are interwoven with abstracted, soft-focus passages. What with all this pictorial pleasure, it can be hard to get a firm footing (particularly given the absence of a horizon line in many of Rayne's pictures). Images of a dashboard radio console in *Bain de Sans Soleil I & II* prompt a veritable synesthetic leap (right now I'm hearing the Eagles' "Tequila Sunrise"...). Another group of paintings, titled *S.P.F. 1-5*, induce a similar sunbaked reverie, although not necessarily a bucolic one. Their acidic palette brings on an enervated, almost narcotic state, one that leaves a distinctly chemical aftertaste. In lieu of zoned-out contemplation, Rayne advises caution. Viewing his work, one is ensnared in a landscape that, despite its seeming natural beauty, is shot through with traces of cultural intervention.

—Jackie McAllister

ARTFORUM

BLAKE RAYNE GREENE NAFTALI "August Evening Walk Out," an exhibition of new paintings by [Blake Rayne](#), was the final installment in his thematic series "Three of Four Seasons" (following "Autumn Drive," 1997, and "The Winter Line," 2000). Skipping spring and diving straight into summer's extreme tangerines, grapes, and lemon-limes, Rayne's flavor-enhanced, atmospheric surfaces tempt us with boredom (the beachy kind), emptiness (or the infinite), and the terrors and joys of intoxication. The "August," "Evening," and "Fridays" of the paintings' titles aren't temporalities you can bank on or calculate, they are events-more like holes or glitches in the controlled time of production. "Walk Out" might be a factory worker's act of disobedience, a transcendental pilgrimage a la Thoreau, a Situationist derive, or all three.

Bain de Sans Soleil I and II (all works 2003) are semiconscious glimpses of a lit-up car stereo, fogging the canvas with ghostly greens and glowing red-oranges. A dazzlingly vacant skyscape, Radically Casual Fridays marks out a void of azure and a toxic cloud of fuchsia between fluttering plastic car-lot pennants. Other paintings superimpose country and city views onto more horizonless skies, water, and close-up nature studies. Composed of multiple perspectives within a single frame, they elude stability and confound the viewer's habit of locating him- or herself in relation to what's shown. Instead, fragmented and gliding mental states-such as surfing, drunk driving, daydreaming, or remembering-are evoked. Rayne's summer light, derived from no single pictorial source, is used as much against the objects in his paintings as in their service, taking on a corrosive force that exceeds and ignores the integrity of whatever it exposes. Meanwhile, wandering lines and streaks of pigment are activated at different speeds across the canvas, causing distortions of not only represented space but also represented time. Looking and walking out become bottomless, unfolded events-overdoses of light, times we lose ourselves in and that burn our brains. Rayne's paintings retrieve unrecognizable, crystalline perceptions from these experiences.

The numbers in the titles of some paintings (e.g., S.P.F. 1-5) play on both sequence and degree of intensity. They indicate thresholds and variations, suggesting a gay science of altered and altering states. The numbers we should see in the car-radio paintings, on the other hand, are blurred out, reminding us that the movements undertaken here cannot be mapped with rational coordinates. Like the impressionists and Turner before them, but recalled here via an unsentimentalizing, post-Adobe sensibility, Rayne pushes pictorial time and space toward the unrepresentable. Nature becomes a crazy screen for tracing out conceptual moves and mental detours. His dynamic, supersaturated surfaces, which never completely cohere as pictures of something, insist that painting, today as much as ever, is a material to see and think the world with. "Three of Four Seasons" presents a cycle that refuses to complete itself. It is a calendar with pages missing, or a modern Book of Hours that doubles as a user's guide for bailing out of regulated and regulating time.

-John Kelsey

*More information available
upon request*