

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

DANA LOK

selected texts & press

DANA LOK

In Dana Lok's intricate figurative paintings, visual transformations coupled with unexpected and often counter-intuitive vantage points tease at the seams of how signs and representations express meaning. Each distinct body of work engages a range of specific ideas or problems as they undergo a translation from language to visualization, with the paintings recording all the distortions, spontaneous slippages, and sleight-of-hand substitutions at play to bridge the gulf between thought and image. Lok's paintings stage a heightened and at times surreal drama of compositional space in which different modes of knowledge and meaning-making are both props and actor, theater set and subject. Threading delicate tensions between signifiers, images in Lok's work gesture to their absent opposites, hidden in the shadows or just out of frame. Like a magician's trick, optical cues abound, distracting the viewer while subtly pointing to the fact that there is always more going on than meets the eye.

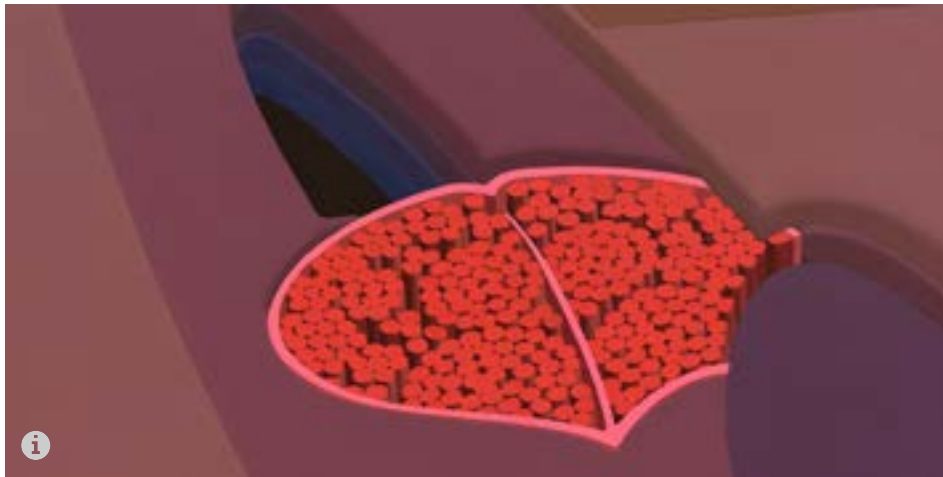
Lok first emerged as an abstract painter before turning to figuration and developing her distinctive style in which enigmatic questions addressing the passage of time or the act of seeing, for instance, are afforded imaginative, incisive answers. Complex and morphing systems of insight are made visible while never wholly transparent. These half-offered, half-withheld solutions hold the viewer's gaze and mind in a state of suspension, a testimony to her deep involvement with the complexities of the medium of painting.

Dana Lok (b. 1988, Berwyn, PA) received an MFA from Columbia University in 2015 and attended Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 2016. In 2018, Lok was awarded the Rema Hort Mann Emerging Artist Grant. Solo exhibitions of her work include As Syllable from Sound, Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York (2024); Closer to the Metal, Clima, Milan (2023); Part and Parse, Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York (2022); One Second Per Second, PAGE, New York (2020); Words Without Skin, Clima, Milan (2019); Mind's Mouth, Bianca D'Allessandro, Copenhagen (2018); Soft Fact, Clima, Milan (2017); and The Set of All Sets, Chewday's, London (2016). Selected group shows include Eye of the Blackbird, Bo Bartlett Center at Columbus State University, Columbus, GA (2025); Anything But Here, Candice Madey, New York (2025); Double Lift, David Petersen Gallery, Minneapolis (2024); Strange Sensation, Foyer LA, Los Angeles (2024); darling, your head's not right, curated by Danica Lundy, François Ghebaly, New York (2023); Anything can pass before the eyes of a person, Derosia, New York (2023); X PINK 101, X Museum, Beijing (2023); The future perfect will have arrived, Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles (2023); Le Biscuit à Soupe, High Art, Arles, France (2022); Gravity, a proposal, Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York (2022); Regroup Show, Miguel Abreu Gallery (2021); Fifteen Painters, Andrew Kreps Gallery (2021); PAGE (NYC), Petzel Gallery (2021); and In Place Of, curated by Leah Pires, Miguel Abreu Gallery (2016), all in New York. Her work is held in the collections of Espacio 2021, La Palma; Pinault Collection; and X Museum, Beijing.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

Dana Lok '15 Explores Language and Meaning in 'As Syllable from Sound'

By Lauren Harris
December 19, 2024



Adjunct Assistant Professor [Dana Lok '15](#) recently opened her second solo exhibition at [Miguel Abreu Gallery](#) [↗](#), *As Syllable from Sound*. The work continues Lok's exploration of sensory experience, anatomy, and language through dynamic visual forms.

Lok's paintings focus on the architecture of human sound, using imagery of mouths, tongues, and neural pathways to explore the anatomy and cognitive processes that transform thought into speech. Lok invites viewers to consider how sound travels from thought to expression, with the paintings acting as a form of staged performance.

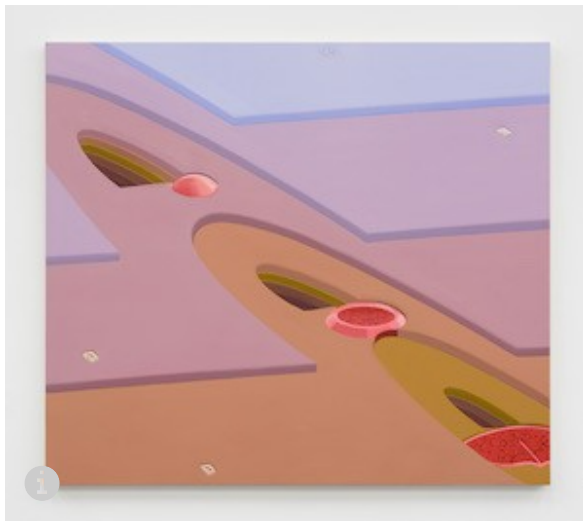


Lok's work also examines the interior landscapes of the body, with the flexible tissue of the mouth and neural networks pulsing with energy. The paintings dissolve surface appearances, revealing internal spaces that echo the reverberation of sound.

The exhibition title is drawn from Emily Dickinson's poem, which captures the relationship between thought and language:

"The Brain is just the weight of God –
For – Heft them – Pound for Pound –
And they will differ – if they do –
As Syllable from Sound –"

The quote reflects the tension between the finite brain and the infinite nature of thought, mirroring Lok's exploration of language, sound, and the spaces between them. The paintings show how the body and mind collaborate to produce meaning, often leaving gaps where imagination and interpretation emerge.



Unlike her previous works focused on visibility, this exhibition foregrounds sound as a medium, creating a surreal interface where sound and vision collide. Lok pushes the boundaries of what painting can convey, exploring how sound's intangible nature can be translated into visual form.

As Syllable from Sound is on view at the gallery's 88 Eldridge location through December 21, 2024.

HypeArt



Dana Lok, All of the Facts, 2023

Courtesy Of The Artist And Clima

Dana Lok Takes You Back to the Basics in 'Closer to the Metal'

A new solo exhibition on view at Clima gallery in Milan.

[Dana Lok](#) is an emerging artist best known for creating compositions that freeze frame her daily observations. This can sometimes translate into an outstretched hand or flipping the pages of a book. In other instances, the Brooklyn-based artist paints mental images that operate in a hallucinatory dream-state, where objects float in space and probe into the dark recesses of the mind.

On view at [Clima](#) gallery in Milan, Lok is presenting a new solo exhibition that distills the world back to its basics. Entitled *Closer to the Metal*, the artist probes into the very building blocks that have come to form life as we know it. Think atoms and molecules, cells clustering into bodies, humans then congregating through communities, and so forth.



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Linguist
10 x 12 in
oil on canvas
2023

Currently up in my show [@clima_gallery](#) through July 29

[View all 34 comments](#)

Standout paintings in the show include her *Canopy, Cascade* (2023), which features a pale pink background that is accentuated by a gridded set of circles and squares, along with what appears to be coral reef and a dismembered human skull floating across the canvas. “I began this body of work driven by an image

that flickers in mind when I consider the notion that our world is built from basics, from the ground up,” said Lok in a statement. “My sense that nature is arranged into levels must trace to the idea that the way big, complex things look depends on the way small, simple things behave. Dependence looks a bit like one thing sitting on top of another.”

Additional highlights include Lok’s *All of the Facts* (2023), which reintroduces the geometric theme playing through many of the works, as the text in the painting warps the message to dizzying results. “I keep my ears tuned for metaphors that use the language of space, volume and weight to describe abstract relationships,” Lok added. “I listen for these metaphors because they hold the potential for novel images, and that’s what I aim to make.”

[*Closer to the Metal*](#) will be on view at Clima in Milan until July 29.

Clima

Via Alessandro Stradella, 5
20129 Milano MI, Italy

EXHIBITIONS

DANA LOK

CLIMA

HYPERALLERGIC

Art **Reviews**

Dana Lok Beckons the Unknowable

Lok's paintings reveal seemingly straightforward objects and events to be strange, slippery, and utterly beguiling.



by Cassie Packard
May 5, 2022



Dana Lok, "Demo" (2022), oil on canvas, 18 x 21 inches (all images © Dana Lok, courtesy Miguel Abreu Gallery; photos by Stephen Faught)

Thirteen paintings interconnected by common iconographic threads and a penchant for sleight of hand comprise Dana Lok's knockout debut at Miguel Abreu Gallery, a dexterous exploration of signification's doublings, reversals, recursions, and inversions. Throughout *Part and Parse*, the Brooklyn-based artist reveals seemingly straightforward objects and events to be strange, slippery, and utterly beguiling. The exhibition probes the ways in which signs are always gesturing at something further afield: an empty plate transforms into a spotlight alongside a knife; open books bare conditional or illusory content, such as the mirrored word "IF" or a rainbow; two firm plums fall from a subtly doubled, outstretched hand in one image to morph into two small holes in the next. Everything we see in these paintings is provisional, multiple, or mutable — ultimately unknowable.

In a sly conceit that casts the canvas as a surgical theater, Lok borrows imagery of surgeons pressing scalpels into flesh from the work of another young Pennsylvania-born painter, Thomas Eakins. In 1875, at the age of 31, Eakins painted **“The Gross Clinic,”** a depiction of five doctors operating on a somewhat abstracted, amorphous body under the direction of Dr. Samuel D. Gross, who had just pioneered a new form of bone surgery. Made to celebrate new scientific advances, this historically scaled portrayal of a medical procedure initially shocked many Americans, who found the work’s naturalism disturbing. Yet this performative painting of a theatrical event was the contrived, aestheticized result of multiple sittings — and even portrayed Eakins himself seated among the onlookers, busily sketching the scene before him.



Dana Lok, “Bone Surgery” (2022), oil on canvas, 96 x 78 x 1 1/2 inches

Lok mines “The Gross Clinic” for parts. “Recursive Surgeon” (2021), an oneiric, indigo-hued painting made on the same scale as Eakins’s, elicits latent psychological surrealism from the American classic: the formidable Dr. Gross, cropped at the neck, towers over an underling whose head is overlaid with, and anonymized by, visions of himself and his cohort performing the procedure for an audience. Dispersed throughout the pale, green-tinged ground of the equally immense “Bone Surgery” (2022) are small black and white copies of figures lifted from Eakins’s painting, some of whom are huddled around picnic blankets (or checkered surgical sheeting). Off to one side, blocks of partially concealed text, which evoke the blanket seen in raised relief, declare: “YOU DON’T HAVE TO KNOW HOW IT’S MADE TO KNOW WHAT IT IS.”

Lok’s paintings aren’t afraid to take contradictory positions, and indeed seem to relish presenting incompatible assertions about the ways in which truth and knowledge operate. Laid out on impossibly green grass in the nearby “Parsing, Parsimony” (2021) is another picnic blanket built of words, which offers a diametric opposite: “YOU HAVE TO KNOW HOW IT’S MADE TO KNOW WHAT IT IS.” The sheet is sandwiched between two spotlights that playfully (mis)direct the viewer’s attention to the spots of flat green paint themselves, calling attention to the painting’s constructed surface — “knowing how it’s made” — and the status of the canvas as a theater, a proscenium where paint performs.



Dana Lok, "Catch" (2022), oil on canvas, 26 x 29 inches

Simultaneously alluding to Gross's surgical demonstration and to Eakins's portrayal of himself in the act of sketching it, "Demo" (2022) portrays a teal hand dragging a pencil across a piece of paper to draw a razor-thin line. The paper is held in place by additional sets of hands that impress their thumbprints on the page, learning haptically as they produce their own relatively unstudied marks. In "Trace" (2022), one hand guides another in drawing a line directly on the canvas. The small, strangely intimate work simultaneously deploys painting's illusionism and gently pierces a hole in that illusionism, toggling between a phenomenon and its depiction, or a sign and its referent.

Concretizing the exhibition's web of associations, images, and references, "Catch" (2022) (catch-22) depicts an intricate spider's web enmeshed in flashbulb-lit flowering greenery. The alluring web gradually adopts the tunnel-like shape of a black hole, evoking an ontologically unsteady portal to a mysterious elsewhere, where time and space are warped, destroyed, and remade, and the world as we know it — or think we do — is called into question. Painting, at least in Lok's case, is not so different.



Dana Lok, "Trace" (2022), oil on canvas, 13 x 10 inches

Dana Lok: Part and Parse continues at Miguel Abreu Gallery (88 Eldridge Street, Lower East Side, Manhattan) through May 7. The exhibition was organized by the gallery.

ARTS

Five Things to Do in New York's Art Scene July 17-22

From a round-trip bike ride to Edward Hopper's birthplace to one of MoMA PS1's celebrated EDM events, there's a lot going on this week.

By Dan Duray • 07/17/23 12:05pm

Welcome to Things to Do, our weekly roundup of happenings in the ever-buzzing New York art scene. Here, we present an expertly curated list of the best goings on that don't require an invite—but might require that you reserve a spot in advance.

Wednesday July 19

Opening: *Darling, Your Head's Not Right*



Jessi Reaves, *Warming Rails Extended (Towel Rack)*, 2022. Metal, hardware, sawdust, wood glue, 58.5 x 27 x 27 inches (148.6 x 68.6 x 68.6 cm.). Courtesy François Ghebaly gallery

François Ghebaly gallery, 391 Grand St., 5 to 8 p.m.

This group show's title quotes The Strokes, and its press release begins with an epigram by the poet and critic John Yau, so we're off to a strong start. Curated by the artist Danica Lundy, it features the work of Kaari Upson, Oda Iselin Sønderland, Lucas Blalock, Julian Alexander, ASMA, Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley, Dana Lok, Hannah Rawe, Jessi Reaves and Philip Seibel focusing on

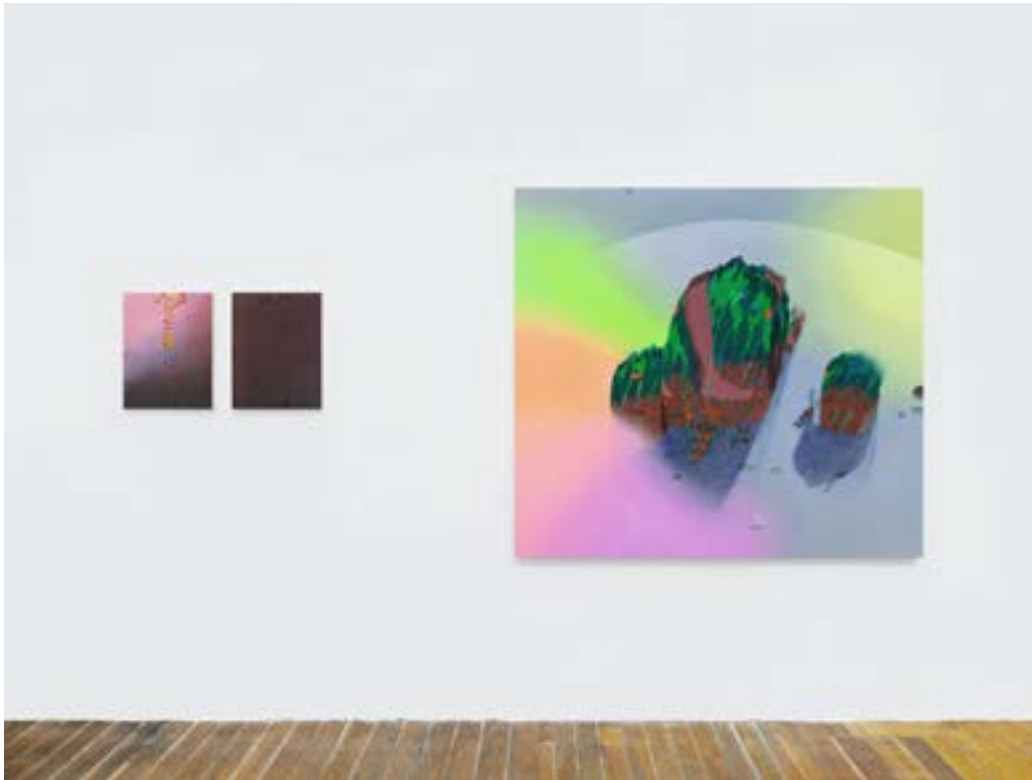
L'OFFICIEL

15 Artists to Watch in 2022

Discover the emerging visual artists to put on your radar this year.

04.19.2022 by Alexis Schwartz

Dana Lok



"Checking for Wetness," and "Causal Wedge," by Dana Lok. Courtesy of the artist and photographer Jason Mandella.

33-year-old Pennsylvania native Dana Lok is committed to challenging traditional forms and perspectives in art and presents a unique thesis on the passage of time in her work. Lok often highlights hands and fingers as a symbol of gathering knowledge and unpacking what's underneath. "My paintings and drawings are driven by my wonder at the enchanted interaction between material and content, surface and image, signs and the things they represent. I treat speech, representation, knowledge and the passage of time as activities that happen on a stage, not unlike tricks in a magic show," the Brooklyn-based designer says of her work. For those interested in an artist who challenges contemporaries, Lok is the one to watch.

HYPERALLERGIC

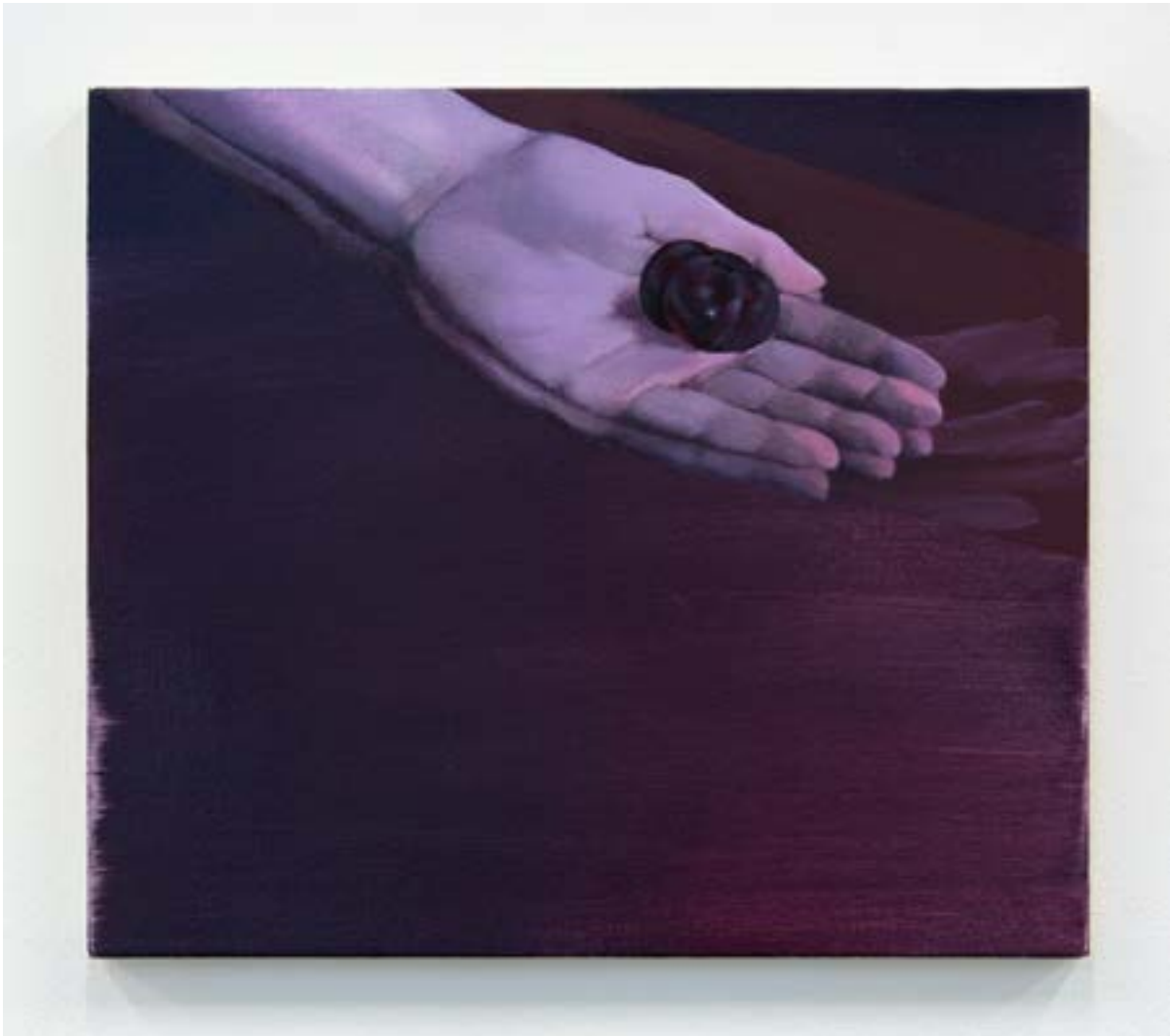
Art **Reviews**

Opening Up the Thingness of Painting

Dana Lok explores a range of perceptual conundrums in an impressive debut exhibition.



by John Yau
April 28, 2022



Dana Lok, "Two Plums" (2021), oil on canvas, 13 x 15 inches (all images © Dana Lok, courtesy Miguel Abreu Gallery)

Painted in different hues of mauve, and measuring 13 by 15 inches, the painting "Two Plums" (2021) depicts an open hand and wrist extending at a slight diagonal from the canvas's top-left edge. Two small plums rest in the palm. Beneath the hand, we see what could be its doppelganger. The mauve tones and the odd, indirect light bring to mind Joseph Cornell's collage film *Rose Hobart* (1936). Originally projected through a blue glass, Cornell chose a "rose" tint when it was first printed in 1969. I mention the Cornell because, like the film, "Two Plums," with its doubling, defines a liminal space.

It is this threshold moment that Dana Lok keeps finding ways to conjure in her impressive debut exhibition, *Dana Lok: Part and Parse*, at Miguel Abreu Gallery. In 13 paintings that range from 13 by 15 to 96 by 78 by 1 1/2 inches, Lok explores a range of perceptual conundrums, which evoke a deeper inquiry — part physics and part philosophy — into elemental questions: How do I know what I know? What measures do I use to quantify my experience? At this convulsive moment, when physicists are trying to visualize models for dark matter, which has never been observed, and others reject science as an objective method, Lok's interest in gaining genuine knowledge focuses on this discrepancy.



Dana Lok, "Parsing, Parsimony" (2021), oil on canvas, 62 x 70 inches

What should be stated is the singularity of Lok's inquiry in relationship to her peers. I know of no other artist pursuing this trajectory in painting. By asking these questions, she opens up the thingness of painting in an unexpected way, particularly regarding its existence as a two-dimensional surface, a three-dimensional object, a multilayered reality, and a means of exploring one's conjectures about the nature of reality as something that exists beyond our comprehension.

Informed by the magical world of cartoons, science manuals, cinematic cropping and lighting, and art history — just to name a few of the artist's inspirations and sources — Lok depicts scenes that convey a search that never arrives at a satisfactory answer. The point is to keep looking, taking the world apart and reassembling it. In "Parsing Parsimony" (2021), she invites viewers to meditate on the relationship between the whole and its parts. On a red and blue checkered cloth situated on grass, its lower right and upper left edges illuminated by flat, bright green circles, we see three interlocking, incomplete rectangles that form towering red and blue letters. The largest and tallest rectangle contains the following text, rendered in alternating red and blue letters:

YOU HAVE TO KNOW HOW IT'S MADE TO KNOW WHAT IT IS.

YOU HAVE TO KNOW ITS PARTS TO KNOW HOW IT'S MADE.

YOU CAN TAKE OUT ITS PARTS AND PLACE THEM SIDE BY SIDE.

WHEN ITS PARTS LAY SIDE BY SIDE IT DISAPPEARS.

The second, lower rectangle, which appears to be half as tall and contains a portion of the larger rectangle's text, reads:

OUT ITS

PARTS AND

PLACE THEM

SIDE BY

SIDE. WHEN

ITS PARTS

The third and smallest rectangle, which extends out of the previous one, reads:

LAY SIDE

BY SIDE IT

DISAPPEARS.

Made of separate columns, each topped by a letter, the three diminishing rectangles seem to be simultaneously commenting on themselves and embarking on a quest for a verifiable truth. Integral to the painting is the fact that Lok gives no indication of what it might be. Is it a thing or an idea? Are they irreconcilable?

Although this is not solely Lok's focus, I see "Parsing Parsimony" and other works in this exhibition as a rigorous refutation of painting's identity as a two-dimensional surface or a purely material thing, but one that does not offer an alternative rooted in the spiritual or transcendence. One could say that the artist wants a less stingy definition of painting's physical existence.

Faithful to that desire, Lok invites viewers to consider the another possible line of inquiry in "Bone Surgery" (2022), where she juxtaposes the letters with a fragment of Thomas Eakins's painting "The Gross Clinic" (1875). The letters, presented as three different-sized clusters, read:

YOU DON'T HAVE TO KNOW HOW IT'S MADE TO KNOW WHAT IT IS.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO KNOW ITS PARTS TO KNOW HOW IT'S MADE.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO TAKE OUT ITS PARTS AND PLACE THEM SIDE BY SIDE.

WHEN ITS PARTS LAY SIDE BY SIDE IT DOES NOT DISAPPEAR.

Depending on the circumstances in which they are applied, do these statements hold a validity that is equal to those in "Parsing Parsimony"?

This relentless desire to keep inquiring even when no answer is forthcoming seems to have inspired "Recursive Surgeon" (2021), the exhibition's largest painting. Using figures found in "The Gross Clinic," and a palette of different mauves, Lok depicts a cropped view of Dr. Samuel Gross, scalpel in hand, directing his assistants to perform an operation on a patient's thigh. In the Eakins painting, the head of one assistant, seen at an angle, is located in front of Gross's stomach, slightly off center. Lok's reinterpretation of "Gross Clinic" includes a close-up of the operation within the head's truncated outline. What complicates this view is that we also see the front part of the assistant's face emerging from the shadow cast by Gross's scalpel-wielding hand, peering — it would seem — into the larger version of his head, thus both observing and participating in the operation.



Dana Lok, "Recursive Surgeon" (2021), oil on canvas, 96 x 78 x 1 1/2 inches

Meanwhile, in the painting's upper left-hand corner, faces of the student doctors emerge from the paint, as if out of a thick fog, their hands supporting their heads, not exactly rapt with attention. I don't think it is an accident that Lok left out the woman seated to the left of Gross, who hides her eyes. What does it mean to see? What is the relationship between seeing and the quest for truth? Is it a fixed or changing relationship? What does it mean to be open, even as you venture into a territory where everything is murky? Might not this painting also be a meditation on vulnerability, change, and mortality? By incorporating and re-envisioning Eakins's painting — which merges detached realist observation with objective scientific study — isn't Lok commenting on the foundations of her own pursuit?



Dana Lok, "Catch" (2022), oil on canvas, 26 x 29 inches

Throughout the exhibition Lok returns to, and reexamines, different motifs: a partially open book, a knife on an empty plate, and a hand lying atop an identical hand. The one outlier in this gathering is "Catch" (2022). As often as I circled back to various paintings in this exhibition, something different happened when I first looked at "Catch." I was transfixed. I made a mental note as to where the painting was located because I wanted it to be the last one I looked at, even though I had not yet seen the entire show.

We are looking down into an open space among bushes and a scattering of white flowers. The lighting is artificial, like the kind you might remember from a dream. What could be a spiderweb or netting extends inward from the branches, the form's weave becoming tighter as it descends into a hole in the ground, like a funnel. The painting's title can be read in a number of ways: as seizing something, taking the opportunity to leave, becoming entangled, or being caught in the act. Where does my mind's eye go when looking at this painting, which evokes an unknowable domain? What is this impossible union of netting, web, and hole? As unlikely as the combination might strike us, something also seems to be irrevocably right about the joining. The limits of seeing and the conclusion of conjecturing and dreaming do not coincide. Although we live in that liminal space, we do not want to acknowledge how little we know as we proceed into the future.

Dana Lok: Part and Parse continues at Miguel Abreu Gallery (88 Eldridge Street, Lower East Side, Manhattan) through May 7. The exhibition was organized by the gallery.

The New York Times

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

Ablaze With Art: Thriving Galleries in Lower Manhattan

Will Heinrich heads to TriBeCa, where new galleries keep popping up and strong shows abound.

By Will Heinrich

Oct. 15, 2020

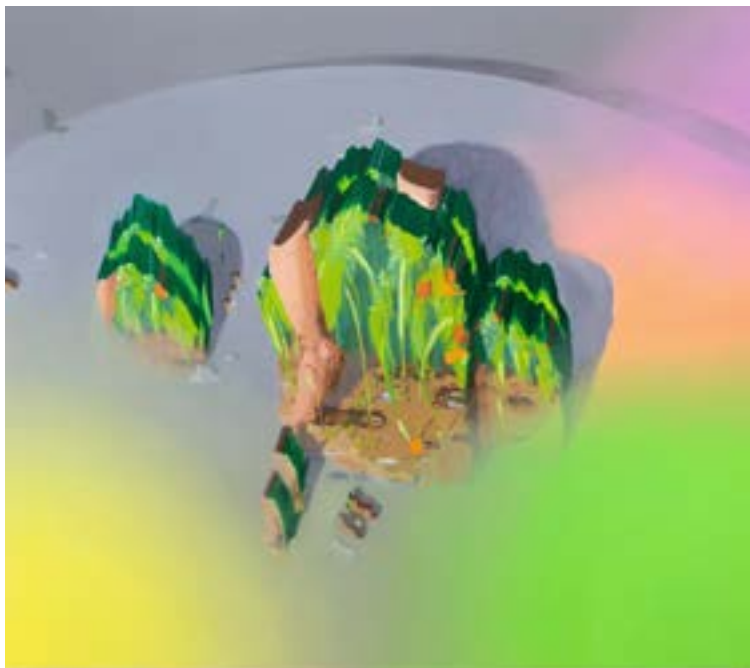


An installation view of some of the new works in Dana Lok's exhibition "One Second Per Second" at Page (NYC) gallery. Dana Lok and Page

Dana Lok

Through Nov. 1. Page, 368 Broadway, Manhattan; 917-599-8140, page-nyc.com.

How would the world look if you could stand outside time? That's the heady question behind "One Second Per Second," a lush but tightly focused suite of paintings by the young Brooklyn artist Dana Lok. In the largest two, "Causal Wedge (Front)" and "Causal Wedge (Back)," a veil of neon mist parts to reveal a single foot trampling through the mud. Simple orange butterflies — perhaps a reference to the "butterfly effect" — flutter around in the tall grass. Jagged receding borders at the top of this vision suggest that it's not just one instant Ms. Lok has her sights on, but a contiguous train of them. But what makes the concept work is that she doesn't linger over the details. It's just an uncommon way of highlighting what is, after all, the heart of most figurative painting — the strange and magical problem of fixing a moment in time.



Dana Lok's "Causal Wedge (Front)," from 2020, at Page (NYC) gallery. Dana Lok and Page

ATP DIARY

Dana Lok and the ambiguity of vision

Clima gallery in Milan hosts, until April 22, the solo show of the American artist

ELENA BORDIGNON, 8 April 2017



Dana Lok, *Soft Fact*—Installation view—photos: Marco Davolio

***Soft Fact* — Dana Lok**

Clima, Milan

Until April 22, 2017

In this exhibition, a forest landscape becomes the stage for a play of flatness and depth, surface and content, point of view and vista. In a continued exploration of painting as a theater set, Lok's new work probes the relationship between illusion and fact in pictorial space. Some works in this show offer a tilted perspective of a painted landscape to reveal the particularity of the stance a viewer must maintain in order to preserve a painting's pictorial depth. Such a perspective is not unlike the perfect view of a play from front and center theater seats. Taken together, the paintings and drawings in this show entertain the idea that pictures can have properties usually attributed to statements: they can be true or false, they can mislead, and they can make promises. Here, an image of a light-filled grove becomes an assertion or argument that presents only selective evidence to support its claims of distance, depth and light.

In *Soft Fact*, images and assertions have weight, volume and texture—they are things to encounter with both visual and haptic senses. Fingerprints stand as evidence of tactile investigation or entitled possession. The objects touched are plush, luminous, duplicitous, impossible.

Dana Lok (b. in Pennsylvania, USA) lives and works in New York. She received her MFA from Columbia University, New York in 2015 and her BFA from Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh in 2011. Recent exhibitions: The Set of All Sets, solo exhibition, CHEWDAY'S, London; A night out of town, Clima, Milan; In Place Of, Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York; The Crack Up, Room East Gallery, New York; Floating Point, Judith Charles Gallery, New York and The Columbia MFA Thesis Exhibition, Fisher Landau Center for Art, New York. Lok was included in New American Paintings, Northeast Issue #128, curated by Laura Phipps.



Dana Lok, Forest Floor, 2017 – Pastel on paper, 40 x 40 cm – photos: Marco Davolio – Courtesy Clima Milan



Dana Lok, Assume (Take), 2017, Oil on canvas, 68 x 65 cm – Photos: Marco Davolio – Courtesy Clima Milan

DANA LOK

BY LAURA PHIPPS

Speak your truth. Live your truth. Tell the truth.

Our culture is obsessed with truth. We look to data and statistics, self-help books, the judicial system, the internet and can hardly acknowledge that these sources don't hold the truth... much less the reality that often there is no one truth. Dana Lok is interested in the veracity of images and of words, but also in the fallacy of faith in veracity. She proposes that paintings can take on the properties of statements—that a picture can assert a position and claim to speak a truth. Lok uses accessible imagery and straightforward language alongside imagined perspectives and complex spatial relationships to complicate the statements that her paintings and drawings communicate.

Lok's newest work clearly articulates her belief in the claims paintings make, while also introducing the proposition that truth and reality are relative. In a recent exhibition, the painting *Soft Grove* (2017) takes on the role of a theater backdrop and relies on the pact we make to suspend reality in the space of theater. But it is not a backdrop in a theater, it is a painting in a gallery, so what is the claim it makes? The subject of the painting itself is a forest landscape that conjures less a reality than a familiar fantasy. Interested in creating a "dumb landscape," Lok's whimsical color palette and simplicity of form belie the complexity of the spatial relationships between the trees, leaves, and ground. Lok often references the imagery of classic cartoons, like those by Disney studios and Warner Brothers, thereby capturing the exacting placelessness of these types of cartoon.

As installed in this particular space—hanging directly on the wall with excess canvas folded along the floor—the painting lays bare the assumptions that we make about painting. Other paintings in the same show further call into question the dumbness of the landscape of *Soft Grove* by suggesting the real ways that its fantastical subject *could* exist in space. The curtain is given multiple dimensions, protruding into space like an architectural model, or seen through a window, receding like the landscape it is. At the same time that Lok presents the possibilities of the landscape's existence as truth she undermines these assertions by including elements that complicate the readings. Colorful fingerprints and subtle, shadowy text interrupt any consistent spatial relationship within *Assume Take* (2017). And most damning Lok incorporates quotation marks around the window that contains the landscape in *Assume Say* (2017). Are these quotation marks setting off direct speech (one truth) or air quotes indicating a satirical or sarcastic statement (another truth)? What does it mean for a painting to quote itself?

Variations on the theme of this playful provocation are evident in much of Lok's work. She often uses circular language in paintings—looking for ways a painting can assert a position, yet also contradict or undermine the position within itself. In Lok's paintings *Conjuror I* (2016) and *Conjuror II* (2016) not only do the words repeat, but the two phrases loop, seemingly infinitely. "I know" and "you know" are unambiguous in their actual meaning, but often meaningless in their common usage. "I know" and "you know" are

vague conversation fillers similar to “uh-huh” or “right,” and yet set against Lok’s painting of a night sky as void they become menacing and weighted in their indecipherable meaning. Another provocation is seen in Lok’s cheeky acknowledgment of circular logic in *Opening Statement* (2016), a diptych including the words “IFF” (sic) and “THEN”, each looming in front of their own moons, yet obscured by the unexplained presence of vines and butterflies. The pitfalls of any argument that relies on “if, then” constructions are well-documented, but the paintings themselves betray no concern with potential falsehoods.

Throughout her work Lok returns to specific references and images and forces them to make statements in spite of their ambiguities. Lok uses the art historical trope of the bather—specifically the bather of Édouard Manet’s *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe*—to interrogate not only the two-dimensionality of painting but also the spatial relationships within a painting. Isolating a single bathing figure from the famous painting, she gives this figure depth, but not form, and imagines what views would be possible if one was in the painting. In her paintings and drawings of this figure, like *Tilted Bather* (2015), Lok upends the expectations of what can be seen in a painting. Her continued interest in imagining the possibilities of perspectives from within a painting often returns to the language of the theater—the potential impressions and viewpoints available from a back or side stage view.

Lok’s process, her way of using paint, is traditional and her paintings use all that representational painting has to offer. This is to say that by representing objects and subjects that exist in real life and cultivating a verisimilitude in the paintings, Lok’s subtle deviations from truth can come as surprise. In a similar way Lok’s messy, expressionistic rubbings of “impossible objects” seem anomalous in light of her paintings, though

they contain much of the same complexity and complications. The practice of rubbing, using charcoal, introduces the touch in a way not apparent in her more meticulous paintings and these works act as a counterbalance to the often tight illustration in the paintings. However, in both the most physically active drawings and the precisely rendered paintings the implications of labor and active problem solving are evident. The conceit in these works, that the impossible objects—two-dimensional images that project as three-dimensional forms through optical illusions—could exist and be recorded as rubbings, serve as one of the most straightforward foils to truth in Lok’s work.

So how does a painting speak its truth? In Lok’s work answering this question involves navigating any number of obstacles—illusionistic space, perspectival quirks, reimaginings of form, ambiguous language and figures—to ultimately arrive somewhere near the ballpark of... it just does.

Double Bunny, 2017 Courtesy: the artist (previous page) *Tilted Bather*, 2014 (p. 159) *Mimic, Pick, Point*, 2017 (pp. 150-151) Courtesy: Clima, Milan

topic kind of transformation. In the spirit of the 1990s, you might imagine ribbon forms of *For Jenny and Mesh Collage with Loofah* (1991) as tumbleweeds blowing across desolate industrial sites in an arid, no longer imaginable, future of deserts and rising seas. As an awkward temporality, they seem ancient and mystic yet, as artworks, they feel fresh. In their wild materiality and utter disregard for the ceramic medium and its craft and function, they prefigure the work of any young artists currently working in Angell, who wrote a text for it, is one obvious example.) More interesting echo, from Painter's own artist-list, might be the work of someone like Ott, who shares Lowndes's approach to collecting the contemporary life. (For precedent look no further than the Schenberg retrospective up late Modern.) Best work in this exhibition is 1981, not longer after Lowndes's Nigeria, where she spent a year with her partner, the ceramicist, in the late 1970s. Lowndes studied at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in the mid-1980s, on a course, first under Dora Bilton then Gilbert Harding Green, an art dealer and collector, a champion of her work and at his Sloane Street space, in the 1980s. However, the 18 years spent in Nigeria proved true. Inspired by Yoruba craft and the incorporation of multiple vessels into a single artefact, the expedient improvisation of their pottery – Lowndes abandoned tradition for uncharted waters.

In Tanya Harrod wrote about 'impatience with clay' upon her arrival in Africa: across the works in this show we see her pushing her material to the point at which it no longer holds itself. (In this she exhibits a facility in impersonating materials, including copper, stone.) We might understand this in another way, too: for all its thrilling originality, this small but formed show in a young gallery is the largest exhibition in London for two decades. The artist, to their great credit, have taken an important step in recontextualizing their oeuvre; it's time that the art world caught up.

DANA LOK Chewday's, London, UK

In 1902, the British philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote a letter to the German logician Gottlob Frege explaining that he had found a paradox in Frege's foundations of mathematics. Russell's paradox refers to an object being part of a group only if it is not part of that group. The title of Dana Lok's first solo exhibition, 'The Set of All Sets', alludes to this contradiction, but here it is the painted surface that is the stage for tensions between what is portrayed and our visual expectations.

Tilted Bather (2014), one of five paintings in the show, is a large work that depicts a cutout of a female figure laid on a circular pool of blue, set against what appears to be a green forest floor, with brown tree trunks in the background. Three vertical bands, which look as though they could be prison bars, are painted in the immediate foreground of the work creating a cage, of sorts – for the woman or for the viewer. The painting takes its bathing figure from Édouard Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (Luncheon on the Grass, 1863). In both works, the woman appears out of proportion: in Manet's rendering, she is too large for her location behind the other figures in the work, looming, oversized and flat, almost like a painting within a painting. Lok's bather looks as if she has been excised from Manet's canvas and placed horizontally, like a coin on a level surface, so that we are able to see the depth of the cutout form. Lok's skillful use of perspectival shifts – from three dimensions to two dimensions and back – offers us the chance to see the painted surface for what it is: an artificial construction that can stage a multitude of realities; a kind of theatre set.

The many angles that a painting can deliver, and the change of compositional outlook that can follow, is given further attention in two very similar looking works, *Conjurors I* and *Conjurors II* (2016), which hang directly across from one another, like mirror images. Both paintings are a night-sky blue, which slightly darkens toward the top, where there is a pale-blue moon, and are scattered with small stars, tilted and slanted, like falling confetti. From the bottom edge of each, an angled shadow creeps its way into the picture. Maybe it's the head of someone looking into a reflecting pool that mirrors a moon-filled night above but, then, the water would have to be eerily still. More likely, it's the shadow of an imaginary viewer standing between

the paintings, humorously intimating us in the spatial murkiness of the composition. Adding to this disorienting configuration, a ring of red- and blue-lettered text looks as if it is circling in the pictorial plane – a trick of perspective. *Conjurors I* reads 'I KNOW YOU KNOW', assuming you start with the pink-coloured 'I' highlighted by the moon's glow – while *Conjurors II* might be read as 'YOU KNOW I KNOW'. The infinite loop – 'I know that you know that I know that you know, and so on' – is both a nod to the use of recursion in mathematics and logic, and a wink to the audience that painting is a game – one in which we all know the rules, though they may sometimes fool us. Lok's works remind us that the nature of painterly representation, of looking for depth in flatness and of finding flatness in depth, requires ambiguity and, perhaps, a little bit of paradox.

Aaron Bogart



Scott Roben

Can painting be thought of in loops? Dana Lok's exhibition *The Set of All Sets* is bookended by two of them. *Conjurors I* and *II* are a pair of mirror-image paintings that face one another from opposite walls, each displaying a ring of free-floating text against a deep blue backdrop. The text consists of two parts: "I KNOW" and "YOU KNOW". You might read the words in one sequence ("I KNOW YOU KNOW") or the opposite ("YOU KNOW I KNOW"). Or you might understand the text as a continuous chain of dependent clauses ("...YOU KNOW I KNOW YOU KNOW I KNOW..." etc.), descending into a *mise en abyme* of "knowing" where the object of knowledge is always out of reach. In *The Set of All Sets*, part of what seems to be at stake in the motif of the loop is its potential as a model for paradox, especially paradox in relation to the discipline of painting. All of the works in this exhibition intervene in certain distinctive qualities of the medium -- its particular ability to depict space and time, to convey narrative, to address a viewer and refer outside of itself -- in order to expose the inherent, unshakeable contradictions at the basis of painterly representation.

In Lok's work, text and space are codependent, operating as part of a single apparatus. In *Conjurors I* and *II*, they're bound efficiently in a multivalent paradox. Who speaks the text in these two paintings, and whom does it address? It's unclear because all we're given is a set of placeholders: a pair of abstract signifiers (I and YOU) that are able to accommodate whatever combination of subjects comes near. So maybe the painting speaks to the viewer, for example, or to the artist in the studio, or to its partner on the opposite wall -- but equally possible is the reverse, that any of these subjects addresses the painting. The real trick of the *Conjurors*, however, is the way that they intertwine the semantic ambiguity with a spatial ambiguity. Just as the subject of the sentence exists as a plurality of possibilities, so too does one's sense of near and far: which side of the ring comes forward, and which recedes? The question of linguistic address, of a *to* and a *from*, is fused with an oscillating awareness of form circling in *to* or out *from* the depths of the painting.

Even when text itself is absent from Lok's images, their spatial composition remains distinctly textual. Perspective, for example, takes on a syntactic function as an organizational device that is deployed to bind discrete forms into particular kinds of relationships. In her painting *Tilted Bather*, Lok employs a perspective shift to inflect a quotation. The painting refers to an iconic work by Edouard Manet, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1862-1863), focusing in particular on the figure of a female bather in its background. Lok's painting imagines a scenario in which the figure has been cut away from the painting and tilted in space without any attempt to preserve the illusion of three-dimensionality. Instead she is exposed as what we know her to actually be -- a flat illusion -- tilted and laid to rest on her "back" in what appears to be a blue puddle on the forest floor. As in Manet's original, she remains unaware of our gaze, but rendered not only *from* a new perspective but within an alternative perspectival scheme, we're denied the fantasy of sharing her space. She arrives in this painting as an interrupted illusion, not fully available to our gaze or our projections, still belonging to a scene taking place somewhere else.

The word "perspective" derives from the Latin roots *per* (through) and *specere* (to look). The works that make up *The Set of All Sets* perform "looking through" on multiple, often intentionally contradictory levels. On the one hand, you look through the paintings into their illusionistic depths, while on the other, you seem to be looking through the device of illusionism itself. The image that's quoted at the basis of *The Enchanted Cel* represents a moment of literal looking through -- a hand reaching out to pull aside some greenery, presumably in order to more

clearly see the wider forest landscape in the distance. The image has been subjected to the same type of manipulations as the figure in the previous painting; this time it's been rotated just shy of ninety degrees in a counterclockwise direction. In both paintings, the perspectival logic of the source imagery falters as it is fragmented and subjected to Lok's intervention. Part of what makes Lok's approach so particular is that in her move to negate perspective, she never resorts to non-perspectival space, such as the space of the diagram. Instead, she allows the tool to perform its own deconstruction, revealing both its fallibility and its robustness: the broken perspective is always finally housed within the frame of a larger, perspectivally coherent image. You could imagine the process repeating itself infinitely, with each partial rotation of the image revealing a larger surrounding space that can then itself be rotated... and we're back to loop again.

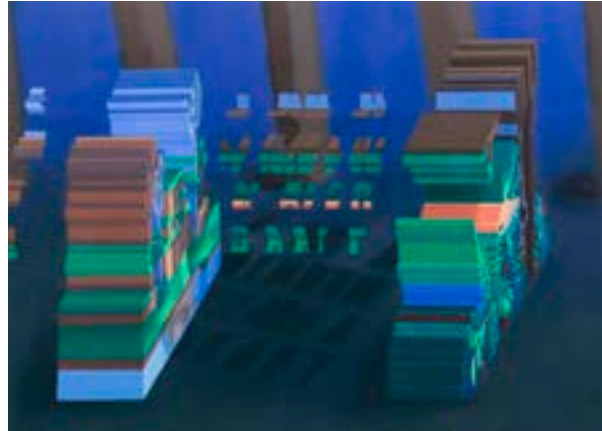
Part of what's so mysterious about Lok's work is the way that it manages again and again to locate and visualize spaces between the signifier and the signified, or between the act of reference and the object of reference. In addition to being rotated, the source image from *The Enchanted Cel* has been split in two so that the foreground — the hand pulling aside the shrubbery — is entirely separated from the background — a blue forest pond with a grassy bank. In keeping with the understanding that space in Lok's work operates syntactically, the foreground/background split can be simultaneously understood as a splitting of subject (the one who sees) from object (what is seen). In the chasm that opens between them, a sort of delicate, barely intelligible text emerges floating, as if shaved off of the scene's contours: "I AM A WINDOW YOU ARE A DRAFT." The phrase might sound like a fairly straightforward analogy of the relationship between a painting and its viewer, except that in fact, it's not quite straight at all. The text, which is aligned on an axis perpendicular not to the frame of the canvas, but to the partially rotated image of the quoted forest, seems directed not quite at the viewer, but at a space just to her left. Here again, a pictorial intervention starts to interact with and disrupt language, in this case dragging its signification slightly off-kilter.

The "oblique" in Lok's work (oblique perspectives, oblique references, oblique modes of address) seems inextricably linked to the act of rotation, and ultimately, the model of the loop. There's no denying that a peculiar atmosphere starts to set in as Lok's paintings carry us again and again into this type of indeterminate territory, into these various, void-like spaces *between*, where time is suspended. *Opening Statement* is a diptych which figures the words IFF (the academic shorthand for "if and only if") and THEN against nearly identical a moonlit skies. Once again we're left with the ghost of a relationship: a conjunction and a conjunctive adverb without any trace of the material they ought to qualify. Instead the two words drift freely in the twilight like shadows of conditional thought. This kind of notion of an unmoored contingency might be emblematic of the logic of the exhibition as a whole, of the matter-of-fact manner in which it speaks, repeatedly and cogently, through contradiction.

BOMB

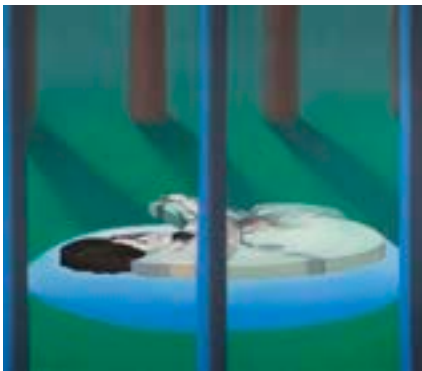
Portfolio by Dana Lok

"Traditionally, a painting treats you to the front and center seats. I like the idea you might get a seat that's off to the side."

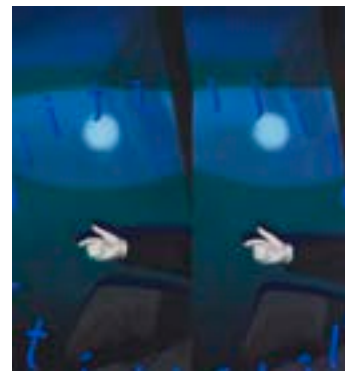


Dana Lok, *Enchanted Cel*, 2015. Oil on canvas. All images courtesy of the artist.

A few years ago, my practice consisted of primarily making abstract paintings. I worked through a structure I called "Slow Frames," which offered you two sequential views of an abstract scene, like two frames lifted from an animation. Seeing a second view of the scene implies that even an abstract painting promises some other, continuous world inside its frame. When I began to very carefully let imagery seep into my work, it came from a source already essentially temporal, constructed, and graphic: a cartoon.



Tilted Bather, 2014. Oil on canvas.



Night Picnic, 2014. Oil on canvas.

The Fleischer Studios of the 1920s and '30s created a flat world with rhythms that travel on the surface of the picture plane. People, animals, objects, and environment are made of one unified, rubbery substance. Everything in this world bounces with life, and everything has the potential to return your gaze. Betty Boop occupies a land at once sweetly inviting and menacing.

Disney, on the other hand, set out to achieve a high degree of naturalism. With the use of his patented “multiplane camera,” he attained a stunningly realistic illusion of three-dimensional space in his feature-length animated films, including *Pinocchio*, *Bambi*, and *Sleeping Beauty*. Traditionally, animations have two layers—one, a stationary background; and two, a series of overlaid transparent cels for animated elements. Instead, Disney created multi-layered backgrounds with several glass panels that could be manipulated individually to create the illusion of parallax as a camera panned across the scene: glass panels with foreground features moved faster, while the panels with the farthest elements of the background moved slowly.



There, There, 2014. Oil on canvas.



Tunnel, 2014. Oil on paper.

I’m charmed by the great lengths Disney went in order to make a shallow space look deep, and I’m drawn to use his work to tease out the strange threshold between the surface of an image and the deep space it depicts. In one scene of a documentary about his multiplane camera, a background painter demonstrates how a painting is irritatingly flat by rotating the picture to show you an oblique view of the panel. This rotation makes the flatness explicit because you can no longer suspend your disbelief about what is on the other side of the forms in the picture; there’s no backside of the hand, far side of the tree, nor bulk to the boulder. Our tacit assumption that we might be able to hop inside the scene and see the other side of the tree is undermined by the demonstration that there’s simply no more information there. I’m fascinated by the prospect of distilling this demonstration and reinserting it into a painting. I have the power to slip new, unexpected information into the space where you assumed there might be the backside of a tree. Depicting an image within an image is like nesting a story within a story.



Crying Pointing Painting, 2015. Oil on canvas.