

TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY

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HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

Summer Carousing and Revelry

by John Yau on July 3, 2016



Elliott Green, "Light Buried Underground" (2008), oil on linen, 12 x 18 inches

It must be summer. There are group shows galore all over Manhattan. This is when you get to discover new artists, get enthusiastic, become disenchanted, fall in love, fall out of love, all of the above, and none of the above, in one day, and still have time to sit back and read a book of poems in the evening. I went to a gaggle of group shows the other afternoon, including *Blackness in Abstraction* at Pace (June 24 – August 19, 2016), *The Female Gaze, Part Two: Woman Look at Men* at Cheim and Read (June 23 – September 2, 2016), and *Objecty* at Tibor de Nagy (June 22 – July 29, 2016).

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The first two exhibitions are big, thematic shows while the one at Tibor de Nagy is more modest and, in the end, more surprising and satisfying. Maybe it is the shrillness of the exhibition titles, the push to have you see the work in a context, which I always find myself resisting. It is hard to look at anything when you feel as if someone is whispering not-so-softly in your ear, making sure you get the point. These shows require that I go back with earplugs on, while I can return to Tibor de Nagy for a different reason, pleasure. Sure the world is burning up or down, depending on your perspective, but that doesn't mean you are Nero if you listen to music.

According to the press release for *Objecty*:

The exhibited works toy with the notion of 'still life' not so much in a literal sense or as a rethinking of the representation of objects, but more as an abstract and magical reflection of qualities that make up objects. The artists as 'object makers' imbue these things with a life of their own.

As press releases go, this one is pretty good, mostly because the language is straightforward and the stated goal is modest. I know I am not alone in thinking that most press releases sound like they were written by a student who took an online course from Benjamin Buchloh. I like the possibility of "magical reflection" rather than seeing more examples either of the "literal" or the "rethinking of the representation," both of which have become predictable, tiresome spiels, Don Rickles on Valium.

At *Objecty*, I was happy to see that Trevor Winkfield hadn't lost his flair for sinister Romper Room colors. Kathy Butterly's sculptures suggest that she is pushing into new territory and I am looking forward to her next exhibition. I have written about Tom Burckhardt before, and these works don't afford me the opportunity to say something fresh about his work. Don't get me wrong, I think he is one of the best around and he is only going to get better. I was tantalized by the work of Dave Hardy, Jen Mazza, Ian

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Pedigo, Alan Wiener, and Randy Wray, and wished I could see more. It is pretty bad to go to a group show and see one or two works by someone and think – that’s enough. There were works by four artists that really caught my attention, and I believe that two of them are not connected to any New York City gallery – Elliott Green and Joshua Marsh. The other two were John Newman, who is represented by Tibor de Nagy, and Tamara Zahaykevich who used to show with KANSAS.

I have been thinking of the term “artist’s artist” these days, maybe because it used to mean an artist who had a handful of loyal fans, but not much attention from the public. At least since the days of Andy Warhol, the idea of not having wide public acclaim was regarded by some as a sign of failure, of possessing a small ambition, of having been deemed unspectacular or considered an elitist. This was “Join the Club” thinking, which may have finally passed, but not completely.

The last time I saw works by Elliott Green and Joshua Marsh was when they were included in the *2015 Invitational Exhibition of Visual Arts* hosted by the American Academy of Arts and Letters (March 12 – April 12, 2015). Held yearly, that’s one of the group shows you don’t want to miss. It was the first time I had seen work by Green in some years. He combined ravishing brushwork with mysterious, Xanadu-like landscapes that emerged, radiant, out of the undulating applications of paint. Rainbows, clouds, jagged mountains, verdant hills, pastoral lakes, and, most importantly, changing light in a panoramic view – it was all there and it was just paint.

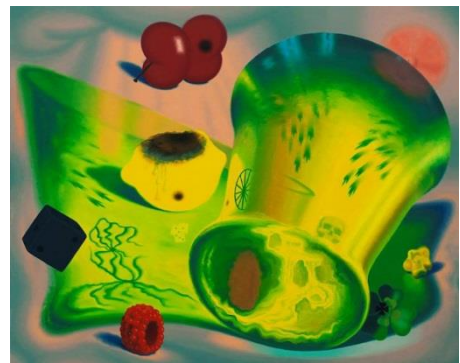


John Newman, “Self-Reflection in Bright Yellow”
(2016), 19 x 15 ½ x 12 inches

I have the feeling that the grooved sensuality of Green's brushstrokes, or what Alexi Worth called their "hardy, taffy-like consistency," would make J.M.W. Turner gnash his teeth. But still life and a smaller scale make different demands than landscape, and I wasn't sure what to expect when I went to this exhibition. Green's two paintings, both from 2008, are small, 12 x 18 inches, and, like his abstract landscapes, they hover tantalizing on the cusp of legibility without ever tilting into the pictorial. There seem to be multiple, overlapping views in "Light Buried Underground," as if something is being observed, remembered and imagined simultaneously. One thing is clear: Green believes in paint and its capacity, as a vehicle, for discovering the unexpected. As good as he is as a painter – and he is very, very good – he never seems to settle into production mode, never tries to show off. Somebody should give him a show, a big show.

I have been a fan of Joshua Marsh ever since I visited his debut exhibition at Jeff Bailey in 2010 and reviewed it for *The Brooklyn Rail*. I also reviewed his second show, *As If*, at same gallery, which has since relocated to Hudson, New York, for *Hyperallergic Weekend* (April 7, 2013). What gets me about Marsh's work is that whenever he gets good at something, he tries to build upon it and move on. In his first show at Jeff Bailey, Marsh used domestic objects, such as water pitchers, drinking glasses, and dustpans, to explore the interaction of light and form, often with saturated, high-key colors. The light was spectral, which contrasted with the smooth, tactile skin of the paint. His palette ranged from tonal gradations to sharp contrasts.

In "Glass" (2016), which measures 16 x 20 inches, Marsh continues to focus on domestic objects (a water glass), but has now added fruit (cherries, a single raspberry), often in a state of decay. Both the red raspberry and the two cherries have a black spot on



Joshua Marsh, "Glass" (2016), oil on panel, 16 x 20 inches

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them. The saturated color and subject matter are at odds with each other, like Picasso's "Weeping Woman" (1937) with its jaunty colors. Shot through with vibrant color and ethereal light, the painting will have viewers asking themselves: what is actual (the fruit); what is reflection (the light passing through the yellow and green glass onto the blue and dusky pink surface); and what is a dream (the tiny skull peering over the foot of the glass lying on its side)?

I have been looking at John Newman's work for many years. At times, his penchant for utilizing multiple techniques to fit unlikely and even exotic materials together seemed a tad precious, while also a bit too much like a one-man-band playing the xylophone, bass drum, and oboe simultaneously. The abrupt shifts from one kind of material and form to another could feel arbitrary, like an overwrought version of Comte de Lautréamont's dictum, which was taken up by the Surrealists: "beautiful as the chance meeting on a dissecting-table of a sewing-machine and an umbrella." However, in two works, "Self-Reflection in Bright Yellow" and "Many Entries" (both 2016), which Newman contributes to *Objecty*, I didn't have the same reservations and I am not sure I can pinpoint exactly why.

In "Many Entries," he achieves a seamless balance between material, shape, and surface. I felt as if I were looking at something that you might find at the bottom of a tropical lagoon. The forms don't shift abruptly from one thing to another so much as flow effortlessly into the next. In "Self-Reflection in Bright Yellow," he displays an uncharacteristic humor, which he might have caught from Kathy Butterly, who shows in the same gallery, and that wit folded another dimension to the work.

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Tamara Zahaykevich, "Ovals Lay Eggs" (2016), mixed media construction, 13 ½ x 10 x 5 inches

Whereas Newman uses all kind of materials and techniques, Tamara Zahaykevich works solely with foam board, paper, and acrylic paint. "Ovals lay eggs" (2016) is a wall relief that provides an oval niche where an unnamed bird might wish to deposit its egg for safekeeping. It could also be an architectural element, a container for an oval mirror, which has been removed, or a frame for a tondo that has not yet been installed. One could say that Zahaykevich has taken a form we associate with Lee Bontecou – a wall relief whose interiors were lined with black velvet – and made it her own, no small accomplishment. The freestanding "Oblique Freak" (2016) is made from joined strips of foam board that rise, tilt, and change, like something trying to become completely erect and unable to do so.

The other thing that is striking about this exhibition is the conversation the different works have among themselves, sometimes all joined together, and other times breaking into small groups or tête-à-tête chats. It is the kind of party where you want to hear what everyone is saying.