

TIBOR DE NAGY

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Two
Coats of
Paint

Solo Shows

Medrie MacPhee: Upcycling

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Medrie MacPhee, *Bob's Not Your Uncle*, 2025, oil and mixed media on canvas, 64 x 84 inches

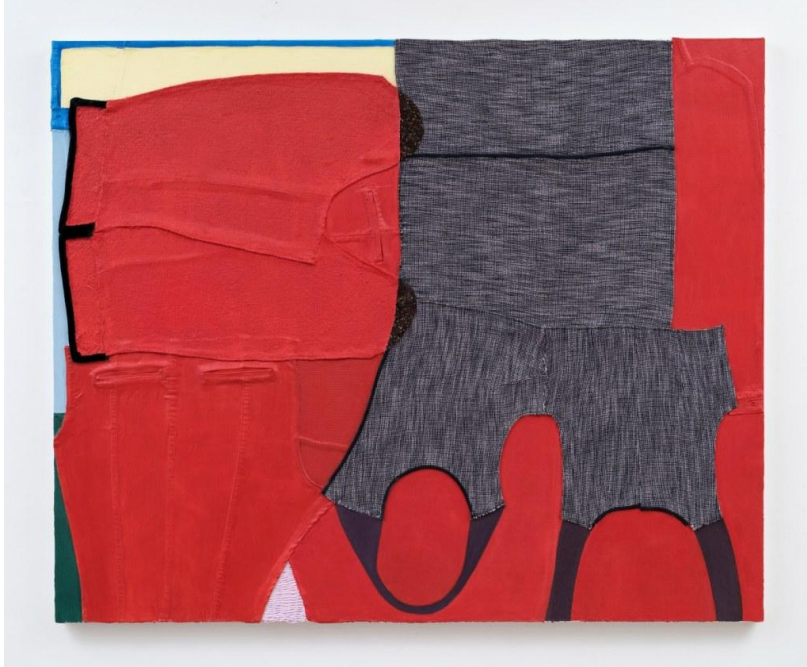
Contributed by Adam Simon / The five abstract paintings in Medrie MacPhee's "The Repair," at Tibor de Nagy, have just enough indications of figure/ground and observed reality to evoke landscape, interior space, aerial view, blueprint. What also connects these paintings to the physical world, as we perceive it, are minor shifts of line, contour, or color that activate the surface and keep the paintings from being flat. While the paintings are large, all but one measuring 64 x 84 inches,

somehow the small gallery doesn't feel crowded. The colored shapes within each painting are similarly large, with a looming assertiveness, but also a matter-of-factness that can be disarming. Color is applied in uniform expanses and the same color can serve as both figure and ground and as simply a painted surface. And then there's the way that clothing, which underlies it all, mimics the human form.

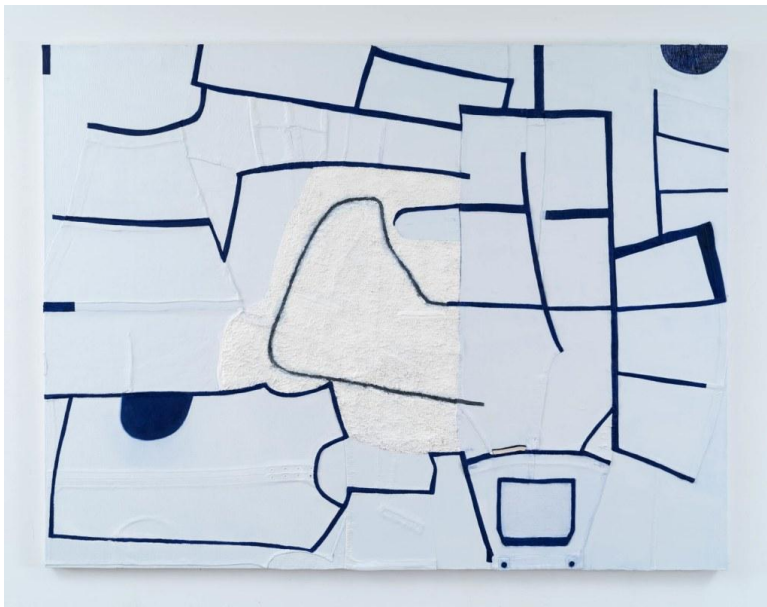


Medrie MacPhee, *Drawing it Down*, 2025, oil and mixed media on canvas, 64 x 84 inches

Each painting includes an underlayer of ghost images created by material adhered to the canvas beneath the paint. It constitutes part of the substrate on which the painting develops. For many viewers, it might be only that – an activated surface with ridges and flat areas. A lot of the secondhand clothing that provides this material is close enough to what most paintings are painted on, cotton duck, that it doesn't feel disruptive. We take it in stride. Yet the ghost forms literally project in front of the depicted shapes by virtue of their relative thickness. This contradictory state of being both in front and behind results in the suspension of any fixed location. It can be unsettling, this lack of fixity, in a way that can tempt a viewer down the rabbit hole of metaphor. At a time when the federal government is trying to outlaw any divergence from strict male/female identity and, more broadly, to mandate a way of thinking that is as unsubtle as us vs them, this slippage between what is in front or behind feels significant. While MacPhee's paintings may prioritize looking over thinking, form over content, it's hard not to see the burying of material under paint, as if from eons of sedimentary accumulation, as something almost archaeological.



Medrie MacPhee, *Yes*, 2025, oil and mixed media on canvas,, 45 x 55 inches



Medrie MacPhee, *The Path of No Return*, 2022, oil and mixed media on canvas, 64 x 84 inches

I never devoted much thought to the cultural content of Julian Schnabel's plate paintings. The crockery was there as disruption and provocation and as an impediment to the natural liquidity of paint. The underlying material in MacPhee's work resonates differently, as a quotidian and familiar presence that is richly associative and referential of all our lived lives. The exhibition is titled, 'The Repair'. Repair can mean to restore to a healthy state and can also mean to return to. What is buried persists, or so psychoanalysts tell us. And the pre-existing identity of the material, with all its utility and associations, exerts subtle shaping pressure on what lingers in a viewer's encounter with

the works. Straps, seams, pockets, pads, buttons, buttonholes – this is the stuff of past lives, perhaps worn by several owners during work and leisure, good times and bad times. It evokes rummaging through bins in thrift shops and the delight of a great find. But it also alludes to the sheer glut of consumer goods and the trail of material excess. The clothes we threw away could have played a role in an imagined world.



Medrie MacPhee, *For the Record*, 2023, oil and mixed media on canvas, 64 x 84 inches

One could see the impulse to recycle as an ecological counterbalance to artists putting yet more stuff into the world. It has long played a role in visual art. Consider John Chamberlain's crushed car sculptures, Lee Krasner's collage paintings that used her own and Jackson Pollock's cut-up works, whole bodies of work that qualify as bricolage, ready-made or affichiste. This show might be the first of MacPhee's, at least that I've seen at Tibor, in which areas containing material are left unpainted. The unpainted areas tend not to be denim, the word twill comes to mind but that's probably wrong. The unpainted material seems even more matter of fact, lacking the gravitas of something buried in paint, but contributing a lightness, both in terms of the lighter material itself, but also of something that has been selected and included in a painting but left alone to manifest its thingness and all that brings.

“[Medrie MacPhee: The Repair](#),” Tibor de Nagy, 11 Rivington Street, New York, NY. Through April 19, 2025.

About the author: [Adam Simon](#) is a New York artist and writer. His most recent solo painting show was at OSMOS in 2024.