

Old Truths & New Lies

7 Jun – 31 Jul 2015 at Rachel Uffner Gallery in New York, United States



"I'm trying to think of a way to make a press release that feels honest and interesting. I guess in the beginning, I just wanted to do a show that felt like the antithesis of a white male abstract painting show. It was kind of an annoyed and frustrated position, but as I started seriously thinking about the kind of work I'd like to see, the show took on it's own shape and the original reactionary attitude dissipated."

"Emi Winter, who is a really brave painter, also has this fantastic rug-producing practice. For this show, I was interested in the way her rugs and paintings interact. They have this delightful way of communicating back and forth, enhancing both practices. For the rugs, it separates them from their utility while offering another way to see them. For the paintings, there's an added weight to the content that produces a perceptible shift in perspective and feeling. Overall, Emi is an interesting choice for me, because I think out of all the artists I invited for this show, with the exception of Annabeth Marks, she identifies primarily and traditionally as a painter. In general, I'm not contemporary painting's biggest fan, but her work recalls an experience I had at an art fair two years ago. I was walking around really just bored and unimpressed, when I saw a row of small, graffiti-esque paintings. I went closer and was totally puzzled as to why all the similar paintings in the fair held no weight, lacked feeling and energy, generally looking very careless, and yet these didn't. Instead, they had an apparent understanding of weight, color, light and, overall, the application of paint felt more intentional without feeling contrived. I was struck by the impression that they were there for the viewer, they wanted to be interacted with. They were Zobernig paintings, who's a painter I admire but didn't expect to see there. Anyway, Emi's paintings have a lot of the same qualities. She does a lot of portraiture and figurative painting but also a lot of abstract paintings that somehow feel content driven without one having to read an academic, theory-based treatise. Her paintings actually come across as important which, I imagine, is a very hard space to exist in as a painter these days, but I'm not a painter so..."

"Ana Cardoso, who I think of in a totally different way, also a painter, but to me, more of a sculptor who ends up painting. I think I was really attracted to her work because I see and feel three dimensions in a perceivable collapse of art history from early minimalist sculpture through post-Internet practices. I think her work never feels like it's relegated to one space, it's very porous. She brings a lot of the world into her work and the work reflects it back to you. Her work is smart, playful and truly engaged in its surroundings. I think work that is made in a studio as a discrete object and imported to a white cube feels irrelevant as a contemporary practice. I think sometimes it's a logistical reality and a possible critical position, but it's difficult for me to conceive of an artwork in space without addressing its viewing context. To me everything changes; the scale, the light, even the materials in some cases. I think Ana's work really lends itself to site-specificity, reaching a level of completion only on-site, overall I find it very satisfying."

"Adele Röder, god, I've wanted to work with Adele for years. She is one of the most experimental artists I know in terms of practice. She's very concerned with thinking about this question of what is contemporary and I find talking to her about that really interesting and I'm not sure there's an answer. It's not the same question as, what is new or what hasn't been done yet, or sarcastically, what historical armpit can I exploit in order to validate my work? Asking oneself what is a contemporary practice is a very deep question about how we take our methodologies, which can engage with, let's face it, near-ancient practices of painting, sculpting, weaving, dying, printing, chemistry, etc, and make them feel engaged and relevant in a way that means something to us in an ongoing manner while addressing this need to ask questions about living in the world today. Most people are only familiar with her work through DAS INSTITUT with Kerstin Brätsch. I think that work is incredible, but it's a long term collaboration and obviously you don't know who is responsible for what in those scenarios and maybe that isn't an important question, but over time I've come to really desire an experience with her work as a solo artist. The work she's put out there is very minimal. So when I had the opportunity to curate this show I reached out to her immediately, but unfortunately, with her recent international move it hasn't been easy to get as much work as I'd like. Frankly, I'd like to curate an entire show around her ideas. I suppose I would say that about most of these artists, but with Adele it would be a very deep conceptual show, very lyrical. There is this emotional desire to engage with her work, a lust for communion, a need to be made one by nearness. To me, that is one of the highest compliments. Not many people would be open to that kind of reaction or interaction. As artists we're often trained to think we're very important and that our ideas and gestures are materialized expressions of genius, but to me, what feels more contemporary is for someone to want to participate in my thinking and to want to intervene. Of course, such work makes it terribly hard to sell and generate a living, but I digress... Adele gave me this video where she's trying to learn something new, flying a drone. She's doing something very simple but you participate in her process as you experience this act of accumulative knowledge, but you're also experiencing something beautiful which is a time-lapse of these opening cherry blossoms. What's cool is that we're able to use the community garden next door to the gallery which actually has a number of trees pruned similarly to the video and we can project it out there and the audience can experience it in a space reminiscent of that in which it was shot, which is nicer than a black box. It has smells and sounds and interacts with the world; it's not meant to be observed as much as it's intended to be engaged."

"Wilder Alison is fascinating, she's got all these things going on. I think she hasn't quite landed and perhaps she never will. I feel the search in the work and I think her practice is always leading her somewhere. In my experience, good work begets work. There's no trouble thinking about where one is going next, the trouble is deciding what is most relevant at a given time. With Wilder, there's so much going on in a participatory way. There's a feminist engagement with language, reading, interpretation, craft and materials. Quite literally, as humans we have these brains that make us instinctive puzzlers, a skill we can cultivate or not, but I think we can't help but look at these works that touch on linguistic markers and not try to figure them out unless we're not seeing what we're looking at, not participating. But if you even look a little, I think your imagination is engaged. You can't always come up with an answer, you can't always figure out what you're seeing. But, for me, that's not the point. It's that I recognize they're meant to be read and it's not the same as a narrative painting, they also create this desire to figure them. They request my time and I actively want to spend it with them. And then there's also this engagement with craft that's really incredible and well articulated. She's using all of these traditional techniques; dyeing, weaving, sewing, screen printing, hand manipulating... and if you look back at the history of her work, it's very sculptural, installation based, interactive and has even gone so far as to touch on product development and all the way to the other end of the spectrum where she's doing these more formal, stretched pieces. But even as discrete art objects, the works are often translucent. She's engaging the sculptural, as opposed to the way that paintings can often make you forget they're actually stretched three-dimensional objects-but there's a whole history of painting that denies that's what's going on, or accepts that as a basic premise, and then there's a whole history of painting that is all about exploring the back of the painting and the substrate and then there's a whole history of painting that's about destroying the substrate and it goes on and on and the wheel gets reinvented... but for me her work isn't about the history of painting or some theory she's trying to illustrate."

Wilder's engaging all these levels of a material practice in increasingly succinct ways that perpetually reveal and reward."

"Feminist practices, I feel like it can be a controversial phrase, but it comes to mind because even as an "anti-white male abstract painting show" (insert laughter), what does that mean, it's a "pro-non-white feminist, narrative-based non-painting show"? umm, that's just the opposite of my original distaste and opposites have a way of becoming equal where two ends of a line meet to form a circle... but in this show, every artist engages in feminist practices, including myself as a curator, artist. I don't think many of us in the show would necessarily materialize a feminist practice in the same way, but to me, it's a cultivated consciousness, a way of moving through the world. It's a kind of engagement with oneself, all those one interacts with emotionally and on a socio-political scale and further, with a particular awareness of inequity on all levels. To me, ultimately, as an artist, a feminist practice necessitates a serious engagement with content or at least that's how I'm going to define it for this show... I don't think there's a single artist in this show who doesn't do this. Of course it manifests in many ways, but for one commonality, there is a total lack of machismo and pretension existing in the work."

Lucas Knipscher, he was originally conceived of as the only male in this show, but I buckled under the peer pressure (more laughter). It's hard for me to talk about his work in a general way because I know it so well. His practice is incredibly varied and yet thoroughly consistent if you start where he starts, with photography. He basically began with the premise that 'photography is dead' and went on his merry way from there. But as a conceptual photographer his work has led him to all these crazy places; basspumping outhouses, vampires, candlelight vigils with Sigmar Polke, rap albums about Occupy Wall Street, Gauguin and chicken fingers, bartending flaming mai tai's at speakeasy bars, pineapples in blackface ... the list is endless and no subject matter is safe because no image is safe. Watching him attack the facade of contemporary culture can be simultaneously enlightening and frightening and, for me, sometimes heartbreakingly sad. It's a little difficult for me to talk about photography without talking about Lucas, Yoni and myself because we all studied at Parsons in the early 2000's under Penelope Umbrico and we all know a lot about the history of photography and photographic practice from the discovery of the camera obscura through the invention of the apparatus, it's early experimental period through the darkroom era and on up to and including it's contemporary moment as a digital representation. So there's a lot going on in all of our work that's concerned with things that this show primarily is not, but I invited them to participate because I think there's an engagement with content, space and the viewer that is very rare with contemporary work, dare I say, especially with white men, and yet in totally different ways from each other, but similar to other artists in this show. It's not just about a deep relationship between space and content, there's a relationship between the surface and the image that is conceptual, overtly political, linguistic, and poetic.

"Yoni Zonszein, his work is steeped in conceptual photographic practice and yet that's not what I was interested in for this show. I have so many ideas for photo shows... I wish someone would do a truly contemporary photo show, there wouldn't be any photos in it (more laughter), or not if I were curating it, because I don't think contemporary photography has much to do with photos anymore. There's been a total collapse into image making and no one is really touching that with a 10' pole, but I digress, again! Anyway, Yoni's practice is close to my heart because it really has a finger on all these cultural pulses in society and politics. Even though it's a very deep photographic practice it materializes in a lot of sculpture, a lot of play, a lot of installation and interaction, both mental and physical. Really, there needs to be an institutional show that is basically an installation of his apartment. When you walk in, at first you think, this is a really nice living space, so much peace and breath and then every little thing starts moving. You glance at a pile, open a drawer and it's a contained piece... the whole place unfolds like a magical installation. If I could have reinstalled his entire apartment in the gallery I would have, but all we can move for logistical reasons is part of the kitchen. It's problematic for display, which I think a lot of good contemporary work is, because the model of the gallery isn't conducive to contemporary thinking, it's a modernist invention and the work that isn't made in a hermetic way often doesn't translate well. But I really wanted to invite Yoni's work into the space because he transcends his medium and discipline like the other artists in the show. To me, nobody sits comfortably in a discipline or a material. Everyone's work is very porous, relating to space and to life, letting the world in while requesting the viewer to think for themselves and daring them to interact. Personally, I find this to be rare. I don't see it very often, especially in America, yet I believe there are a lot of artists working this way, I just don't think a lot of them are showing in New York."

"Blaze Lamper is interesting because her work is serious and tightly controlled yet so incredibly playful. I had been to her studio last winter and completely fell in love with her newest work which was all these large, free-style shaped canvases of fruit and pizza. There was a little painted pizza slice that I've coveted ever since. When I was conceiving of the entryway to the gallery and how I wanted the viewer to move through the space I commissioned a few of the artists to make flags or banners and I knew immediately that I really wanted a huge slice of pizza for the public, it's so NY! Blaze and I have a history of conversations about theory that often can be so debilitating to our practice and for the past year or so she's been on an

artistic tangent where she's rejecting theory's clutches and the work that's coming out of it is so successful and free, so inventive and frankly, fun. I don't think there's enough fun in art, or at least on display, unless it's sarcastic, about pop culture or making fun of someone or something, so this is my opportunity to offer a slice (more embarrassed laughter)."

"Annabeth Marks, I'm really into this blue painting! Again, with the technique, the rawness, the saturation, the heavy manipulation, and even the pigment and luminosity... there's all this painting stuff going on, right? but then it really shifts, it really starts to suggest itself to you. To me it's almost like a sexy come on. In fact, I think the first thing I thought of when I decided that I wanted to curate an anti-abstract painting show, was this blue painting, which may seem absurd, but there's so much quality in this sculpture-masquerading-as-a-painting that it was enough to inspire this entire show. One really needs to see it in person, if it had been a stretched canvas it would be nowhere near as successful. It really has a vibrating life of its own... I mean, I want to own it. I saw it last summer and I wished it was mine and I guess I start with what I covet. When I say that I wish it was mine, I also mean that I wish I had made it, they're usually the same sensation. It's a huge compliment; it's not that I literally want to take that from her, it's that I wish everything I made achieved the same level of accomplishment. To me, this is an acceptable level of envy, it's one we can share and use to inspire each other to be better, make better. Her second painting is a geological specimen. I wish we could hang it with the back visible because it's just as interesting as the front. It's an object, it doesn't need the wall, it needs you! It's so heavily manipulated, so saturated, the surface so exaggerated. When she unwrapped it for me in the studio it was front-side down and I thought to myself, what is this thing that you excavated from the earth? It wasn't this cheesy Schnabel-esque paint in a tree, tie to the back of a pickup truck and drive around the beach in Montauk, macho bs, it was a real find... she somehow simultaneously achieved this read of archeology and moon rock that I still get lost in every time I look at it. Frankly, there's just all this space, maybe that's my general interest in everyone's work. There's space for you and me! One doesn't need to read this in order to understand anything in the show, nothing is sealed, there's nothing to 'get' where you're going to be wrong if you don't interpret the work in a particular way. I think all the work has this incredible porosity to it. You can make things as a viewer, you can move things around in your mind, you can transform and manipulate, you can experience one work through another. I didn't ask her, but Wilder made this origami painting that will be in the show. I don't know how much public manipulation it could withstand but if she were there she would fold it up and show you how it's literally a transformer. I think that's indicative of how much space there is in everyone's work to interpret, move and breathe. Those are all very deep concerns of mine as both an artist and a curator."

"In regards to my work being in the show, I felt like I wanted my role to be both peripheral and integral to the experience of viewing. I want to shape the show spatially, like an architect and an energy healer. I really want to manipulate the gallery accentuating its four distinct spaces, including the garden next door. I could only curate a show with a particular space in mind and Rachel Uffner has so many incredible qualities and site-specific problems that make it a wonderful place to produce a group show. One of the more exciting aspects of the gallery, is that you have three distinct interior spaces, two of which have a lot of natural light, nothing is a gleaming white cube. The front room is the most challenging, I really want to address the effect of the long, narrow entrance and the affect it produces on the work. To me, it just screams help me be something else! And then the back or main room can either feel very tiny or rather expansive. I want to make it feel wider and taller and for the work to push the architecture to its perceptual limits. I noticed with the last show, that the main room, filled with Pam Lin's amazing photobased sculptures, that the room literally expelled viewers as they entered it and I couldn't tell if that was because of the tiered installation, the work itself, or the architecture. I want an opportunity to explore this and mitigate the effect. And then upstairs, the space can be very awkward in that there's no corners. There's a floating wall, there's no ceiling, there's a beam running through the center, and then you have a pitched skylight... so it's a really interesting and challenging space. I think I wanted a chance to utilize its possibilities in a unique way while emphasizing the natural light. I want the viewers to move in the round and through the work in a way that won't be easy in the front hallway or in the compression of the main back room. Because there's an open space off every wall, there's this circuitous energy to the top floor and I want to see if I can draw it and the viewer around the room... we'll see."

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Opening hours

Wednesday - Sunday
From 10am to 6pm or by appointment



