

the village
VOICE

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Mark Flood, Judith Linhares, and Others Who Don't Need Your Darn Network

A couple of years ago, art historian and critic David Joselit published an article on contemporary painting in the journal *October*. The article was sort of notable for a few reasons. One is that *October*, the formerly radical art journal whose founders now serve as overlords in Ivy League art-history departments, hasn't been a big supporter of painting. The essay also straddled the murky divide between art history and criticism—categories presently very much in flux.

Joselit's piece rested on the premise that painting could remain vital if it did more than just "hang on the wall." Instead, it should make explicit the "networks" in which it operates: the social space of the gallery, the world and history of images, its reproducibility. If painting does this, Joselit argued, it could get around being a luxury collectible, stuck over someone's couch or in a museum storage room, and continue circulating and producing new meanings and relationships.

The problem, for many artists, was that Joselit's essay offered only a narrow space in which to operate—or, alternatively, a criterion too broad and vague. It also privileged a particular lineage of conceptual painting. Even before reading the article, one painter I know said, "I can already guess which galleries and artists he mentions." More problematic was the idea that painting in commercial galleries could break the commodity-collectible cycle. You don't need a Ph.D. in art history—or economics—to see the complications there.

If you look around Chelsea right now, though, there are plenty of paintings that happily resist Joselit's manifesto, succeeding on other terms. And while much of the work "just" hangs on the walls—an element central to his critique—it makes the case for looking at pictures made by artists, in addition to all the mass media images that invade our consciousnesses on the street, subway, computer, smartphone, and elsewhere.

Josh Smith, currently showing at Luhring Augustine (*531 West 24th Street, through March 19*), could easily be incorporated into Joselit's instant-canon, since he's adroit at putting networks—art history, installation, artist branding—into play. But the expressionist idiom in which he works depends, like indie rock, on the right balance of irony and earnestness. Smith achieves that, though, particularly in the back-back gallery, where a nearly wallpaper, salon-style display of canvases and panels with colorful, abstract gestures and digitally manipulated images offers a torrent of techniques and references.

Expressionism is taken up differently by Judith Linhares at Edward Thorp (*210 Eleventh Avenue, through April 2*). Linhares's pleasingly weird universe of nude women and menacing critters—painted in long, chunky brush strokes and spectral colors—is constantly mentioned alongside the work of Dana Schutz (and I'm repeating the crime here). Linhares is clearly the template, not just for Schutz, but for many younger artists interested in the expressionist lineage of early-20th-century painters like Paula Modersohn-Becker. But it's one thing to have an idiosyncratic art-school hallucination, versus sustaining one for over 30 years, as Linhares has successfully done.

Greenberg Van Doren Gallery

NEW YORK

Tomory Dodge at CRG (*548 West 22nd Street, through April 2*) incorporates stripes, which are central to the work of earlier artists like Daniel Buren and Gene Davis, and slabs of paint scraped onto the surface like Gerhard Richter in his abstractions. (A body of Richter work is also on view in Chelsea, at the Flag Art Foundation [*545 West 25th Street, through May 26*])—but enough about him.) Dodge's painting is particularly interesting for the way he re-creates digital effects in an analog language, heightening your awareness of how you "see" digitally, even when you're not in front of a computer.

Returning to the music metaphor, Mark Flood at Zach Feuer (*548 West 22nd Street, through March 26*) is like the Scratch Acid, Jesus Lizard, or Butthole Surfers of painting: a vintage industrial-punk, self-described "art manufacturer" whose fabulously stripped-down canvases spray-painted with texts—and in one installation, corporate logos—are accompanied by stacks of Batman comic books and torn-out Lindsay Lohan magazine images. Flood lives in Texas, where the term "badass" was popularized, if not invented. This seems like the appropriate adjective for a show in which the painting hung over the front desk reads, "Ask your drug dealer if your heart is strong enough for sexual activity."

Daniel Lefcourt's gray-black monochrome paintings at Taxter & Spengemann (*459 West 18th Street, through March 26*) offer the least, visually, of this roundup. They are an interesting experiment, though, based on digital photographs output into molds into which he poured acrylic paint and fixed the results on the canvas. Self-consciousness pervades this enterprise. "Is this Painting behind itself?" the press release asks, paraphrasing the title of Joselit's essay, "Painting Beside Itself."

Some other current shows, though, would fit in Joselit's universe. Uptown at Greenberg Van Doren (*730 Fifth Avenue, through April 23*), Cameron Martin's new works, painted with multiple layers of pale gray pigment, are derived from photographs and explore what he calls the "exhausted genre" of American landscape painting. Set against warm white walls, they hover in the space and, like Ad Reinhardt's black paintings, rely on extended viewing time for the subtle differences in value to register.

The Ellsworth Kelly extravaganza at Matthew Marks (*522 West 22nd Street; 526 West 22nd Street; and 526 West 24th Street, through April 16*) similarly challenges Joselit's theory. The *Reliefs*—two stacked canvases, one black and one white—by the 87-year-old modern master are new, but some of the drawings on 22nd Street date back to the '50s. Kelly is perhaps the best proof that activating the space around the painting and beyond the wall—and into a world of referenced images beyond—isn't a new phenomenon.

After hitting Chelsea, I attended a lecture by T.J. Clark, a pioneering Marxist art historian with '60s Situationist pedigree. More than 500 people packed an auditorium on 23rd Street to hear Clark talk about Picasso's *Guernica* (1937).

Clark described how, by creating a history painting, Picasso knew he was engaged in an anachronistic enterprise. And yet, he was depicting "heroic actors living through a world historical change." The language was romantic; the lecture, surprisingly formalist. But for Clark, painting remains the site of radical struggle. He tied *Guernica* to the present as a war-protest emblem, reproduced in posters and street murals in India, Paris, and outside an army base in North Carolina. Painting's problematic status as a collectible commodity was not mentioned. **MARTHA SCHWENDENER**