

The PRESENCE of the PRESENT

Teresa Baker

Liam Everett

Leslie Shows

November 1, 2014–January 25, 2015

In a moment when technology reigns, and remarkable images can be generated with the push of a button, the relevance of painting persists. *The Presence of the Present* explores new work by three accomplished Bay Area artists whose seemingly disparate approaches to the painted surface share a distinct alertness to materiality and place. Their works and processes test the boundaries of the medium while shaping an argument against the allure of the virtual for an experience of the real. Utilizing a range of media such as paint, canvas, paper, felt, velvet, wood, cement, aluminum, salt, synthetic rubber, and shards of Plexiglas, artists Teresa Baker, Liam Everett, and Leslie Shows insist on the importance of material surfaces experienced in real space. In addition, their varied processes provide a counterpoint to the ease of production afforded by digital technology and emphasize the continuing relevance of the physical and material. Through composition, texture, and scale the artists challenge traditional notions of the painted surface, while grappling with the physicality of painted works in distinctly different ways.

Teresa Baker paints, cuts, tears, rolls, wraps, and drapes scraps of felt, paper, and velvet to create visual conversations between raw form, color, and

mark making. Often hovering in a difficult-to-pinpoint space between painting and sculpture—not unlike the misshapen textile works of Richard Tuttle or the precarious assemblage pieces of contemporary Gedi Sibony—the flatness of the wall as support remains a vital component to Baker’s practice. For example, *A Pole and A Hoop, Not a Circle*, 2014, is comprised of cut felt and paper wrapped around a hula hoop and balanced just so, with its final composition reliant upon the tension of the wall. Utilizing an elegant economy of means, in which each component is contingent on the other to create the whole, Baker’s works invoke complex characters, creating a push-pull between the simplicity of her materials and the individual personalities they assume. Felt is the common denominator in the works on view here—a material that the artist embraces despite, or rather because of, its often awkward characteristics. “I enjoy the challenge of giving it a function as an object, using and working with its inherent properties, and heightening the material a bit,” Baker has stated. The physicality of Baker’s work also resonates in her process through an active habit of walking the landscape that surrounds her Marin Headlands studio. Such sojourns inform her intuitive yet carefully considered

constructions, allowing decisions upon reentering the studio to coalesce in the resulting gestural arrangements. For Baker, this has become as important to the practice of making her work as the materials themselves.

Baker's mode of physical movement parallels the rigorous corporeal approach to painting employed by **Liam Everett**. Having previously worked in a variety of media including performance and sculptural installation, which included canvases subjected to the elements of the Northern California coast draped over rudimentary support systems such as saw horses or deconstructed stretchers, we see in this exhibition the culmination of these impulses resolved by the formal presentation of paintings on stretched canvas. Yet their straightforward display belies the means of their making as Everett performs a series of self-imposed restrictions to generate the paintings, including a primitive yet laborious process of gradually adding and subtracting multiple layers of paint to the canvas. Everett's initial application recalls that of Jay DeFeo's epic layering of paint within her monumental piece *The Rose*, 1958–1966 (Whitney Museum of Art). However, Everett's canvasses ultimately act as a foil to the latter falling subject to an elaborate process of erasure. The artist utilizes an array of tools like alcohol, salt, steel wool, and varying degrees of sandpaper to reveal highly tactile, luminous paintings. Just as Everett's works demand a physicality to their making, so too do they insist upon an active mode of viewing. Their towering size—*Untitled (Almaciles)*, 2014, is his largest to date—ground them in a human scale and their shimmering surfaces invite an exploration of their layering. Akin to American painter Jacqueline Humphries, whose process also involves the application of pigments one on top of the other that are scraped away to unveil a textured surface, Everett has described his work as an excavation, not unlike the sculptural act of carving into stone.

The geologic nature of Everett's process is reflected in the work of **Leslie Shows**, whose ongoing interest in the fluidity of time, matter and thought have driven her approach to the painted surface. As in her past projects, which have taken glaciers of the Alaskan landscape where Shows grew up and the mineral Pyrite (fool's gold) as points of focus, this subject matter emerges in her new paintings with a more expansive lens. Here, images of a wide range of industrial man-made molds—the hollow vessels used to shape liquid organic or chemical matter as they cool and solidify—serve as her point of departure. Shows's source material, culled from digital photographs of contemporary

injection molds and eighteenth-century illustrations of lost wax bronze casts and ancient stone mold fragments, provide a breadth of inspiration for these works. As viewers, we are able to make out vague forms such as an equestrian statue in *The Daybreak Star*, 2014, a children's toy in *White Abaia*, 2014, and an automotive part in *Coupler*, 2014, although Shows's renderings of these obscure objects are left intentionally ambiguous. Like her contemporary Charlene von Heyl, Shows employs a complex collage technique that straddles abstraction and representation. Her skilled hand layers dense and unruly materials such as crushed glass, shards of Plexiglas, and thick sweeps of synthetic rubber to capture her subjects, allowing an element of alchemy to complete the works. Compositionally, Shows channels the landscapes of her past paintings through lustrous surfaces that absorb and refract light and invite our eyes to graze over shifts in color and texture, thereby creating an interplay between positive and negative grounds.

The Presence of the Present considers the diverse work of a new generation of painters within the pervasive context of digital culture. Despite their adherence to the wall, the works in this exhibition exude a powerful presence and theatricality to capture our attention in much the same way the seductiveness of a screen works to distract us. Yet Baker, Everett, and Shows seek to offer a more complex and satisfying experience through the material and physical attributes of their work, which are otherwise unattainable through the glass matrix of a laptop or smartphone. Their works draw attention to the shifting conditions of perception in this digital age and the ways in which the ever present screen has altered our sense of place, space, and visual attention. Drawing us out of our propensity to engage with the virtual, the presence of these works in physical space encourage a re-engagement with the world around us and remind us of art's potential to capture the imagination. Together, they demand our sustained attention, slow us down for careful looking, and ask us to be present in the moment.

—Amy Owen, Curator

Exhibition Checklist:

In the listing of dimensions, height precedes width precedes depth.

TERESA BAKER

A Pole and A Hoop, Not a Circle, 2014

Acrylic on felt, hula hoop, and paper
24 x 36 in.

Courtesy of the artist

Blue Rounds, 2014

Felt
18 x 18 in.

Courtesy of the artist

Squares and Pines, 2014

Acrylic on felt, paper, and stretcher
36 x 36 in.

Courtesy of the artist

Red on Beige, 2013

Acrylic on felt and polyurethane foam
18 x 36 in.

Courtesy of the artist

Untitled, 2014

Acrylic on velvet, linen, felt, paper, and gessoed felt
30 x 18 in.

Courtesy of the artist

LIAM EVERETT

Untitled (Almaciles), 2014

Acrylic, enamel, alcohol, and salt on oil-primed linen
77 x 120 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Altman Siegel, San Francisco

Untitled (Kalmar), 2014

Acrylic, enamel, alcohol, and salt on oil-primed linen
77 x 59 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Altman Siegel, San Francisco

Untitled (Lobrega), 2014

Acrylic, enamel, alcohol, and salt on oil-primed linen
90 x 77 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Altman Siegel, San Francisco

Untitled (Nejd), 2014

Acrylic, enamel, alcohol, and salt on oil-primed linen
77 x 57 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Altman Siegel, San Francisco

LESLIE SHOWS

AUX, 2014

Ink and engraving on aluminum
78½ x 21½ x ¼ in. and 82 x 19 x ¼ in.
Courtesy of the artist and Haines Gallery, San Francisco

Coupler, 2014

Acrylic, Plexiglas, and synthetic rubber on wood and aluminum
42 x 33 x ¾ in.
Courtesy of the artist and Haines Gallery, San Francisco

The Daybreak Star, 2014

Ink, paper, and engraving on aluminum
70 x 48 x ¼ in. and 82 x 37½ x ¼ in.
Courtesy of the artist and Haines Gallery, San Francisco

Slot Mount, 2014

Acrylic, ink, and engraving on aluminum
36 x 42 x ¼ in.
Courtesy of the artist and Haines Gallery, San Francisco

White Abaia, 2014

Acrylic, Plexiglas, synthetic rubber, cement, and polymer clay on wood and aluminum
36 x 42 x 3 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Haines Gallery, San Francisco

About the Artists:

Teresa Baker (b. 1985, Watford City, ND) lives and works in San Francisco. Her work has been presented in solo and group exhibitions at Bay Area venues including The Luggage Store, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, and Interface Gallery. Baker was recipient of the 2013–2014 Tournesol Award from the Headlands Center for the Arts. She holds a BA from Fordham University, New York (2008) and a MFA from the California College of the Arts, San Francisco (2013).

Liam Everett (b. 1973, Rochester, NY) lives and works in San Francisco. His work has been exhibited at venues including the Institute of Contemporary Art, San Jose, and White Columns, New York, and exhibitions throughout Europe. In 2013, Everett was awarded the Richard Diebenkorn Teaching Fellowship at the San Francisco Art Institute. Everett holds a BFA from SUNY Empire State College, New York (2004) and a MFA from the California College of the Arts, San Francisco (2011). He is represented by Altman Siegel in San Francisco.

Leslie Shows (b. 1977, Manteca, CA) lives and works in Los Angeles. Her work has been presented in solo and group exhibitions at venues including the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, UC Davis, and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. She was a recipient of the 2006 SECA Award from the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Artadia Award in 2009. Shows holds a BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute (1999) and a MFA from the California College of the Arts, San Francisco (2006). She is represented by Haines Gallery, San Francisco.

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