

New American Paintings

JURIED EXHIBITIONS-IN-PRINT

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Andrea Karnes

Curator, The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth



Photograph: David Woo

Being a juror for *New American Paintings* affirms many important aspects of contemporary art, making this selection process extremely gratifying. In a broad sense, this publication reveals that some of the most traditional subjects in art are worth investigating—and reinvestigating. In particular, landscapes and figures persist in making their way onto paper,

canvas, and a variety of other media. The content of these two categories is, of course, continually updated so that it is culturally relevant to this moment in our collective and individual experience. Perhaps this is why the images in this book, often a wonderful hybrid of traditional media and subjects, have the potential to powerfully resonate with us today.

Kevin Bell creates meticulously rendered, realistic landscapes—such as a plot of land with shrubbery or a glimpse of a mountainside—all of which are set against a white ground. While not monumental, the isolated viewpoints Bell chooses to portray bring our attention to that which we might ordinarily overlook—as we wiz by it in a car, for example. His work induces an unusual quality of stillness and focus to otherwise ordinary subject matter.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Derrick Saunders uses reductive line and color to create works that conjure metaphoric landscapes. The hard lines and graphic characteristics of Saunders' abstract imagery are often used in an unlikely way, suggesting organic forms, such as sea and sky. This dynamic is then repeated in a num-

ber of other oppositional possibilities, such as silence/noise, rain/sun, day/night. A distinct static quality is also part of Saunders' work and this, in combination with implied traces of wreckage, creates a general sense of disruption—or the proverbial calm before the storm.

Evoking the natural world in yet another way are Vincent Falsetta's colorful, all-over canvases. These paintings, though expressly abstract, seem to suggest waves of water, light, or sound. Falsetta's investigations into the physical qualities of paint on canvas, evidenced by his combing of lines into thick, wet oil paint, could appear random; however, it is actually careful planning and a deliberateness of hand that merge to create each of the artist's pulsing, multi-hued abstractions.

John Holt Smith's canvases extend the boundaries of both landscape and the figure. Using undulating color to create lines and circles,

the artist dissolves the recognizable form, and in its place, creates an abstract meditation on his chosen subject. By stretching the color and form of natural elements to the point of pure abstraction, Smith taps into

an aura, or essence, that goes beyond recognizable physical characteristics. Such an approach implies that breaking down outward appearances allows all living things to exist on equal terms. Likewise, Robert McAn's mixed-media canvases elaborate on a similar idea, namely the abstraction of the human form. Using paper as his primary material, McAn explores the idea of part-to-whole, or the complex nature of navigating the self in the world around us.

Trent Call's comic-like characters and Steven Hopwood Lewis' Southern Gothic-inspired creatures can be seen as investigations into the surreal and imaginative possibilities of portraiture. Though Call and Hopwood-Lewis' styles are divergent, both create fantasy figures

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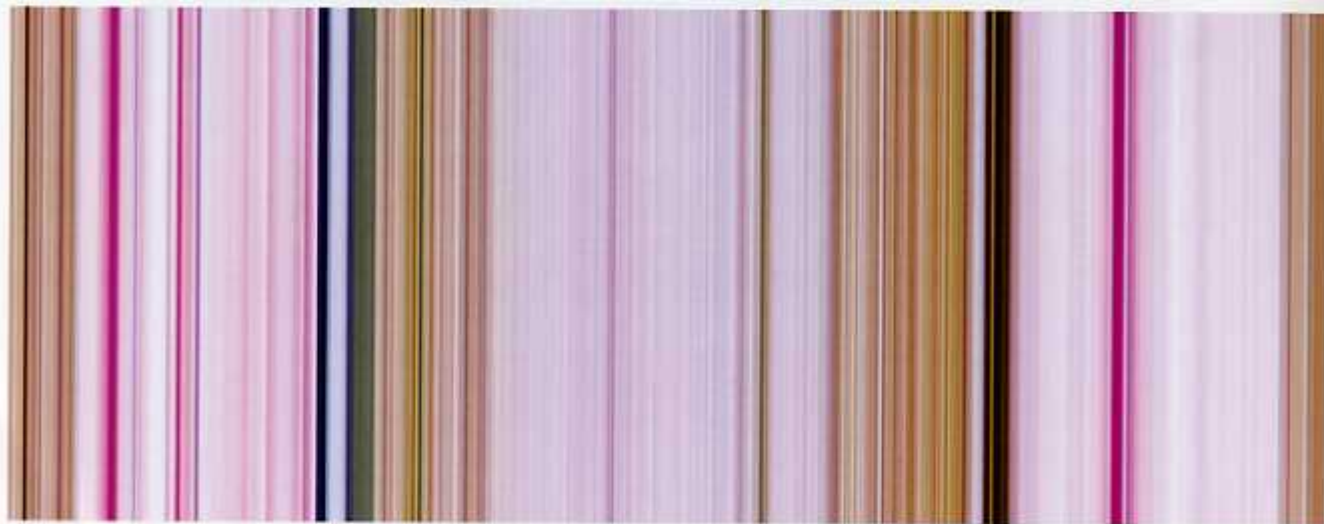
John Holt Smith

Wyeth Sequence #2 acrylic, enamel on aluminum 48" x 48"



John Holt Smith

Holt Sequence acrylic, enamel on aluminum 48" x 48"



John Holt Smith

Wreath Sequence | acrylic, enamel on aluminum | 30" x 72"