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## Eddie Martinez Edges Toward Abstraction

BY SCOTT INDRISEK | SEPTEMBER 19, 2014



(L-R): Eddie Martinez's "Perfect Stranger," 2014, and "Shoulda Swam With You," 2014.

(Courtesy of the artist and Kohn Gallery)

After “Matador,” a 2013 exhibition at the Journal Gallery in Brooklyn, Eddie Martinez sort of hated paint. “I had a negative reaction, I got really turned off by it,” said the artist, who found himself avoiding the studio after completing the works in the aforementioned show: Large, quasi-abstract canvases that serially explored the contours of a Picasso-esque bull. To deal with his creative

block, Martinez started walking the beach on the North Fork of Long Island during the summer, pondering if three-dimensional work might be the way forward. “I wanted to do sculpture,” he explained, “but I didn’t know *how* to do it.” The answer turned out to be fairly simple: Gather whatever weird or evocative materials are discovered underfoot, and combine them in ramshackle, brightly colored configurations. “This is a lobster trap,” Martinez said in his Bed-Stuy studio, pointing out various elements in a series of modest sculptures. “That’s a tennis ball. Foam. Milk caps. Rusty things...” A number of these tiny pieces were shown at Half Gallery earlier this year; Martinez also created painted-bronze versions of some, which were nearly impossible to distinguish from the originals.

Upon returning to Brooklyn, Martinez translated the aesthetic of the hand-held sculptures into larger pieces, which — thanks to their human-scale — end up with a more figurative, bodily orientation. Found objects are combined with planks of wood and ample amounts of plaster. For some of these materials, beach-combing proved insufficient. (“I found a marine-material graveyard in Long Island — where buoys go to die,”

Martinez said.) And, thankfully, he started painting again — a series of canvases that are more abstract than ever, gestural and sketchy despite their large-scale, with a surprising amount of breathing room. While the paintings still hew to the cadre of influences that Martinez is often mentioned alongside — Picasso, Willem de Kooning, Philip Guston — they have more or less abandoned the figurative elements of epic earlier work, like “The Feast,” a dense triptych from 2010. Baby wipes and other detritus are affixed directly to the surface, along with dirtied-up computer printouts of Martinez’s own earlier paintings, which are stuck into the canvas with push-pins.

These new works, along with sculptures and drawings, are on view through October 25 in “Nomader,” Martinez’s first solo show with Los Angeles’s Kohn Gallery. The exhibition title, he said, refers to his own peripatetic childhood, shuffling between both coasts after his parents’ marriage dissolved. Paintings like “Perfect Stranger,” 2014, collide blobby slabs of primary colors against a marine-blue background. In many ways, they resemble two-dimensional versions of the sculptures. Beginning with the “Matador” canvases, Martinez said he

sought “a solid push toward abstraction: Pare it down as much as possible, and have it just be about shapes, color, and composition.” Despite his six-month painting hiatus in 2013, these new works show that he’s fully re-engaged with the medium: Loose, energetic, and decidedly unstuck.