Reviews: Besides, With, Against, and Yet
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By TJ Carlin

**Art Review:**

**Besides, With, Against, and Yet:**

Abstraction and the Ready-Made Gesture

The Kitchen, New York
13 November – 16 January

Painting is certainly not all dead (see The Princess Bride). If we run with the analogy of its being mostly dead, its hope for resuscitation and direction is definitely through recontextualisation. If painters today both benefit from and struggle with the double-edged sword of historical hindsight, they are still doors (and there are plenty of them), but they are wading in a much larger and more unwieldy morass of languages than ever before. It may be that visual cross-pollination of languages is the way of the future for painting; certainly group shows hold great potential to activate this. And With, Against, and Yet: Abstraction and the Ready-Made Gesture seems to edge upon that possibility.

The show certainly represents a collection of relevant galleries, such as Miguel Abreu, Greene Naftali, and Tang & Sperone, but it is also a very difficult exhibition to take in, both with regards to the amount of work and to the juxtaposition of conceptual and affective approaches that it represents. The many attitudes to painting in the show seem to edge each other out in their competition for the viewer’s sympathy: it’s almost impossible not to choose the readymade over colour-field painting, or vice versa, simply to block the proximity of the one in order to have some integrity of experience with the other. A viewer determined not to put on blinders might instead seek formal associations. Uneasy paintings stand out; two fabric pieces, two paintings incorporating a readymade and, bizarrely, more than one metallic painting — all compelling works but diminished in their splendour somewhat by unintentional companionship, like two girls at the prom wearing the same dress.

Perhaps one solution may have been simply to show less work. Nearly all of the pieces are very good, and there are more standouts than could be listed here — the mixed media in Kalfie Fenn’s Astroland (2009) renders, in its contrast of materials, a materially scintillating quality worthy of its namesake amusement park; Rebecca Guayman’s optically sumptuous Exhibition Guide for the Kitchen Chapter 15 (2009) provides a geometric fulcrum that anchors the back room. There are also some successful pairings that enhance the individual pieces by their associations — the airiness of, and the physical surface tension effected by, Cheyney Thompson’s split-panel Chronochrome I-IV (2009) brings a low, restrained but clearly audible hum to the dashing explosion of Kentin Bratch’s gigantic drawing PreSpective (2009), which exudes a dark, unfettered gush of painting, and also permeates, which lie, unstuck from the paper, on the floor.

Ultimately the exhibition is a bit frustrating, as the abutment conceptual and expressionist approaches bring out what are at once the crucial factors and the vulnerabilities of each: their potential incoherence. But the organisational premise of assembling a collection of diverse approaches is achieved, and the questions it raises of how curators can best serve painting are crucial to our understanding of the medium’s future. T.J. Carlin