

Jennifer Bartlett

Pace

Jennifer Bartlett has often used musical terms as titles for her large-scale installations, notably in *Rhapsody* (1976) and *Song* (2007). *Recitative* (2010), shown here, extends the musical metaphor literally—its total length is 158 feet, compared with *Rhapsody* at 153 feet, and *Song* at 97—while capitalizing on the title word's relation to speech and to a vocal delivery that abandons melody for dramatic purposes. In all three musical structures, rhapsody, song, and recitative, our attention focuses on delivery—in vocal presentation it is impossible to separate performance from performer.

Recitative, a true virtuoso performance, transcends color and geometry even as it shares those elements—uniform-size steel plates painted white and then embellished with colored dots or streaks—with the other two works. Patterns ultimately give way to gesture, as a black line snakes its way over 20 of the plates and onto the wall.

Paradoxically, to understand *Recitative* we must look beyond the totality of the work and into the individual segments. There we find allusion, quotation, and parody—references to other art and artists. For example, Jasper Johns's crosshatched paintings are present here. Those works, complex in their juxtaposition of colors, constitute a point of departure for Bartlett. She repeats them back (to Johns and to us) but inserts them into her larger narrative. Thus she enacts her own coming into being, absorbing, recalling, and restating, at least

in this segment, the device of a great artist.

The aggressive nature of *Recitative*—its staccato digression from harmony, its prosaic style—reflects Bartlett's relationship with her own divergent modalities, landscape and nonrepresentational art. Sometimes she simply paints what she sees, turning it into harmonic planes and textures; here she works on her experience of art, especially recalled art. It is her disjointed esthetic landscape—a sensational sight to see.

—Alfred Mac Adam

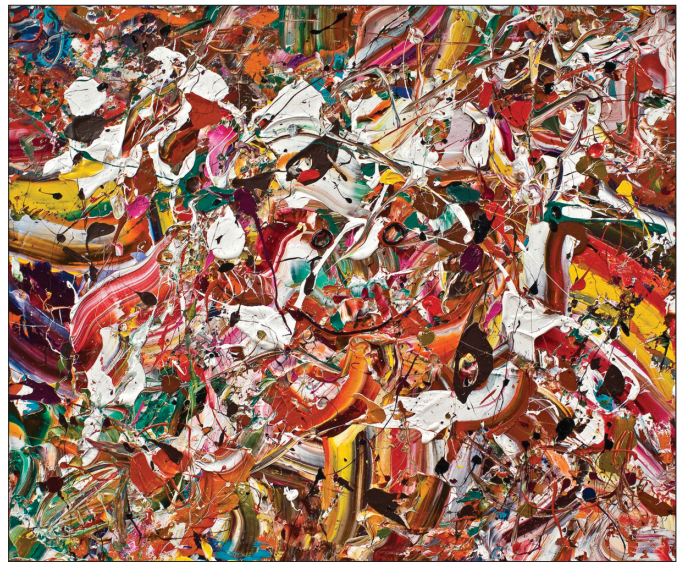
Michael Reafsnyder

Ameringer/McEnergy/Yohe

In Michael Reafsnyder's joyously frenzied paintings, each rectangular picture, with its layers of drips, swirls, daubs, and arcs, in every hue imaginable, was also a map of its own creation. Together with his cacophonous multicolored, biomorphic ceramic sculptures, these works

seemed primarily designed to energize their audiences.

For his showy topography, Reafsnyder



Michael Reafsnyder, *Love Field*, 2010, acrylic on linen, 60" x 72".

Ameringer/McEnergy/Yohe.

used a variety of application methods: spreading the paint with a flat edge, allowing it to drip from above, applying it directly from the tube, touching it with his hand (or perhaps his arm), or, while the paint was still sticky, lifting it off the surface. The lush, thick surfaces put one in mind of cake frosting as much as they did Abstract Expressionism. Arguably Gerhard Richter's spirit was being channeled—and challenged—as was Jackson Pollock's.

For the only nonabstract element in the works, the artist used a primitive smiley face—two circles above an up-turned curve—as a deliberately silly trademark. This symbol appeared in most of the large works and reminded viewers not to take the art-historical references too seriously.

Above all, the lovely disorder of color in each gestural painting captured a sense of perpetual motion, and indeed the viewer's eyes were compelled to keep moving within each work. The five sculptures in the rear gallery were displayed on individual plinths, and each reiterated the exuberance of the paintings. Titles such as *Paint Feast*, *Love Field*, and *Good Day Sunshine* (all 2010) also conveyed the artist's impulse for excess and his feel-good approach to abstraction.

—Doug McClemont



Jennifer Bartlett, *Recitative* (detail), 2010, enamel over silk-screen grid on baked enamel and steel plates, 11' 2" x 158' 3", overall installed, 372 plates. Pace.

LOS ANGELES TIMES

Art review: 'Los Angeles Museum of Ceramic Art' at ACME
January 13, 2011



Foreground: Michael Reafsnyder, "Untitled", 2011

Los Angeles does not have a Museum of Ceramic Art...

And that's exactly what happens at "Los Angeles Museum of Ceramic Art," a rollicking and provocative 24-artist exhibition of more than 150 pieces, nearly all made over the last year, at ACME. Organized by artists Roger Herman, whose paintings are currently on view at Jancar Gallery, and Monique van Genderen, the "Museum" gleefully dispenses with hoary ideas of artistic purity.

Michael Reafsnyder's four serpentine mishmashes of clay slabs stand out for their super-saturated palettes and freakish color combinations. Their fusion of Baroque pyrotechnics and innocent delight is ludicrous and satisfying.

-- David Pagel

ACME, 6150 Wilshire Blvd., (323) 857-5942, through Feb. 5, Closed Sundays and Mondays.

Installation photo: Robert Wedemeyer, 2011

Michael Reafsnyder

Splatters, Smears, and Smileys Collide in
Michael Reafsnyder's New Paintings
8 September 2015



The canvases of California-based painter Michael Reafsnyder pulsate with energy. Layers of abstract marks bear the traces of their making as paint is directly applied from the tube, weaving together to create dense, intricate topographies. It's not always easy to enter the work: one must follow multiple strands of color before a narrative opens up and the viewer is absorbed by the sensual space Reafsnyder offers.

Each painting is completed in one sitting—a necessary constraint that, as Reafsnyder recently told Artsy, “keeps the painting from looking like a battlefield.” This approach, made easier by a switch from oil paint to acrylic, allows the artist to explore the canvas as a site of constant action. Each dab, smear, or gush of color is followed by an instinctive reaction until the whole is wielded into its precarious form. “Often there are false starts or paintings that go astray,” he explained. “Those paintings get destroyed but the information gleaned is used to make the final painting.” Each painting is the combined result of learned memory and sheer spontaneity.

Within the compositions that emerge, color seems to be the guiding principle. In *Astro Float* (2015), vertical swipes of orange, yellow, red, and blue form a skeleton for the piece—interrupted by mottled green in the upper corner, swirling into the linearity of the under layer. According to Reafsnyder, color doesn't create structure but actually precedes it and “hopefully unhinges” it. In his work, each added element serves to destabilize the others, creating a delirious logic that is unique to each painting.

For Reafsnyder, the balance between being “serious” and providing pleasure is crucial. “Navigating Ab-Ex painting and its purported seriousness is of primary importance to me,” he said, “especially having perhaps ‘misread’ the movement

upon initially encountering it and seeing the work as joyous propositions.” Some works bear a direct mark of this first take on the movement: a smiley face signature. In *Sherbet Slide* (2015), the cacophony of orange and blue interspersed with greens, black, and white, recedes once the iconic face is spotted, cheekily peeking out at the viewer. “This recurring image is often the final gesture and distances me from the work while allowing a generous space for the viewer and setting the mood of the painting,” he noted. “I never conceived of the image as a smiley per se, rather as an invitation to an experience of excess and defiant joy.”

by Alexandra Alexa for Artsy

Los Angeles Times

Art Review: Michael Reafsnyder at Western Project

March 12, 2010

by Christopher Knight

Eight raucous and deftly handled new paintings by Michael Reafsnyder continue his delirious engagement with painterly hedonism. Drizzled, dribbled, smeared, scraped, scuffed and slippery swipes of bright, wet, acrylic color engulf the canvases like nontoxic spills. Inevitably, a small arc topped by a couple of little circles emerges somewhere in the boisterous field –Reafsnyder's signature take on a smiley face, squeezed directly from the paint tube. Amid all the high-spirited energy at Western Project, a small surprise occurs: The paintings are nearly upstaged by a half-dozen modest ceramic sculptures sitting quietly on plywood pedestals. These are not Reafsnyder's first ceramics, but they are his most assured.



Where the paintings are fast, the sculptures are slow – hand-built slabs of clay that unfurl and unfold like dense bouquets of jungle blossoms or exotic undersea creatures. (The style is not similar, but the sensuous, sometimes erotic forms allude to the brilliant work of Kenneth Price.) The color is likewise different from the paintings, more low-key and pastel, with matte areas intermingled with shiny glazing. Brighter bursts are mostly restricted to the form's curvilinear edges.

The unexpected result is small objects (nothing is over 18 inches) that look like animated drawings in space. The smiley faces also turn up, but Reafsnyder tears them asunder: One eye might encircle the end of a cylinder, while the grin assumes the form of a rolled length of colored clay. The joy is built right into the complex forms, which gives these sculptures the appearance of sentient life



art ltd.

WEST COAST ART + DESIGN



“Michael Reafsnider: Surface Tension”, Kim Biel, July 2007

“Originally, I wanted to make paintings that were like hamburgers,” Michael Reafsnider says with an utterly straight face. In the back room at Western Project in Culver City, Reafsnider sits beside a selection of his paintings, large and small. One of his recent ceramic figures peers over his shoulder with a bemused expression. Reafsnider holds up his hand in a C-shape, miming an impossibly fat hamburger of the variety that exists only in advertising photographs. “So, you have a hamburger, and from the side you look at it and you can see all the ingredients individually, right? But then you could bite into it and you’d taste it all at once. I wanted a painting where you have all the ingredients, but then all the ingredients together. You can see all the layers but you still have the hamburger that you can enjoy as a whole.”

If Reafsnyder's paintings are indeed hamburgers, then they are well on their way to international franchise. With shows in Australia, Spain, Austria, Germany and Singapore in the decade since receiving his MFA from Art Center, Reafsnyder's work has tapped into an international hunger. Reafsnyder recalls the advice of his professor, the critic and painter Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, that "the most radical thing you could do right now was claim to be an abstract expressionist." Reafsnyder continues, "You never really hear people say that. That gave me a lot of leeway."

Though an angst-ridden, testosterone-driven avant-garde may characterize the history of abstract expressionism, Reafsnyder says firmly: "That kind of heroics is where I hop off." Instead, he admires the "roughness" of the imagery created by the second-generation abstract expressionists Joan Mitchell and Norman Blum. Reafsnyder is also interested in the work of the artists of the COBRA group, active in Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam between 1949 and 1952. Again he draws the line at what he refers to as their psychological probing about the desire to return to the childlike. While Reafsnyder's paintings may achieve a similarly unencumbered aesthetic, they are opposed to the work of the COBRA artists in that there are no psychological monsters hiding under his bed. "I didn't want my paintings to be put off as just [an attempt to regain the childlike]," Reafsnyder explains. "I wanted people to see that my paintings are composed, and they are made to guide you in a very specific manner. It's not just a big fur ball. Viewing the painting is highly structured. So putting the armature on top forces you to follow that structure."

This construction is not always immediately obvious. For instance, in Reafsnyder's 2005 painting *Skyrider*, a thick band of smooth pumpkin orange, ultramarine, white and olive paint divides the canvas into thirds, making a liquid descent from the top right edge. As it trails off into the lower third of the painting, this energy is picked up by a thicker, darker swath of luminous jade, navy, and royal blues, which form an arcing diagonal speeding back towards the top of the painting. On top of this, a set of deceptively mechanical markings, oozing colors that are precisely applied, form a sort of railroad track, guiding the viewer back to the roiling center of the composition.

This contrast, between controlled structure and the exuberant freedom of movement that distinguishes Reafsnyder's paintings, does not equal automatic success. He admits, "I destroy tons of paintings. Sometimes a painting seems done, but it's done in a very predictable manner or in a manner that I've mastered before, like the easy solution. So then I start scraping and removing and trying to undo what I know. And when I start scraping and removing sometimes it becomes a big muddy disaster. Sometimes I come back the next day and say, 'Wow, that was horrible.' It's just kind of embarrassing. I always imagine someone coming in and saying, 'Ugh!' I think sometimes I also destroy some that had good solutions, but I just wasn't

confident enough to keep them.” Given the popularity of Reafsnyder’s work, however, it’s easier to imagine someone entering his studio and screaming, ‘No! Stop!’ as Reafsnyder rips the canvas from the frame. His eye for the editing process has ensured that those paintings fortunate enough to escape his studio are all vibrant and highly articulated, the layers of paint legible both on their own and as a whole.

Reafsnyder also recalls Gilbert-Rolfe’s insistence that his students take themselves seriously. “He talked a lot about good art coming out of bad ideas. Or silly ideas that lead you into interesting terrain. Try your bad ideas instead of trying to be a sociologist or theorist,” Reafsnyder paraphrases. “It’s more of an acknowledgment that you don’t have everything under control and that when things are frivolous or silly, interesting things can happen.” Gesturing over the surface of a nearby canvas he follows with his hands the trajectory of several thick swipes of paint as they melt into the blue shadows of the composition, “Everything was going into the middle and then these forms emerged. When I paint, I get so into it and so wrapped up in it that I always wondered how I’d detach myself from the paintings. So, way back when, 10 years ago, I was concerned with how to place marks in the surface of the painting that would serve as an indication that I’d finished with it. There was always a mark that I would make, like the sign-off, like now it can go into the world. I think of the smiley face as that finishing mark. Sometimes it sets the attitude for the painting, and it’s kind of a friendly gesture for the viewer. Either people are okay with it or they hate it. I’ve never had a mild reaction to it.” He pauses and adds, “Which is fine.”

In a recent phone interview, the critic Dave Hickey also spoke of the insouciance present in Reafsnyder’s work. “His paintings have the virtue of not caring. In other words, they aren’t particularly worried if you like them or if they’re the right thing to do. Even in an ecological age, his paintings are still about waste, about a conspicuous consumption of paint. They have a sort of aristocratic élan. They take enormous chances.” Standing in front of a selection of canvases it seems quite natural to anthropomorphize Reafsnyder’s paintings in this way, to let them go out into the world and do some work on their own, no matter what people think of them. Reafsnyder is deeply influenced by James Hayward, who was also an instructor at Art Center when Reafsnyder was working towards his MFA there in the mid-1990s. He recalls buying oil paint from Hayward and discussing painting. Less than a decade later Reafsnyder and Hayward would show side by side, in “Step Into Liquid,” the critically noted 2005 exhibition curated by Hickey at Otis Art Institute’s Ben Maltz Gallery, and in traveling shows organized by Hayward himself. Hickey directly relates the carefree language of Reafsnyder’s abstract expressionism to Hayward who, Hickey says, “discovered a way to make wet, messy paintings without bearing with it the whole accoutrement of self-expression. It’s messy in a lighthearted way. The paintings don’t have about them an aura of suffering.” In other words, there’s nothing terrible lurking behind these friendly facades.

As Reafsnyder describes his process in creating a large work, he points to several disparate areas where the ground of Caribbean turquoise still shows through. But the structure, or the armature to borrow Reafsnyder's architectural metaphor, is on top, the drawn paths of color offering up a distinct cognitive route. Like footholds on a climbing wall, they give his viewer a path to ascend, albeit a circuitous one, from which she can then rappel into the depths of the painting. "There's no premixing," Reafsnyder says, "everything happens on the surface. It's kind of a nod to the idea that the canvas is a place of activity. And it is—it's where everything happens. The big [paintings] are tough because it's just me and I'm sort of battling with them, moving up and down. And my studio's small, so when I paint I only have a couple feet on the side each way, so I'm right there in the painting. Sometimes it's hard to get back. I love the idea, though, of never really being able to take it all in at once." Reafsnyder is quite comfortable with this need for a constant, almost frenetic, negotiation of space.

Most of Reafsnyder's paintings are created in a single day, during his working hours between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. His recent shift from oil paint to acrylic has only served to accelerate this already rapid process. He explains, "With oil you could always go back into [the painting]. You could make decisions, but you could flub them a little bit, you could manipulate the timing a little bit. But with acrylic those decisions have to be made faster, and they become much more specific." It was due to those material considerations of oil paint that Reafsnyder's signature swaths of color are made with all sorts of knives: from palette knives to plastering trowels, even baking knives, which he admits to purchasing, with a grin and a sheepishly put-on French accent, at the upscale kitchen store Sur La Table.

It's easy to picture Reafsnyder working quickly. Pent up in the back of Western Project, his Los Angeles gallery, a small space that he says is larger than his studio, he can barely stay still: he is often stretching his legs, bending into semi-yogic postures while balanced in the seat of his chair. Still, his paintings are more than a record of this activity. Very conscious of his break from the tradition of heroic individualism that defined the early abstract expressionists, Reafsnyder's paintings are much more a celebration of themselves than of the artist who created them.

Born in Orange, Calif., in 1969, Reafsnyder still resides there today. A self-described "homing pigeon," he is content to let his paintings travel the world while he himself travels back and forth between the studio and his home each day, pressing forward his ongoing inquiry, discovering a host of unlikely solutions in paint. This great variety that is present in his work was highlighted this spring in a solo show at R.B. Stevenson Gallery in La Jolla entitled "Whirl" that featured nearly a dozen recent works.

Ultimately, the success of Reafsnyder's paintings lies in their ability to escape any easy over-determination. They remain defiantly lighthearted or "messy," as Hickey describes them, despite the natural tendency for such wild entropy to resolve into a smooth and consistently ordered state. There is great pleasure in watching this struggle as it unfolds on the canvas and continually subverts the expectation of any simple solution. "Sometimes I fear that I'm a little classical, like a Hans Hofmann abstractionist, like you have this balance here and here," Reafsnyder says, pointing to opposite corners of the painting. "So sometimes it's about trying to undo that. Sometimes I get to that point in the painting and then try to destroy it. When I finally undo it, that's when I feel like the painting is done."

Jun 2007 by kim beil



"Floating", 2007, acrylic on linen, 35 x 44 in

Las Vegas Collects Contemporary
Las Vegas Art Museum, 2008

Essay by Libby Lumpkin



In the mid-1990's, California artist Michael Reafsnyder took a different approach to taming the gesture; he unleashed the best. In paintings such as *Mermaid Grotto*, Reafsnyder demonstrates the mutability of an idiom that for some 40 years had seemed immune to change. He accomplishes this feat with a full-throttle, exuberant approach that leaves behind mid-century dramas of psychic self-expression and angst-ridden, metaphysical encounters. His lush, upbeat style transports gestural painting into the social and secular domain of popular culture. The encounter with a Reafsnyder is an encounter with the raw and self-indulgent excesses of a distinctly American here and now.

Reafsnyder's application of paint is unapologetically indulgent; each of his works swallow many tubes of paint. From 1996, when he first began exhibiting, until 2004, Reafsnyder painted with oils. The frenetic, densely filled compositions of this initial period feature thick strokes and skeins of brightly colored paint squeezed directly from the tube, with some passages flattened with a squeegee or palette knife. Almost all feature one or more primitive-style representations of the "smiley face," with some including scribbled words. These depictions and inscriptions are formed by skeins of paint or are scratched into the painted surface. The switch to acrylic paint, in late 2004, allowed for shinier, more reflective surfaces and significant increases in scale. The

works in acrylic retain the figurative elements and rich colors of the earlier oils, while skeins extruded from tubes are replaced for the most part with broad, energetic strokes.

Reafsnnyder is known for the masterful refinement and originality of his painterly style. The enticing bright colors, frontal disposition of the compositions, and welcoming appeal of the smiley faces combine to evoke the brassy promise of gratification found in popular advertisements. Reafsnnyder's habit of applying pure colors- unmixed on the palette- in part grew out of his admiration for hamburger advertisements. Like viscous layers of mustard, mayonnaise, and ketchup, Reafsnnyder's colors remain distinct, even when they meld together in candy-like swirls. The closest analogy to Reafsnnyder's painter's style is found in the boisterous, high-volume impudence of hard rock music. Works like *Mermaid Grotto* remind us that, when rock bands like The Rolling Stones emerged in the 1960s, no true counterparts emerged in art until Reafsnnyder painted them. They also remind us that the gestural stroke has allegorized a fairly wide variety of narratives dating back to the seventeenth century, and is perfectly suited to allegorize the excesses of America's acquisitive, pleasure-hungry popular culture of today.

THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

February 23, 2007



Melding divergent forces, with a smile

By Christopher Knight, Times Staff Writer

The five large-scale paintings in **Michael Reafsnyder's** enchanting exhibition "Aqualala" at Western Project — his first L.A. solo show in four years — are among his most deft and accomplished. Slathered, watery blues and deep purples are painted wet-on-wet, in great gushes of sensuous color.

Licks, swipes and squiggles of crimson, white, bubble-gum pink, turquoise and other hues punctuate them. Each canvas is contained, its edges a strict boundary for the paint's otherwise Dionysian delirium, while Reafsnyder's trademark smiley-face still ices his pictorial cupcake.

What's new here is sculpture — typically (for this artist) eccentric in its joyful fusion of high-minded material abstraction with goofy, down-and-dirty pleasure. If the imaginative paintings suggest rapture of the deep, the sculptures bring us the mermaids one might hallucinate there.

Bumpy, lumpy blobs of heavily worked and kneaded clay are glazed in splashes of thin, watery color — and yes, the smiley-face grin turns up, seeming right at home. The sculptures' sizes are modest, each a couple of fistfuls of clay mounted atop a pedestal. They all have the presence of glorified knickknacks, at once treasured yet disposable.

Reafsnyder is adept at walking a razor-sharp line between seemingly incompatible differences.

These mermaids merge Willem de Kooning's "Clam Diggers" with Capodimonte porcelain figurines. It shouldn't work, but it does. Perhaps the subject — a lingering, multicultural myth of being torn between comfortable origins and a hostile world — is not quite so eccentric as it first seems.

Western Project, 3830 Main St., Culver City, (310) 838-0609, through March 17. Closed Sundays and Mondays

**Michael Reafsnyder at R.B.
Stevenson Gallery**
Artweek, June 2007.

By Victoria Reed



"Floating", 2007, acrylic on linen, 35 x 44 in

Garish, silly, whimsical and satirical, aptly describe Michael Reafsnyder's paintings, and these are terms that no self-respecting mid-twentieth century abstract expressionist painter would accept. But Reafsnyder's paintings exist for the pure joy of being abstract except that it isn't a familiar type of abstraction; they are a very twenty-first century twist on modern American art.

Part of Reafsnyder's appeal is that he is subtly making us rethink abstract art, evidenced by the initial disorientation felt upon entering his recent exhibition. Although Reafsnyder's technique is familiar—broad areas of thick paint cover each canvas with the painter's strokes, gestures, slashes, and drips—his colors and subject matter unsettle. Roughly 3-by-4 feet, the palette is too bright and unreal. The pink isn't a soft hue seen at sunset or the pale color of skin, but it is a vivid cotton candy color. Turquoise doesn't resemble that natural stone as much as a piece of plastic, and the blue could only have come out of an acrylic paint tube. These hyper-realistic hues are best suited to a Web page.

More unsettling still is the artist's play on subject matter. Amid the expressive strokes and broad painterly gestures, Reafsnyder usually inserts a cartoon face. Simply drawn googly eyes and a smile upsets the seriousness, angst and pathos normally associated with the expressionist canvases.

For Reafsnyder, painting should be about the material and not the artist's hidden feelings. In his statement he wrote, "Painting's capacity for frivolity, lusciousness and seriousness is outrageous. Unfortunately, it is that capacity that has been mismanaged and misguided into convoluted theories of interiority, expressionism, truth, and authenticity." In other words, Reafsnyder is merely exploring the paint material and canvas surface in the same manner as the previous generations of artists. They were/are both trying to combine sophisticated issues of "pure" painting with childlike spontaneity.

Reafsnyder, however, was born in 1969 when pop was waning, video art was emerging and minimalism was trying to dominate the American art scene. By the time he became an artist, the pure intentions of abstract painting belonged to the distant memory of his grandfather's generation. The expressive nature of abstract art could easily be copied and the quality of the paint itself allowed for thicker paint textures and more luminous canvases. Thus, Reafsnyder can literally play with the paint, but with the eyes and attitude of a generation comfortable with the color television, Technicolor movies, and animated films. Reafsnyder simply takes the tubes of acrylic paint and has fun—there are no deep thoughts hidden in his canvases.

Although smaller pieces as *Sunny Fresh* (a fusion of fuchsia, electric green, carrot orange, turquoise, red, and white) and *Top Shelf* (another amalgamation of distinct colors) hold their own space and allow us to appreciate the artist's gestures, I prefer Reafsnyder's larger canvases. *Glazing*, with its grand scale, muddled background (a pejorative term for the

SAATCHI ONLINE

MICHAEL REAFSNYDER AT WESTERN PROJECT, LA
2007

Opening tonight is an exhibition by Southern Californian artist Michael Reafsnyder, his first solo show for four years. Comprised of large-scale paintings, drawings and sculpture, 'Aqua la la' is a series of exuberant, energetic works which revel in the use of colour and the texture of paint.

Each painting is completed in one session, and what at first might seem a spontaneous, visual equivalent of stream of consciousness writing, is in fact the result of deep thought about the composition of each inch of canvas and the overall structure of each individual painting. One picture might literally bear the weight of hundreds of pounds of oil paint, as it is smeared onto the canvas, creating a sense of chaos - sometimes delicious, sometimes foreboding - which at the same time has its own inner logic.

There is an unapologetic sense of pleasure in the visual in Reafsnyder's work, which is noted on the gallery's press release as 'an antidote in our age of digital graphic glibness'. But this doesn't mean that Reafsnyder's world is an entirely rosy one - the paintings have a dark undercurrent of menace and creepiness in them, which lurks beneath the 'tornadoes of poison and sugar'.

Michael Reafsnyder: Aqualala
New Paintings, Drawings, Sculpture



Fluttering, 2006, Acrylic on linen, 94 x 72 inches

Pincus, Robert L., San Diego Union-Tribune, April 5, 2007

'Whirl' finds Michael Reafsnyder in love with paint



Michael Reafsnyder loves paint. He also loves to paint. He piles on drips, swirls, sweeps, globs, dots, squiggles and lines to such an extreme that it's safe to conclude that painting makes this guy happy.

The artist, who lives in Orange, has shown a lot in the last decade, particularly in Los Angeles but also in Italy, Australia and Singapore. He's also gained increasing attention from critics and museums. "Whirl" is his first solo exhibition at the R.B. Stevenson Gallery in La Jolla and the new work finds Reafsnyder in his characteristically ebullient form.

Abstract expressionism is a big backdrop to this work, but not the more brooding strains of the first generation produced by the likes of Pollock, de Kooning and Rothko. Reafsnyder, as he says, leans toward Joan Mitchell and Norman Bluhm, with their lighter palette and mood.

Titles alone, like "Sunny Fresh" and "Swushy," telegraph this tone. The paintings follow suit. "Top Shelf" is a dose of pure sensuous, retinal pleasure, as he revels in purples, oranges and reds that rise and dive across its surface, along with a plethora of other colors.

But Reafsnyder also does something weird to his often wonderful surfaces: he uses thick dots and lines to offer up happy faces on a lot of these paintings. He has said, "I am interested in making a painting that goes from pop to abstract expressionism to expression a la Matisse." But how he gets from this logic to happy faces is, well, baffling. He's created his own form of distracting graffiti.

Los Angeles Times
January 14, 2006

ART REVIEW

Just going with the flow
The fluid form of abstract painting is celebrated
in the 'Step Into Liquid' exhibit at the Ben
Maltz Gallery.

By Christopher Knight, Times Staff Writer



One sign that a group exhibition is significant is that it changes the way you perceive works of art that you thought you knew. At the Ben Maltz Gallery at Otis College of Art and Design, Step Into Liquid is a significant show.

I've been looking at (and enjoying) James Hayward's paintings for more than 20 years, but I've never quite considered them in the way they appear here. Otis' guest curator-in-residence, Dave Hickey, has assembled paintings by five artists — Jane Callister, Pia Fries, Michael Reafsnnyder and David Reed are the others — whose work reanimates a major American postwar tradition. In the 1950s and 1960s, fluid forms of abstract painting, from the drips of Jackson Pollock and the sponged puddles of color by Helen Frankenthaler to the pours of Morris Louis, had asserted continuity between nature and art.

The paintings in Step Into Liquid pick up the thread while severing the continuity. Hayward's paintings have the authoritative power and hypnotic grace of the surface of the sea, the sheer face of a mountain cliff or the sweep of a plain of grass — yet without any recourse to illusion, metaphor or representation. Think of them as cultural equivalents rather than natural embodiments.

Hayward's four paintings date from 2005, and each uses the same format — a vertical canvas, 6 or 7 feet high and slightly narrower than it is tall. One is black, one yellow, one white and one a green so dark as to appear almost black. Along the edges of the canvases, under-painted layers of other hues can be glimpsed.

The thick oil paint is applied in deliberate strokes of a regular, if not quite uniform, length (7 or 8 inches). The brush marks indicate use of a medium-width brush, and the regularity of the application has a repetitive quality that borders on ritualistic. The paint strokes are laid on in every conceivable direction — except, notably, horizontal (like a landscape) or vertical (like a figure). The size and scale of the canvas and the brush marks gently guide you into a comfortable position in front of the painting. They carve out a physical space of contemplation, from which these gorgeous paintings feel vast, unfathomable and in perpetual flux.

They're oceanic without the ocean.

Hayward, 62, and Reed, 59, are the show's elder statesmen. Fries, who was born in Switzerland and works in Düsseldorf, adds an international element. Callister and Reafsnnyder, both born in the 1960s, are two of the most engaging younger painters working in Southern California right now. The show packs a lot into a modest space.

In the fall of 2004, on the 40th anniversary of the landmark survey exhibition California Hard Edge Painting, Hickey organized an Otis show of geometric abstraction. Step Into Liquid is its complement, focusing on wet, fluid abstraction rather than crisp geometries.

Reed's luxurious paintings are the pivot between the two shows: He mixes oil and resin to crash Baroque waves of translucent paint against hard-edged rectangles, like flowing electrons moving through the windows of a computer program.

Callister's exceptional recent paintings represent a slight shift in her work. All three miraculously evoke the conjunction of land and sea, the space of a primordial shoreline where timeless stability and constant vacillation continuously trade places. Yet none is in the least descriptive, in the manner of a traditional landscape painting. A warm, fleshy pink ground is interrupted by pours, puddles, splashes and clumps of abstract color-shapes, which appeal to a sense of visual tactility.

Reafsnyder continues to update the signature motifs of modern alienation to the monumental scale of mass culture. For example, Slippy is a large, dark painting in which indigo acrylic has been swiped with a squeegee as a background. Then, great swaths of glossy color are smeared, splashed and dripped across the surface, while a bright orange smiley face grins out at you. Signs of pleasure come in a variety of guises, and here a visual overload of paint does the talking. Following Reafsnyder's marvelous one-man survey that closed recently at the Las Vegas Art Museum, the Otis show gives rich context to his quirky work.

Fries' paintings are the exhibition's weak link. Each is an inventory of paint application methods, from thick wedges and troweled-on oil to skinny squiggles squeezed straight from the tube (it looks like silly string), often in pastel hues and always on pure white panels. Disconcertingly, embedded within the paint are silk-screened prints that appear to be tangled piles of crepe-paper ribbon.

The point seems to be that printing fits with the other techniques because, in a world characterized by reproduction, our assumptions that direct application of paint embodies uniqueness and reveals authentic feeling are false.

True enough, but the idea is long-established (not least by Fries' teacher, Gerhard Richter), and these paintings don't have adequate visual appeal to sustain them.

Step Into Liquid features just 17 paintings yet accomplishes more than most exhibitions twice its size. Come on in; the liquidity is fine.

Image: Michael Reafsnyder, *And That's All Right With Me* , 2005



LAS VEGAS CITY LIFE

“A Gorgeous Mess”

BY KATIE ANANIA

More: Michael Reafsnyder, Painting and Sculpture 2002-2005 embodies a special kind of abundance that stems not just from a buildup of materials (although there's plenty of that), but a buildup of history. Reafsnyder's work, done mostly in oils or acrylics, but also on exhibit with drawings, bronze casts, and sculpture at the Las Vegas Art Museum, exudes an elegant yet balls-to-the-wall cheerfulness that sidesteps its own historicization while highlighting the absurdity of some of art's favorite movements.

Like Abstract Expressionism, for instance. Reafsnyder's principal method of artmaking is to squeeze paint directly from the tube and apply it, unblended, to the canvas. Jackson Pollock, you might remember, used a variation of this method to acknowledge paint as a direct extension of the soul. He let the paint fall where it fell in order to express hardship, joy, the chaos of the urban landscape, and existential torment. The thing is, Reafsnyder plays with the paint after it lands -- color is squeezed out and forms wormlike, three-dimensional passages on the canvas that are built up, pushed aside, re-formed, and re-textured with brushes, sticks, and squeegees. It's a thick, gorgeous mess.

Picture driving the Florida turnpike in love-bug season, when clouds of small insects, locked in the act of coitus, meet their death on your windshield. The glee you experience in re-animating these bugs with your wipers is insurmountable, and so are Reafsnyder's compositions. They're all about fierce, warm-hearted glee and the toppling of "triumphant modernism," which is serious, too serious for us. Imagine worms of paint being squeezed from their tubes and systematically smashed together to a soundtrack of Switched-On Bach.

These paintings are often garnished with smiley faces made of the same worms of paint,

sometimes with plastic googly eyes. There's some playing around with Pop art here, because he's quoting a notorious graphic phenomenon. The smiley face is the ultimate expression of vacuity and promise, and this precise gesture of cool cheerfulness bridges the old, new, absurd, joyful, parodic, and historical elements in his work.

Reafsnyder's bronze pieces provide another re-examination of the painting process, and an even more material connection to Pop coolness. These are done by painting a painting, casting its surface in metal, and throwing the painting away. It's an act of tracing, which means that we're not supposed to think about the painting and how authentic it is, but rather the process by which it's recorded and remembered. Think of the puns: The artwork is a cast-off; the art object is re-cast as a frozen, archived memory.

The drawings are another choice cut, which appear as a series mounted on a wall and showcase the artist's love of fluid forms. The forms are so fluid, in fact, that I'm reminded of my first look at a Helen Frankenthaler painting-- not in terms of composition or intent, but because I remember thinking that Frankenthaler's canvases must be trying to express depth, because there was so much paint soaked into the canvas that I thought she wanted me to imagine it going down in there, disappearing past the smooth cloth. I was wrong about Frankenthaler, and Reafsnyder is wrong here -- gloriously, superbly wrong. There are square smiley faces -- blockheads, and I hope this is code for all the disappointments the art world has to offer. They swim, and are broken and re-mixed across the paper in a leaky, liquid, decidedly careless way.

Reafsnyder takes a medium -- paint -- that was, in a certain context, reduced to pure flatness, and gives it a new topography. He's also about this backward practice where you sort of do things wrong but always in a symphonic way. And, as the first show in the Las Vegas Art Museum's new "Contemporaries" series, as well as Reafsnyder's first solo museum show, this collection of Merrie Melodies invites as many wrong turns, incorrect readings, and preposterous glee as history could very well allow or imagine.

More by Michael Reafsnyder

Through Dec. 31

**Las Vegas Art Museum
9600 W. Sahara Ave.**

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Las Vegas Weekly
Oct. 27 – Nov 2, 2005

Paintings pose questions about potential for soulful abstraction in an image-battered age

By Chuck Twardy



Michael Reafsnyder's abstract paintings beg the question of whether abstract painting is still viable.

In his first solo museum show, *More: Michael Reafsnyder, Painting and Sculpture, 2002-2005*, the Southern California artist fills two galleries of the Las Vegas Art Museum with paintings that prove it is possible to load prodigious volumes of oils or acrylics onto a surface in nonrepresentational configurations. He scrapes pigment into cresting waves, scumbles it into complex passages and extrudes tubes of it into twisted ropes of solid color. Here is Pollock unbound, the apotheosis of the abstract expressionist ideal of the soul's direct expression. Except that Reafsnyder can't quite take that ideal seriously. For one thing, Reafsnyder's undiluted cobalts and forest greens, and his rich mixtures of primary colors, are those of lively marketing, which gives the paintings a pop-art edge. And he paints a smiley face, sometimes more than one, on every painting. Something about Reafsnyder's representational repertoire—whether building two eyes and a mouth with strands of pigment or slashing incisions in the paint surface—suggests Willem DeKooning more than Jackson Pollock. But instead of wraithlike figures of women, Reafsnyder draws bright, sun-ray lines in paintings such as "Black Hole Sun" (2003). A T of two broad swaths forms a stick figure for the smiley face in other paintings, such as "Grace" (2002). Some paintings have incised text, and sometimes the smiley face is inscribed instead of built, and partly scratched away. In this way, Reafsnyder recalls neither Pollock nor DeKooning but Jasper Johns, who has made the canceling of images a leitmotif of his long career. Latent in that practice was the idea that Johns' groundbreaking work itself helped cancel abstract expression, or at least discredit its spiritual earnestness in a world already battered by images by mid-century. In this spirit, Reafsnyder even cancels his cancellations. Clearly, the smiley face undercuts any hint of sanctity in those swirls and scrapes, but in some cases, such as "In Bloom" (2005), the face is drawn into the paint and partly scratched away, as if Reafsnyder would do away with it. *More* marks another first, that of LVAM's new Contemporaries Series, instituted by new Consulting Executive Director Libby Lumpkin, who also organized the show. That it should boldly outline a key tension of postmodernism—the tug between soul and skeptic, earnest and ironic—marks a welcome turn at the museum.

Michael Reafsnyder at
Galeria Marta Cervera
El Mundo, January 16, 2003

by Javier Hontoria



In his first exhibit in Spain, Californian Reafsnyder (1964) presents a series of paintings on wood that at first could be defined as violently gesture-like. A dozen small panels have one layer of paint applied at drastic angles that are the base for a plethora of paint applied directly from the tube.

The artist does not want to be a part of the expressionist tradition despite of the nature of his works.

The fact is that this is not an excessive gesture-like practice but rather a slow and careful exercise.

Applying paint directly from the tube is a careful and slow endeavor that brings as a result a sense of energy without losing its dynamism. After long and logical drying process, the end result is a rough, three-dimensional landscape that sometimes sets itself free and floats over the wood.

Michael Reafsnyder at
Galeria Marta Cervera
ABC, January 16, 2003

by Maria Garcia Yelo

The first individual exhibit of Reafsnyder outside of the US surprises the local audience as much as it has surprised his countrymen. The artist who graduated in arts from the Art College of Design in Pasadena California presents seven Oils on wood in which the abundance of material is a major feature. A torrent of paint, spilled, dragged either applied in full or partial brush strokes directly from the tube and at first blush in a frenetic process without an orderly fashion or purpose. The vibrant cascade of orange, electric blue, yellow, intense red, greens, fuchsia etc. overlap to create real perspective. Little by little in the tumult of color, small silly contagious faces emerge that smile and made the viewer smile back. However, those faces convey a fierce and macabre laugh. They look like extraterrestrial beings that surface and land among letters and numbers on the wooden surface.

At first sight this plastic carnival seems like a joke or an ingenious and improvised game that tries to involve the viewer. But if this is the case, why bother concentrating so many elements in such a reduced space? Why so much waste of energy? Some argue that this is a perverse and frivolous joke; however jokes do not come out of a fluke.

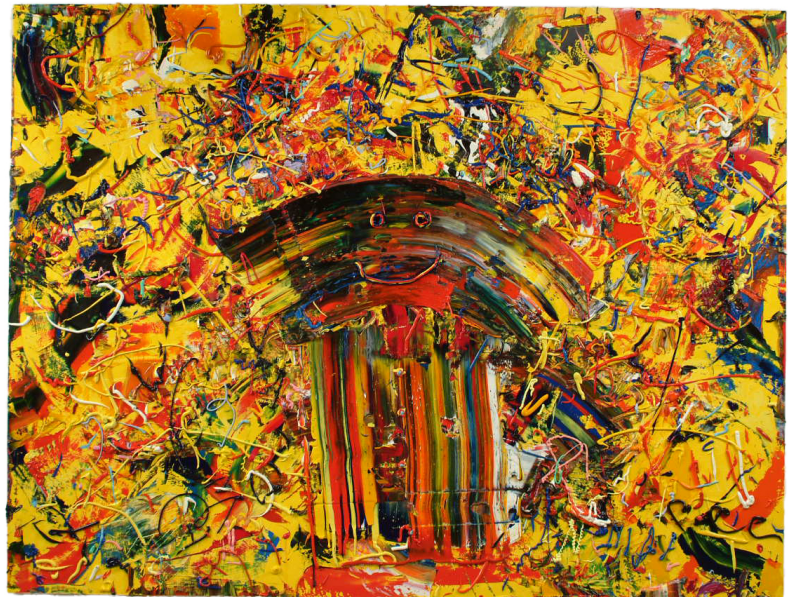
When looking at the work from this Californian, the concepts of North American abstract expressionism comes to mind. The creative process is certainly similar, but these exuberant works are not the result of an automatic, unconscious and emotional explosion, but rather a new approach to the conceptual tendency so much in fashion in Los Angeles, which are a reflection of the Greenwich Village geniuses.



**Michael Reafsnyder
at Mark Moore Gallery**

By Shana Nys Dambrot

Artweek, June 2003, p. 18



Not so much composed as engineered are Michael Reafsnyder's new paintings. In attempting to describe his technique, one wants verbs in lieu of adjectives. One feels compelled to speak of the artist's own physical movement in applying the paint rather than the trajectory of the viewer's gaze which it precipitates. For although the surface topography is vibrant, and the florid intensity of the colors sublime, it is the intricate architectural structure of his brushless brushwork that ultimately captures the eye and the imagination.

Reafsnyder's practice is anachronistic, gestural and gloriously impractical. It revives an interest in painting's sensual aspects not often seen since Ingres spoke luridly of the artist's brush as an extension of his own hand and eye. More literal than figurative realism, yet far less chaotic and arbitrary than pure abstract expressionism. Reafsnyder reintroduces a hedonistic urge for the paint itself, yet remains engaged with formal considerations. This kind of subversive statement addresses the rivalry between line and color, which has persisted from the renaissance to modernism and beyond, by building linear shapes out of pure color. In 1904, the French critic Fernand Caussy wrote that color was "brute and inorganic" and that a preference for it over classical drawing was to be dismissed as nothing more than an exaggerated feeling for nature. The following year witnessed the inception of "fauvism" – a term originally used sarcastically to denote artists who stubbornly insisted on working with colors that seemed beastly and out of control.

In this context, painting such as this can be understood as an antidote to the struggle with rarefied digital-age graphic flatness. By way of countermand, Reafsnyder's compositional networks are distinctly modular; crawling across his surfaces like the ivy that infiltrates, disintegrates and also holds the old stone house together. These splashing, gurgling, half-organic edifices are rife with invisible lavender, chartreuse and vermillion highlights. The paintings' shadows, tones and caverns absorb the light even as primary colors and aggressive impasto kick it back. Despite the frenetic energy at play, the wide boulevards of compressed (read: squeegeed) pigments underscore their curious sense of balanced intention.

The paintings are heavy and deep, containing complex cosmologies that are nevertheless quite devoid of content. Instead, it is the artist's body that is recast in them as a suitable subject for abstract painting. The swooping, smearing, squeezing, oozing and congealing of pile paint onto the canvases conveys the extreme physicality of Reafsnyder's process. His flesh and bone presence in the work is indelible and undeniable; it's obviously time-consuming and labor intensive character creates an effect closer to that of sculpture or performance art than to the stubborn two dimensionality of most painting and drawing. He

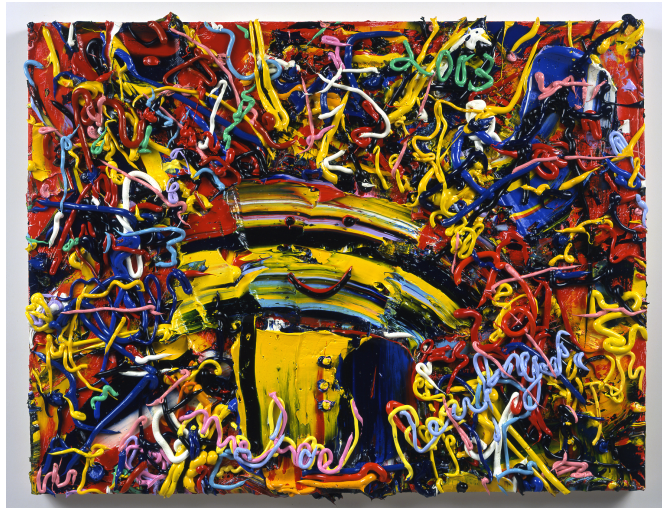
demonstrates a Dionysian exuberance and a predilection for baroque excess, yet in the Smiley Face, Reafsnyder has chosen the simplest icon which to tether the works to popular culture. This last is indicative of the multiple levels on which the work succeeds, providing plenty of material for the more theory-driven viewers as well as piles of pure sensory enjoyment for the rest.

The Los Angeles Times

E26 Friday, April 18, 2003 Around The Galleries

Squeeze, Scrape, Squeeze

By Christopher Knight



When you look at a painting that you really like, it's common to break a grin. Disconcertingly, paintings by Michael Reafsnyder are in the habit of smiling back.

At Mark Moore Gallery, three large new paintings and two smaller ones show the artist complicating the impressive work he's shown there in his last two outings. Hefty loads of thick, chaotic oil paint in brilliant colors continue his eccentric homage to the 1950s painters of the CoBrA (Copenhagen/Brussels/Amsterdam) group - Karel Appel, Asger Jorn, Pierre Alechinsky, etc. - Europeans who riffled through folk art, children's scribbling and prehistoric imagery in search of freely expressive motifs.

Also still on board is the cheesy 1960s icon of the smiley face - an emblematic half-circle topped with two dots. Made from thick coils of oil paint, the blank stare and its dumb grin diabolically update the CoBrA motifs of modern alienation to the scale of mass culture.

Like the paint, the logo is a sign for pleasure. But given the almost violent palette in which it is embedded, this bliss flirts with danger.

Reafsnyder has vastly enlarged the size of his paintings. The largest work here is 6 feet by nearly 8 feet. The concentrated power of his earlier, more modest works explodes.

Forget about brushstrokes. Paint on the surface is smeared with a squeegee, then more paint is layered in swoops, squiggles and arabesques by squeezing it straight from the tube. Reafsnyder gets an infectious rhythm going - squeezing, scarping, squeezing - that suggests release and renewal, not to mention a scatological spin on creativity.

He has also enlarged his field of references. In addition to CoBrA, the push-pull color theories of Hans Hofmann come to mind. So do the big, august abstractions of Germany's Gerhard Richter, whose use of a squeegee to smear his lush paint tamps down their expressiveness, making them seem remote, austere and one step removed. Reafsnyder's smears nod in that direction, but suggest gravity is replaced by wild-eyed charm.

His exuberant abstract fields of lush paint create a visual bramble, from which a rudimentary figure lurches into view. A wide vertical swath is made with the squeegee at the center, and a curved swath tops it. Distinctly phallic, this mushroom-headed figure is adorned with the smiley face, and some have snowman-style buttons down the front. The weird, playfully erotic kick is self-deprecating, and it contains a sly element of surprise.

**The Los Angeles Times 6/08/01
by David Pagel**



In the early stages of the Industrial Revolution, when the printing press made mass-produced books available to more readers than ever before, concerned citizens began to worry that the increase in readily accessible information would make people stupid. The capacity for thoughtful recollection might be replaced with an insatiable appetite for escapist diversion.

Now that the Information Age is upon us and our eyes are incessantly bombarded by an overwhelming volume of visual stimulation, worried observers continue to act as if diminished attention spans were the natural consequence of the image glut. Their argument appears to be logical: The more there is to look at, the less time we have to digest it. The only problem with this line of reasoning is that it doesn't hold up. To see why, visit **Michael Reafsnyder's** third solo show in Los Angeles, an over-the-top extravaganza that goes a long way to show that visual overload does not necessarily lead to shrinking attention spans.

At Mark Moore Gallery, each of Reafsnyder's 20 hefty yet modestly scaled oils on panel is nothing if not excessive. Some, like "Teutonic Bombshell," "Harumph" and "Mower" are hard to look at, their furious smears and whiplash swipes of juicy paint combining the aggressive, headache-inducing vibrancy of Op art with the meaty physicality of Expressionism. Others, like "Swishy," "What the . . . ?" and "Nyder-Michael-Reafs" are hard to stomach. Squeezed straight from the tube, fat worms of delicate lavender, murky burgundy, rusty pumpkin, frothy mint, baby-doll pink and cobalt blue clash against churning surfaces of primary colors.

In a sense, Reafsnyder is an anti-Expressionist. The madcap gestures that pile up like multi-vehicle wrecks on his paintings do not describe inner turmoil as much as they invite your eyes to metaphorically leap out of their sockets and careen around meticulously engineered arrangements of texture, gesture and shape.

To emphasize that his carnivalesque compositions belong in the visible world of shared public space, Reafsnyder has painted a smiley face on each--sometimes piling four or five atop one another. Their energy is infectious; if you don't take yourself too seriously, it's hard not to crack a smile before these embarrassingly generous images.

Imagine if a painting by Seurat were crossed with one by Pissarro and the offspring were fed a steady diet of steroids and methamphetamine. This gives you an idea of the physical wallop and optical sophistication of Reafsnyder's profoundly weird works. They get your attention in a split-second and then do something interesting with it.

An abstract painting with thick, expressive brushstrokes in various colors including brown, white, yellow, purple, blue, and pink. The composition is dense and layered, with some areas appearing more textured than others.

issues.

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Art Issues

pg. 49

Michael Reafsnyder at Mark Moore, 11 December-22 January

By Christopher Knight



Michael Reafsnyder's philosophy of painting comes across as forthright and elemental:

Take a blob of oil paint.

Do something to it.

Do something else to it.

Etc., etc.

Reafsnyder's sixteen small wooden panels in this, his second solo show in Los Angeles, rarely get much larger than 12 or 16 inches on a side (one is a modest 20 by 27 inches, and by comparison to the rest feel immense). Yet, each one seems to have required tubes and tubes of paint to make. Bright and insistent, like eager children vying for attention, they together describe a full inventory of application techniques; oil paint is piles, smeared, scraped, dragged, combed, pressed, smudged, buttered, blotted, daubed, pounced, and run over with a squeegee or a spatula. A brush might also have been used but it's just about the only tool that doesn't make its presence clearly felt, with nary a slathered brushstroke left visible to the eye.

Sometimes the paint is left lying on the surface, just as it fell when squeezed directly from the tube. Then the skinny, snaky cylinder or crimson, cobalt, lemon yellow, or uncorrupted white reads as a three dimensional line, somewhere between an element of traditional drawing and sculptural high relief. Elsewhere the paint has been scraped down so close to the bone that color is transformed from a blaring declaration into a whispered memory barely heard. Occasionally the pure pigments melt together into muddy puddles of brown merde, but more often they shriek in primary and secondary hues.

Here and there a word has been scratched into the surface of the painted panel, like a petroglyph on an ancient rock or a graffiti-style inscription on a neighborhood wall.

The artist's name, occasionally coupled with the initials of his country, seem to have been carved with a stick (the wrong end of that unseen brush). The charged territory of identity politics is thus signified - notably, by using only the most rudimentary of means - but it is casually regarded as simply inseparable from the stuff of the painting itself.

Reafsnnyder's work has been considered in terms of the postwar European CoBrA group (in particular, the raucous easel pictures of Karel Appel and Asger Jorn come to mind). The chaotic surfaces, torrents of aggressive color, and childlike glee of his paintings certainly seem cognizant of that somewhat critically beleaguered precedent. While the vivid soup of CoBrA paintings frequently offer up images loosely associated with Northern European folklore, the corporate spirit of American consumer culture is embedded in the surface of Reafsnnyder's art. Each painting turns out to be a visual essay on the Smiley Face, that bland symbol of vacant cheerfulness and empty satisfaction that has proliferated in the popular consciousness for more than thirty years.

As employed by Reafsnnyder, though, the Smiley Face seems utterly without irony. There's nothing snide or smirking in these paintings, nor do they appear as escapist admonitions of the "don't worry / be happy" variety. In fact, there's something fierce and creepy about the button eyes and toothless grins that deniably emerge into view from his sloshing seas of colorful paint. "Dialectical materialism has taught us that conscience depends on social circumstances," the CoBrA group asserted in 1949m "and when these prevent us from being satisfied, our needs impel us to discover our desires." The social circumstances of American painting today are engorged with Puritan reticence and rebukes, which not only forestalls contentment but also makes a mockery of the very ambition. Reafsnnyder has found a way to sharply criticize that morbid, smothering tendency without giving up on spontaneity and pleasure. His small and darkly sunny paintings stand as little tantrums of defiant joy.

Smiley Faces Emerge from Swirls of Abstraction

by JEANNE C. WILKINSON

Michael Reafsnyder is a rare phenomenon in today's art world. A competent young painter emerging from the California school of conceptualism, Reafsnyder plays with the tenets of abstraction like someone who understands painting.

At first glance, the paintings appear to be Abstract Expressionist compositions of swirling smears, scrapes and daubs of paint—spirited, lively, engaging. But while being drawn in by the beauty of the patterns and flows of paint, you can't help but notice that in the lower part of each of the works is a small face that asserts its presence like a child tugging at your leg.

Above his head, you try to conduct an adult dialogue with the painting—about de Kooning, maybe Richard Pousette-Dart and various theories involving painterly Abstract Expressionism—but the little face will not leave you alone.

Despite his use of pop clichés, Reafsnyder manages to avoid both cloying sentiment and over-intellectualization in a balancing act made possible by an obviously sincere immersion in the discipline and skill of painting.

The face is deceptively simple, deceptively crude. The smiley face



Untitled by Michael Reafsnyder, 1999

could be nothing more than a sort of faux-naïve conceit ironically tagged on an otherwise competent abstract motif. But there is something more raw and naked and strange about the face than irony and conceits would allow.

In fact, careful attention reveals that the face has worked out of the body of the painting, in some cases emerging from the pigment like a

baby being born. As anyone who has painted knows, excessive blending of otherwise bright, clear colors will eventually result in a muddy, murky mess. In Reafsnyder's process, the colors of the upper composition merge and blend at the bottom, and from this accumulation of pigment arises the face. In some paintings, dotted eyes and mouths ride on a tiny sea of mud; in others the face is separated from the

rest of the composition by a rainbow-like spread of thick, creamy pigment.

But above the faces, lucid and pure, colors rise in wild curves, smears and slashes. The upper areas appear discharged in exhilaration—the lower parts rooted in obsession.

Michael Reafsnyder's paintings evoke the sumptuousness of fine cakes and pies, with paint so luscious it looks good enough to eat. Those paintings have a strong physical presence that, like all textural works, are difficult to photograph well. But it's more than that. There is a quality in these works that can be seen only with the naked eye. It's like the difference between watching the full moon rise fat and yellow from the sea, and seeing the photograph of the same moment.

Beneath the sunshine colors and thick paint lies something quirky and unsettling. The element of the human face, however codified, always signifies a narrative. In Reafsnyder's case the story is one that is small enough to wheedle its way into your mind almost unnoticed, and large enough to encompass the world of painting.

Michael Reafsnyder at Cheryl Pelavin Fine Art, 13 Jay St., 925-9424. Sept. 23 through Nov. 8. Open Tues.–Sat. 11 a.m.–6 p.m.

Wilkinson, Jeanne C. "Smiley Faces Emerge from Swirls of Abstraction".
The Tribeca Trib, September 1999.

FRIDAY, APRIL 25, 1997



By DAVID PAGEL
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Inside Out: Michael Reafsnyder's compact paintings at Blum & Poe Gallery are some of the strangest of the season. After the sneers, guffaws and snickers they initially elicit subside, it's clear that this young abstract painter's solo debut ranks among the best of recent memory.

His modestly scaled oils on panel hit your visual system like a punch in the eye. Viewers don't *respond*

to these exceptional images as much as they *react* to them. Involuntary and extreme, such physical interaction demonstrates that something like instinct takes over in the presence of Reafsnyder's art.

That's no mean feat. Especially since Reafsnyder's panels are painted in a loose, gestural style that recalls the gut-wrenching, soul-searching flourishes of much Abstract Expressionism.

In pointed contrast to that style, which meant to plumb the depths of the artist's psyche in a quest for authenticity, Reafsnyder's paintings put the instincts of viewers front and center. Profoundly contemporary, these loaded works turn the old-fashioned idea of art as self-expression inside out. Like Rorschach blots, they tell more about viewers than whoever made them.

Plus, Reafsnyder's panels wreak havoc on conventional wisdom about abstract painting. Painted primarily in reds, yellows and blues squeezed straight from the tube, his furiously worked surfaces look as if they're the dimwitted second cousins of Gerhard Richter's exquisitely refined paintings.

Nevertheless, Reafsnyder's pictures do not rely on any sort of "aw shucks," country bumpkin charm. Cuteness has no place in these fiercely civilized paintings. Although many include stick-figure faces staring straight at you, these goofy components only intensify the jittery edginess generated by Reafsnyder's weirdly electrifying art.

■ *Blum & Poe Gallery, 2042 Broadway, Santa Monica, (310) 453-8311, through May 3. Closed Sundays and Mondays.*

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

Best of the '90s

A SPECIAL ISSUE

Dave Hickey



Dave Hickey is an art writer who lives in Las Vegas. His essays have most recently been collected in *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy* (Art Issues, 1997).

LA Spring (as in Prague Spring):
Part I In recent years, the art world has been admitting young artists one at a time, cutting them out from the herd and quickly transforming them into high-dollar Vanity Fare. The dam broke this spring in Los Angeles. Dozens of bright young things mounted so many bright young shows that one actually moved from gallery to gallery, from month to month, with heady anticipation. Among the standouts: Kevin Appel, Philip Argent, Linda Besemer, Ingrid Calame, Jane Callister, Fandra Chang, Steven Criqui, Sharon Ellis, Jeff Elrod, Jason Eoff, Jack Hallberg, Jim Isermann, Kurt Kauper, Penelope Krebs, Laura Owens, Aaron Parazette, Monique Prieto, Michael Reafsnyder, Adam Ross, Brad Spence, Jennifer Steinkamp, and Yek.

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The Dawn of the
Post-Contemporary Art Age

The Art of Trespass:
On Morgan Thorson
and John Fleischer.

Craig Drennen in Conversation
with Carl Ostendarp

Sanneke Stigter On How
to Preserve Conceptual Art

Interview: Anton Ginzburg

Jesse Jones' Parasitic
Interventions

Revisiting
Picasso's Guernica

The Psychogeography
of Val Britton

Ed Clark:
A Life in the Arts,
with a Broom

'It's Not About Having the Last Word'
**The Role of Art
Criticism**



IT'S NOT ABOUT HAVING THE LAST WORD

BY DAVID PAGEL



Michael Reafsnider, *Summer Strut*, 2016, acrylic on linen, 60" x 72." Courtesy of the artist and Ameringer/McEnergy/Yohe.

I write art criticism for two reasons: 1. To find out what I think about what I'm looking at; and 2. To make the world safe for me. The first is pretty simple. So is the second, but it's a little harder to explain.

When I walk into an exhibition or come across something that asks me to take it seriously as a work of art, I rarely know what this means. So I have to spend some time with it: looking, gazing, glancing and

all that, but also pondering, putzing around the nooks and crannies of the experience, and noodling through the impressions the thing generates in my body. That includes my brain (lizard and otherwise), as well as my gut, solar plexus, and spine, along with my skin, the hairs on the back of my neck, and my eyes, which sometimes seem to have minds of their own—certainly the capacity to move more swiftly than

Exhibition Review- Floor Flowers

“地生花”展评

撰文：大卫·帕格爾 / Written by: David Pagel
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“地生花”这个展览发端于当代艺术创作的一个现象——相当一部分当代雕塑家的作品离开地面，以墙作为根据地在空间中蔓延。墙壁过去是绘画、摄影以及其他二维作品的专属摇篮。此次的八人展览中，艺术家们的雕塑作品向墙迁移，不是为了攻占领地替代绘画，也不想让人们认为，他们的作品也是三维图像或抽象画，只不过更加厚重重要了。他们篡夺了传统意义上的绘画领地，只是因为它给了他们更多的空间去折腾——随心所欲地做自己的事，享受更多的自由、激情和超乎寻常的不可预知性。这也激发了观众去重新思考地和墙的关系：首先，地和墙作为作品的载体，各有多少种承载作品的方式；其次，我们的身体如何与水平轴线和垂直轴线方向上的物体互动。“地生花”这个展览凸显了这些原本对立的领地之间的复杂关系，创造出了一种种探索形变流动性的情境，这种情境也为开放式的换位提供了成长的土壤。

这场从地到墙的运动是双向的：过去，当代画家把自己的绘画作品挂在墙上就心满意足了；现在他们让作品从墙上下来去占领画廊的各个空间。但是“从地到墙”之旅却并非“从墙到地”之行的镜像。

“地生花”同时也缘起于当代艺术创作的另一个现象——众多当代画家的作品走下墙壁，有时在架子上尘埃落定，有时立在基座上，还有的时候洒在地上，以各

创作出了不挂墙上的作品，转战实体所在的三维空间，这当中的可能性貌似是无穷的：对于习惯二维创作的画家来说（不论具象或抽象），当代雕塑是开放灵活的，它那异想天开无所不包的特质是一片肥沃的土壤。这个展览中的作品还没有被定性，你可能会认为它们是雕塑，绘画或者是二者兼具的一种奇怪媒材组合，但在新的空间里，艺术家们的创作延伸了，同时观众和展览作品之间也有了更多进行复杂互动的可能性。

“地生花”展出了8位艺术家的作品，其中的四位——罗伊·道威尔、迈克尔·瑞福施耐德、詹姆斯·理查兹和伊娃·桂古娃都是画家出身，近年来才开始雕塑创作。他们过去的绘画作品独具一格，透露出一种无处着落的不安，现在他们也在继续创作这类绘画作品。于是，于情于理自然而然地，这种不安的意味也在他们的三维探索中得以延续。4位画家都是DIY实验者，他们热爱法则也尊重构成的严密逻辑，但同时，他们对玩票式的混乱也十分着迷，这两种情绪恐怕难分。所以，他们百无禁忌的艺术才有了一种断层的可能性。结构稳固的墙上作品之下，潜藏的是他们们的一个信念：一切形式的秩序不过是暂时的，稍纵即逝，徘徊在崩溃的边缘，它们那些可以被理解的意义随时可能会分裂成毫无意义的信息碎片或者难以消化的硬块，风崩离析的缄默与其他的意义形式的可能性产生共鸣，这个过程也许不是彻头彻尾的冒险，但它却往往会在不经意间显现出结构感和粗犷。

力于探索抽象的历史和潜力。二人深知，貌岸然的自我满足是陷阱，他们绞尽脑汁地去清除作品中不必要的严肃性。纯粹的观念，现在仍然笼罩着抽象绘画，但在这二人这里，纯粹被抛弃了，创作时他们一只脚牢牢地根植于日常的真实中，另一只脚自由地跳跃进另一个世界，那里面有游戏的愉悦和奇思妙想。道威尔通过拼贴来创作，他把从墨西哥和洛杉矶找来的海报和广告撕开，粘帖到面板上，然后用铅笔、蜡笔和漆打造出坚硬磐石的合成物，这些物体可不乐意安坐着，似乎内在有一股让它们活灵活现的能量。瑞福施耐德像疯子一样作画，他把大块大块的丙烯颜料直接从管里挤出来，然后用调色刀刮刻出各种生机勃勃的形状，看上去让心潮澎湃，因为它们永不凋凌。为了确保观众知道快乐是第一要义，他的画都要以一个笑脸来收尾：两团颜料代表眼睛，还有一张幸福的半圆嘴。画作表面密密麻麻，颜料碰撞纠缠。瑞福施耐德做雕塑的时候，他的陶瓷就将画作译成了三维的，促使观众从尽可能多的角度去观看事物。相比之下，道威尔就简单多了：他的纸型雕塑都是漫画形象，它们像玩具一样恭迎观众进入无限的可能性，任凭语言的想象力漫无边际地驰骋。

再举两位雕塑家：伊娃·桂古娃。二人刚开始艺术生涯开始时，创作的画好像要在观众眼前分解开来一般。而在自己去的画廊中，伊娃创作的墙上作品表面看上去好像更平铺直叙，又好像被彻底撕裂，数字病内

Floor *Flowers* begins with the observation that a significant number of contemporary sculptors are making works that get up off the floor and spread themselves across the walls of the spaces they occupy, which were once the exclusive provenance of painting, drawings, and photographs, as well as other two-dimensional works. The sculptures in the eight-artist exhibition migrate wall-wards not with the intention of standing in as surrogate paintings or with the goal of being treated as thicker, three-dimensional images or abstractions. They usurp the space traditionally occupied by painting simply because it gives them more room to maneuver—to let loose and do their own thing, with more freedom, verve, and unpredictability than usual. This invites viewers to reconsider the relationship between the floor and the wall, primarily in terms of the various ways each serves as a ground for the works it hosts, but also for the manner in which our bodies interact with objects oriented on a horizontal axis and those oriented on a vertical one. In *Floor Flowers*, the complexity of the relationship between these ordinarily opposed territories is emphasized, creating a situation in which shape-shifting fluidity and open-ended transpositions are cultivated.

The movement, from floor to wall, goes in both directions: Contemporary painters, once content to hang their works on the walls, are letting them come down from that position and occupy various spaces around the gallery. But the journey, from wall to floor, is not a mirror image of the trip in the other direction.

Floor Flowers simultaneously begins with the observation that a significant number of contemporary painters are making works that push off of the wall, sometimes settling onto shelves, at other times resting on pedestals and, at still others, spilling onto the floor, where they take up residence as all sorts of things: bona fide sculptures, sculptural offshoots, modestly scaled installations, mongrel objects, loose constellations of things, or provisional assemblages. When painters make things that do not hang on walls but inhabit the three-dimensional space bodies occupy, the possibilities seem endless: the open-ended flexibility and anything-goes promiscuity of contemporary sculpture serve as fertile grounds for painters accustomed to working in two dimensions, whether pictorially or abstractly. As the space in which they work expands, so does

the potential for more complex interactions between viewers and the slippery things in this exhibition, whether you think of them as sculptures, paintings, or some strange combination of the two media.

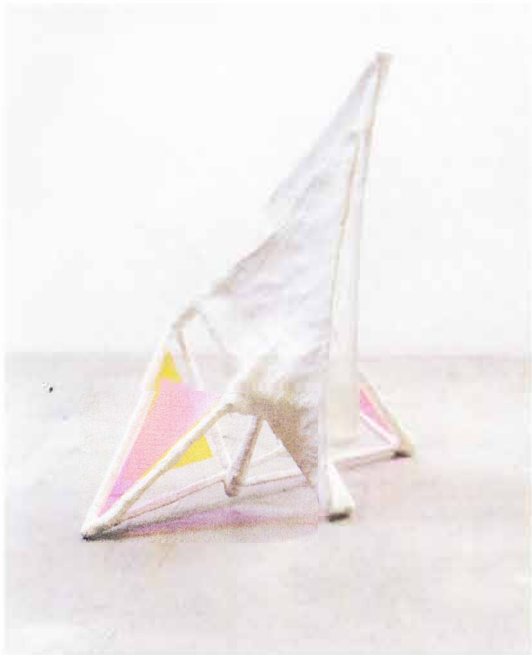
Of the eight artists whose works comprise *Floor Flowers*, four—Roy Dowell, Michael Reafsnyder, James Richards and Iva Gueorguieva—started out as painters and only recently began to make sculptures. The kinds of paintings they made, and continue to make, are peculiar, and contain within them a hint of the peripatetic restlessness that leads, logically and naturally, to their three-dimensional explorations. All four painters are do-it-yourself experimenters whose love of formal principles and respect for compositional rigor are matched by an equal and opposite attraction to the chaos of playfulness, which, in their no-holds-barred art, comes with the possibility of incoherence. Underlying these four artists' solidly structured wall-works is the conviction that all forms of order are not only temporary and provisional, but teetering on the brink of disintegration, their legibility inches away from splintering into potentially senseless bits of info, or dumb lumps of stuff, whose muteness resonates with the possibility of other modes of meaning, which often seem rudimentary and crude, if not downright primal.

As painters, Roy Dowell and **Michael Reafsnyder** are committed to the history and potential of abstraction. Each knows the pitfalls of sanctimonious self-satisfaction and goes out of his way to purge undue seriousness from his work. The idea of purity, which still haunts abstract painting, falls by the wayside as both artists make works with one foot firmly planted in everyday reality and the other skipping freely, into a world of playful pleasures and imaginative whimsy. Dowell does so via collage, pasting torn posters and advertisement he finds in Mexico and Los Angeles onto panels and then using pencils, crayons and paint to build rock-solid compositions that refuse to sit still and seem to be animated by their own internal energy. Reafsnyder paints like a maniac, squeezing big gobs of acrylic straight from the tube and then using a palette knife to scrape and carve it into exuberant shapes that are a thrill to behold, in ways that never get old. Just to make sure viewers know that pleasure is a priority, he finishes each painting by adding a smiley face: two dollops of paint standing in for the eyes and

a semi-circle for the happy mouth. When **Reafsnyder** makes sculptures, his ceramics translate the whiplash collisions on the densely worked surfaces of his paintings into three dimensions, compelling viewers to see things from as many perspectives as possible. In contrast, Dowell simplifies: his papier-mâché sculptures are comic icons whose toy-like format welcomes viewers into a realm of infinite possibility, where active imaginations know no bounds.

For their parts, Richards and Gueorguieva got started as artists by building paintings that seemed to be breaking down right before one's eyes. Over the last twenty years, Richards has made wall-works whose surfaces looked as if they were being eaten away by moths or consumed by viruses, digital or otherwise. Over the past ten years, Gueorguieva has made piecemeal paintings and fractured collages that appeared to be, simultaneously, exploding and imploding. The tension between the outward and inward movement of her discordant compositions is felt in one's gut, made palpable by the implied violence of the energy her splintered pictures unleash. Her more recent three-dimensional works, which sometimes hang on the wall and sometimes stand on the floor, bring the pictorial dynamics of her images up close and personal, their jagged fragments made even more physically menacing. In contrast, Richards, like Dowell, simplifies things when he moves into three dimensions. His trio of pieces, all made this year, resemble the unlikely offspring of abstract paintings and street barricades, improvised roadblocks that protect citizens as they rebel against more powerful authorities. In these crudely cobbled constructions, painting and politics dovetail more elegantly than usual.

The other four artists—Rachel Lachowicz, Steve Roden, Julia Haft-Candell, and Tessie Whitmore—are sculptors whose works never accepted the notion that the wall was off-limits. From the start of their careers (Lachowicz and Roden in the 1990s, Haft-Candell in the '00s, and Whitmore in the '10s), each made mixed-media works that roamed freely from the floor to the wall—and back again. Like Dowell, Reafsnyder, Gueorguieva, and Richards, these four sculptors preferred the freewheeling possibilities of impurity to the limitations of entrenched conventions. Finding virtue in loose ends, and



让·罗丹：866（静而轻） 榫木，金属丝，石灰，衣物，树脂玻璃
 Jean Rodon '866 (SILENCE AND LIGHT) 33-1/2x21x35 inches bass wood,
 wire, plaster, cloth, plexiglass 2013



迈克尔·瑞福施耐德 釉陶
 Michael Roafsnnyder GLAZER 71/2x15x101/2 inches ceramic 2009

pleasure in ad hoc improvisations, they stretched boundaries to the breaking point, flaunting expectations, mocking manners, and embracing misbehavior to make works that neither fit into traditional categories nor broke the rules for the sake of breaking the rules. Too savvy for such shortsighted satisfactions, their boundary-bending works expanded the territory in which sculpture operated without abandoning its formal punch and aesthetic finesse.

As sculptors, Lachowicz and Roden treat the floor and the wall as equally suitable points of departure for their art, whose ultimate goal is to get in your head and make you think differently about the world in which you live. That's the conceptual side of their works, which mess with perceptions all the better to get people to perceive things differently: both sharper in one's attentiveness to the nuance of often overlooked details, and, at the same time, more wide-ranging in terms of its connection to the global world we inhabit, as well as the galaxy through which our planet whirls, and the cosmos beyond. The conceptual kick Lachowicz's sculptures and Roden's two- and three-dimensional things deliver is all the more potent because it is accompanied by a love of materials and a commitment

to the sensuality of substances, whose resplendent physicality can be translated into words only imperfectly. Lachowicz's handmade Plexiglas forms recall geological structures while simultaneously serving as industrial-scale containers for the pigments used in cosmetics. Roden's knee-high sculpture similarly emphasizes asymmetry, evoking those moments when it's more interesting to be out-of-step with one's surroundings than immersed in them. In both artists' floor- and wall-works, the tension between experience and meaning gives rise to a charged exploration of the shifting boundaries between matter and meaning, nature and culture, chaos and order, discipline and whimsy, pleasure and suffering.

The youngest artists in *Floor Flowers*, Haft-Candell and Whitmore, work in a world shaped by their immediate predecessors: the other six artists in the exhibition. Trained as a ceramicist, Haft-Candell brings clay into the equation, treating it as medium no less useful than any other material, and perhaps even moreso, given its century-spanning history, its utilitarian associations, and its intimate links to hands-on domesticity. Whitmore is a scavenger, a talented re-purposer who gathers together cast-off scraps and discarded bits of around-the-

house stuff to cobble together tenuous assemblages or mini-installations that spark all sorts of associations and trigger all kinds of memories while never pretending to be anything other than what they are: purposefully yet casually arranged constellations of mundane items that speak to the extraordinary beauty of ordinary life—when we see it with fresh eyes and live it with the conviction that there is no choice but to do so. Haft-Candell's multi-part pieces invite similar meditations. Like doodle-filled sketchbooks or three-dimensional journals, her light-handed clusters of drawings and sculptures and studio detritus have the presence of loose collages, cut-and-paste pieces from which the paste has been eliminated so as to emphasize the free-flowing mobility—and rearrangeable ease—of the various parts. The capacity to reconfigure themselves in a viewer's imagination is essential to Haft-Candell's playfully animated compositions. It is also integral to the show as a whole, which draws viewers into a situation where the parts add up to wholes that are themselves parts of other wholes, and so on and so forth. 📍

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San Francisco Chronicle

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"Five Times Four at Modernism"
by Kenneth Baker

Mel Ramos' pop-era paintings of lubricious nudes were politically incorrect even when he first made them. The pinup irreality of his ogling female figures was qualified occasionally -- at least for art history students -- by direct reference to canonical Mannerist or neoclassical nudes.

But little or no apology mitigates Ramos' recent remakes of his pop nudes posed with or astride products such as candy bars and Cuban cigars at Modernism. The new pictures on canvas are done with the same suave attention to the buzz of color at the edges of forms characteristic of the '60s paintings.

Perhaps Ramos' greatest concession to changing times is his discreet inclusion of pubic hair in some new pictures. And perhaps the greatest difference in reception today will be spectators' inability to deny the gendered nature of their responses to what Ramos has done.

Most visitors may be more comfortable with the sensuality, sublimated but not twisted, in Modernism's "Five Times Four," works by five California painters chosen by Southern Californian James Hayward.

Hayward's own monochrome abstractions mark the show's low point, though they are more rewarding than they appear at first.

Sam Tchakalian's four small abstracts, which roll like stretchers and seem with their fat, translucent surfaces. No painter working today brings the dead matter of paint to life with less apparent skill than Tchakalian.



Michael Reafsnnyder, Drink Milk, 2002, oil on panel, 12 x 16 inches

Working deftly on strips of scrap lumber, Richard Allen Morris proves the capacity of well-used oil paint to redeem almost anything with its richness.

And Dennis Hollingsworth improvises wildly and engagingly with different techniques of paint application.

But Orange County painter Michael Reafsnnyder stands out for sheer ebullience and cheek. Piling paint on small panels, squeezing it direct from tubes like a child who has just discovered where toothpaste comes from, Reafsnnyder stints neither color nor quantity.

Perhaps with a wink toward Willem de Kooning's goggle-eyed "Women," he gives each of his paintings a cartoon face.

With respect to the pieties of abstraction, a more transgressive move than this gleeful self-congratulation can hardly be imagined.