

MARK MOORE GALLERY | **BEN WEINER** STATEMENTS

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Acting as a chronological survey, Mark Moore Gallery: *Statements* introduce a featured gallery artist through images and candid interview. From noteworthy early examples to present bodies, the works featured in *Statements* act as an overview of the varying practices and movements implemented by a given artist in tandem with their thoughts and interpretations.

Ben Weiner's paintings and videos depict cropped magnifications of commonplace materials used in the creation of artifice. These materials range from beauty products, art supplies, and artificial food ingredients to digital displays and mirrors. Weiner allows the intrinsic illusionistic properties of each material to serve as the embryo for each work of art, representing their ethereal luminous effects through meticulous painting and stop motion video making. Thus, Weiner arrives at disorienting abstractions through processes of representation. Such works pose a confusion of object, subject and medium, reflecting the permeation of artifice and imitation into ordinary experience in the digital age.

Weiner (born 1980, Burlington, VT) received his BA from Wesleyan University (CT). He also studied under Mexican muralist José Lazcarro at Universidad de las Americas (Mexico). He has exhibited his work widely across the United States and in Mexico with solo shows in Los Angeles, New York and Puebla, and in group exhibitions in Chicago, New York, Miami, New Haven, Ridgefield, Los Angeles and Riverside. His paintings can be found in the Sammlung Mondstudio (Germany) and the Frederick R. Weisman Foundation Collection (CA). The artist lives and works in New York City.

BEN WEINER

Interviewed by: Catlin Moore, Mark Moore Gallery Manager

How did you initially develop your photorealistic technique?

When I began painting in college, I was interested in representation and depicting my surrounding world. During my first painting class I painted mostly from life, and I was never quite satisfied with the product; the process felt a bit like an archaic ritual to me. While painting from life was interesting for its novelty, as a form of observation it was unlike the way I normally perceive the world. I began integrating photographic images into my source material, and eventually took a photography class. Once I began viewing sources through a camera, things really began to gel.

My painting teacher, Tula Telfair, taught us to pre-mix a comprehensive palette of colors before we started painting, and this system appealed to me. I liked the idea of separating my process into distinct parts: photographing, then mixing, then painting. This method was harmonious with my aim to convey a perspective that blended mechanical and organic elements. My interest in the segmentation of my methodology- as well as its actual process - led to me painting the paint on my palette.

Much of your earlier work explores the concept of beauty and artificiality, but in a different sense than your newest pieces. What was the original fascination with this, and how was it exemplified through objects from commonplace objects with Styrofoam and paint, to more exotic items like pearls and gems?

My earliest work (2003-2005) naturalistically depicts the artificial world we live in, and examines a broad range of man-made objects such as paint, Styrofoam, and freezer interiors. Between 2006 and 2008, I focused more specifically on decorative objects such as jewelry, mannequins, and beauty products as a meditation on fetish, illusionism, and the commodity status of the art object. In these works, the subjects more overtly reference the art object itself. In my most body of recent work, I have combined these two earlier themes by observing illusionistic properties of the artificial materials we use in daily living, such as processed food ingredients, beauty products, embalming fluid, mirrors, computer screens, and art supplies. Thus, I observe how illusionism factors into human behavior on a broad scale. I am interested in how these materials form a collective interface that allows us to shape the physical world according to our imaginations.

You use tactics like magnification and cropping to decontextualize the familiar. How does detachment from the recognizable operate in your work?

I use a cropped, magnified perspective in my paintings to reflect the way in which our technology alienates us from ordinary experience by creating a perspective on the world far outside of what we can perceive with unaided senses. I think that painting, whose perspective is between documentation and fiction, is an ideal medium for portraying this effect.

In your most recent body of work (created for 2010's *Material and Illusion* at Mark Moore Gallery), you delve into the nature of art's medium. This concept has seemingly appeared in your earlier work as well with works like *Transformation*, 2005 but how does this earlier representation differ?



My earlier depictions of oil paint provided the conceptual embryo from which my current series grew. I was inspired by Clement Greenberg's concept of self-criticism (that an artwork should explore the nature of the medium in which it's made) because I felt it was relevant to the way the media currently makes us aware of every aspect of our lives. Marshal McLuhan describes this as "living mythically and in-depth at the same time". So in my current series, I'm expanding the idea of "art as an exploration of medium" into art as an exploration of the human tendency toward artifice in an age of hyper-self awareness. So I have continued to paint oil paint, but I'm now juxtaposing it with paintings and videos of other artificial materials (beauty products, artificial food ingredients, etc.) that reflect various artificial aspects of contemporary life.

"Attention is paid to both the materiality of the items and the materialism."

– Joy M. Pepe, *Artspace* (2008)

Explain how you arrived at video art. Is this a medium you had previously utilized?

During the summer of 2007, I was taking photos of hair gel as the source material for what would be the painting *The Crimes of Paris*, 2007. During the photo shoot I became very interested in the material properties of hair gel, and how I could manipulate it as an actual medium. I felt that the hair gel's suspension between a liquid and a solid was fascinating in ways a still image could not completely capture. I had made stop motion video projections a few years before as a sort of moving backdrop for a theatrical production in Mexico City, so I had experience with that technique. For the next two years, I did experiments to learn about the physical properties of hair gel and other materials. I read a lot about the physical and chemical properties of these materials, and also had to learn more about the technique of stop

motion video in order to relate it to what I had been doing with painting. While the videos were a departure, they were also a natural extension of my painting process; I use a similar still life macro-photography setup for my videos as I do for my paintings, except in order to make the videos I take thousands of photos and collage them into a moving sequence rather than creating a painted composition.

Obviously, your work requires a great amount of meticulous practice and detail. Can you describe your typical process in creating a new painting?

Once I have chosen a subject to paint, I extensively photograph it. Because my subjects are so small, and often quite viscous, I put them in tiny clear plastic containers, and photograph them in a black foam-core box about the size of a microwave that I built. This setup gives me a versatile and completely controlled lighting environment. My camera has a powerful macro lens that I made by connecting an upside-down 50mm lens to a 90mm lens, and is tethered to my computer. This system allows me to fluidly create compositions both by making changes in the physical setup, and by collaging images in Photoshop.

Once I have arrived at an image, or set of images, I project a loose sketch of the composition onto a canvas, and begin mixing colors. I mix colors very specifically by dividing my composition into 5 - 7 sections, and mixing a set of around 100 colors for each section, a process that is highly specific and mechanical. Once all the colors are all created, I paint section-by-section, starting with those furthest in the

background and moving toward the foreground.

I mix oil into my paint, which extends the drying time, so that I can finish each section while the paint is still completely wet. Painting wet-into-wet, with soft brushes, enables me to blur edges to give them an optical feel, and to give the painting a smooth, merged surface. In the end, I do a little glazing to enhance luminosity, but for the most part the painting's surface is a single, opaque layer of smooth, buttery paint. Because of the great amount of detail and the need to finish each section while the paint is still wet, I work on only one piece at a time.

Some critics have referred to your imagery as "terrains." Is that something you're conscious of when you're composing a new work?

When scale is relative, an object seen from close up becomes a terrain or an environment. I am interested in the way technology has created a realm of the mind, which we experience through camera lenses and electronic media, but is also removed from the physical, scaled world to which our bodies are anchored. Because many people today spend significant time engaged with electronic media on a daily basis, this synthetic realm of the mind is as much their natural environment as is the physical world. So, in a sense I do consider my paintings and videos landscapes, or naturalistic depictions of our technologically enhanced environment, and that's why I format my compositions horizontally and give them spatial qualities.

The human tendency towards desire is also a marked theme you address. How do your most recent works – for example, those that deal with processed food ingredients – investigate that idea?

Artificial ingredients mimic the tastes that make us desire food. Desire is a signal triggered by the senses, telling the body to pursue

something it needs. Our bodies need sugar for energy, therefore sweetness tastes good to us, provoking desire. Illusionism tends to “reverse engineer” desire, creating a sensual cue that triggers it without actually indicating something that would fulfill the bodily need.

When I depict illusionistic materials in my paintings, I try to use the qualities about them that fools the senses - in the case of jewels or paint, it is the way they reflect light to attract the eye. In the case of high fructose corn syrup, it's a bit more complicated, because you can't see its taste. However, you can see its texture, which is used to create realistic textures in food, and you can see its golden glow, which does indicate sweetness, as in a translucent lollipop. The corn syrup's viscous texture also allows it to be stirred and melted into food as an inconspicuous ingredient. All of these physical qualities allow it to create the illusion of being a sweet desirable food, and I use them to create an image that abstracts that desire.

Can you elucidate on the objective of the videos? Many of them denote a process or progression – what is the significance of that?

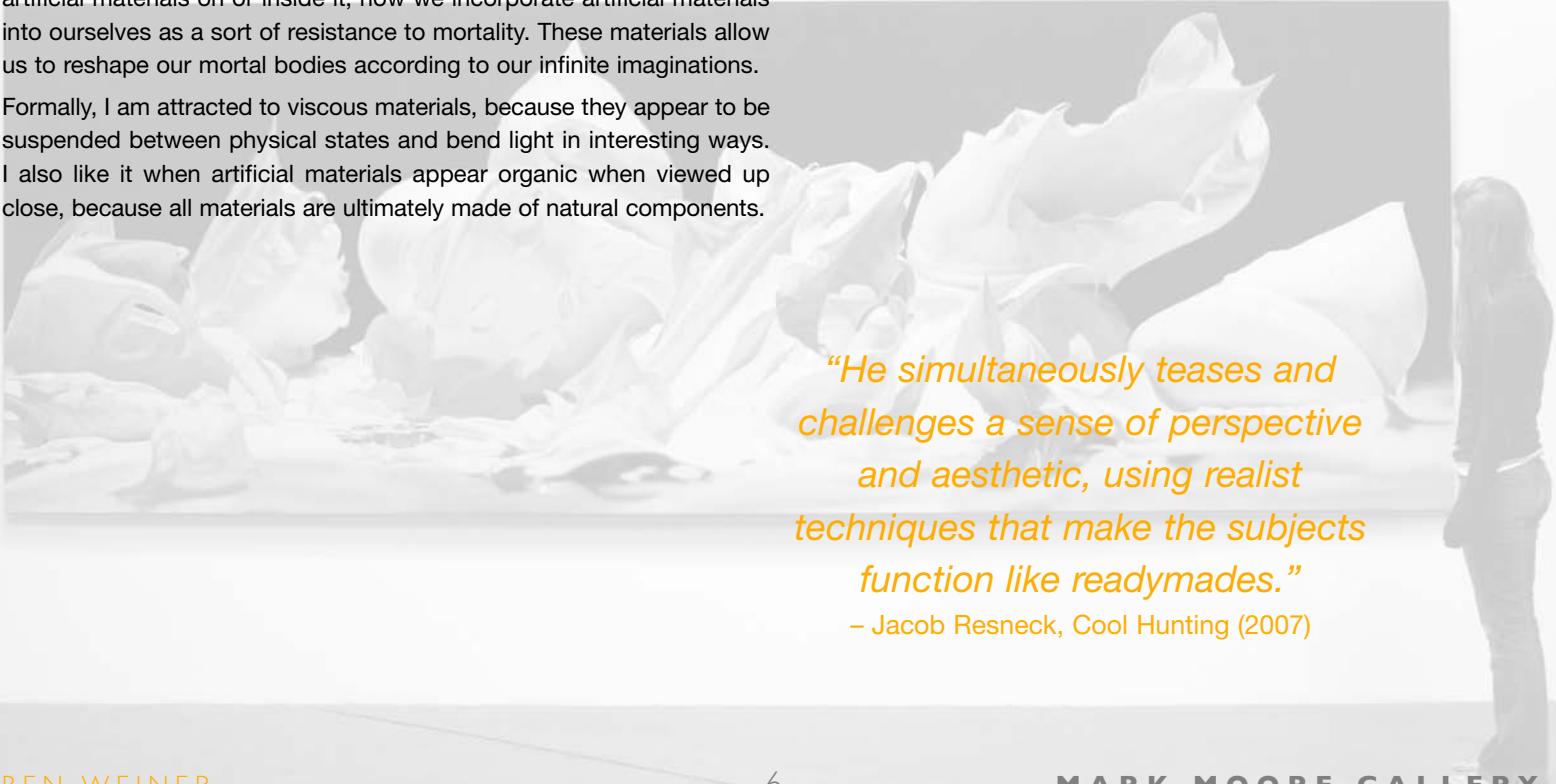
Each of my videos depicts a material that creates an illusion. The video's narrative records a transformation derived from the physical properties that create the illusion. For example, one video depicts hair gel as it evaporates—leaving behind a hard polymer shell—then reconstitutes as water is again added, in an endless loop. This mutability is what allows hair gel to shape hair, and then harden. Another video shows monosodium glutamate crystallizing out of a water solution. MSG's solubility is what allows it to be incorporated invisibly into food as a flavoring agent. I'm using the physical chemistry of these materials as a type of formalism. Odd structures and

configurations develop as the result of crystals' growing or polymers' solidifying, and the art piece evolves as the narrative moves along.

How do you find the materials that are most appealing to paint?

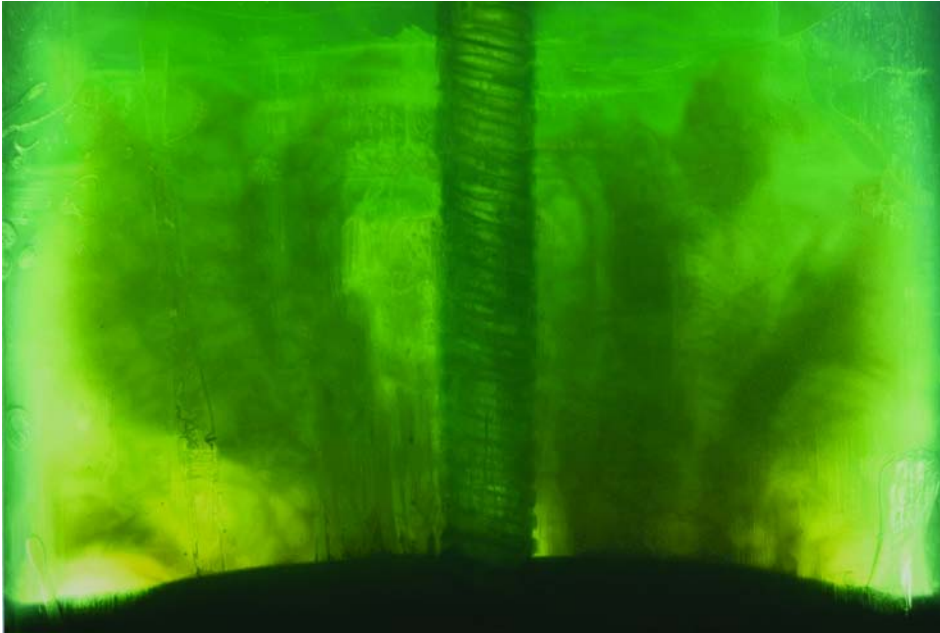
I generally look for artifice as it occurs in our daily lives and in materials that we use regularly. I also think about the body and how we put these artificial materials on or inside it; how we incorporate artificial materials into ourselves as a sort of resistance to mortality. These materials allow us to reshape our mortal bodies according to our infinite imaginations.

Formally, I am attracted to viscous materials, because they appear to be suspended between physical states and bend light in interesting ways. I also like it when artificial materials appear organic when viewed up close, because all materials are ultimately made of natural components.



“He simultaneously teases and challenges a sense of perspective and aesthetic, using realist techniques that make the subjects function like readymades.”

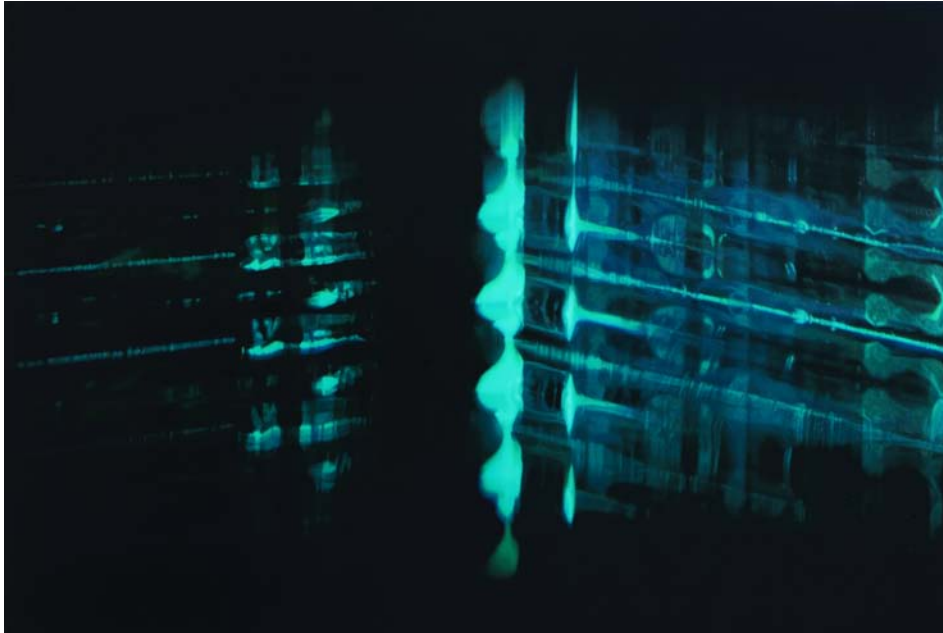
– Jacob Resneck, *Cool Hunting* (2007)



C₃H₈O₂, H₂O, NaC₁₈H₃₆O₂, C₉H₁₀O₂, C₂₈H₂₀N₂Na₂O₈S₂, 2010. oil on linen, 28 x 42 inches



TiO₂, C₃₄H₂₂Cl₂N₄O₂, C₁₈H₃₂O₂, C₁₀H₁₆, C₂₀H₃₀O₂, AgX, 2010. oil on linen, 28 x 38.35 inches

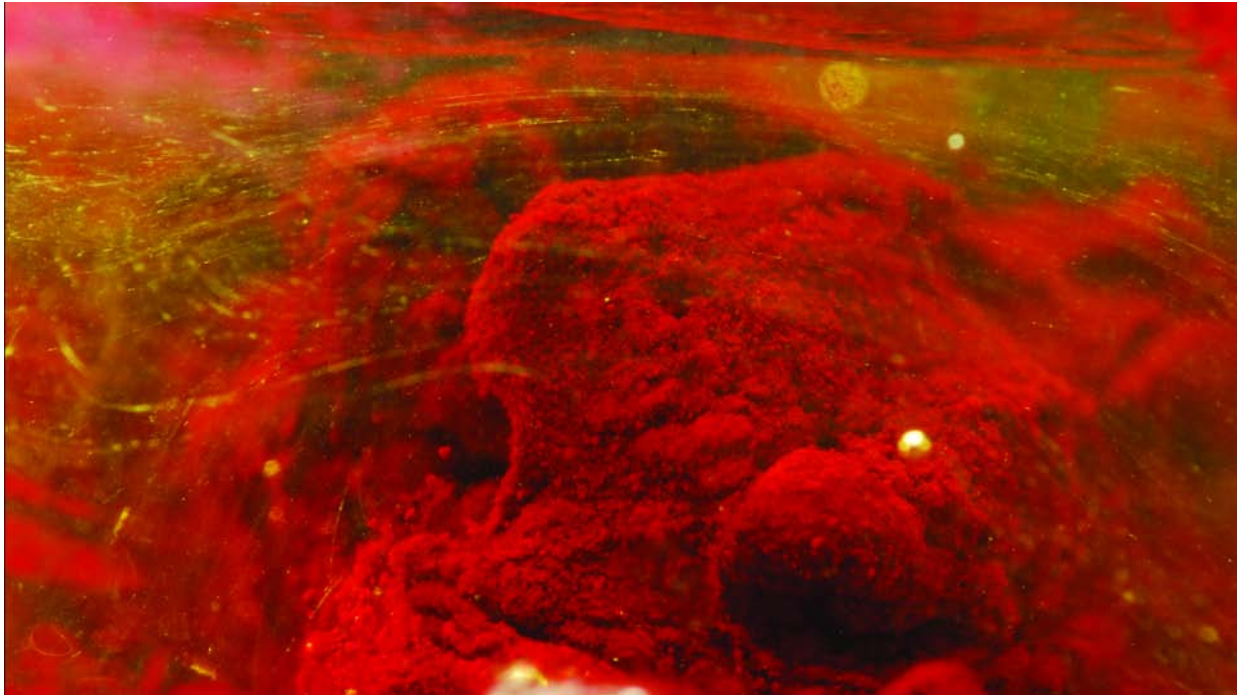


SiO₂, AI, 2009. oil on linen, 28 x 42 inches



C6H12O6, 2009. oil on linen, 28 x 42 inches

Collection of Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, Los Angeles, CA



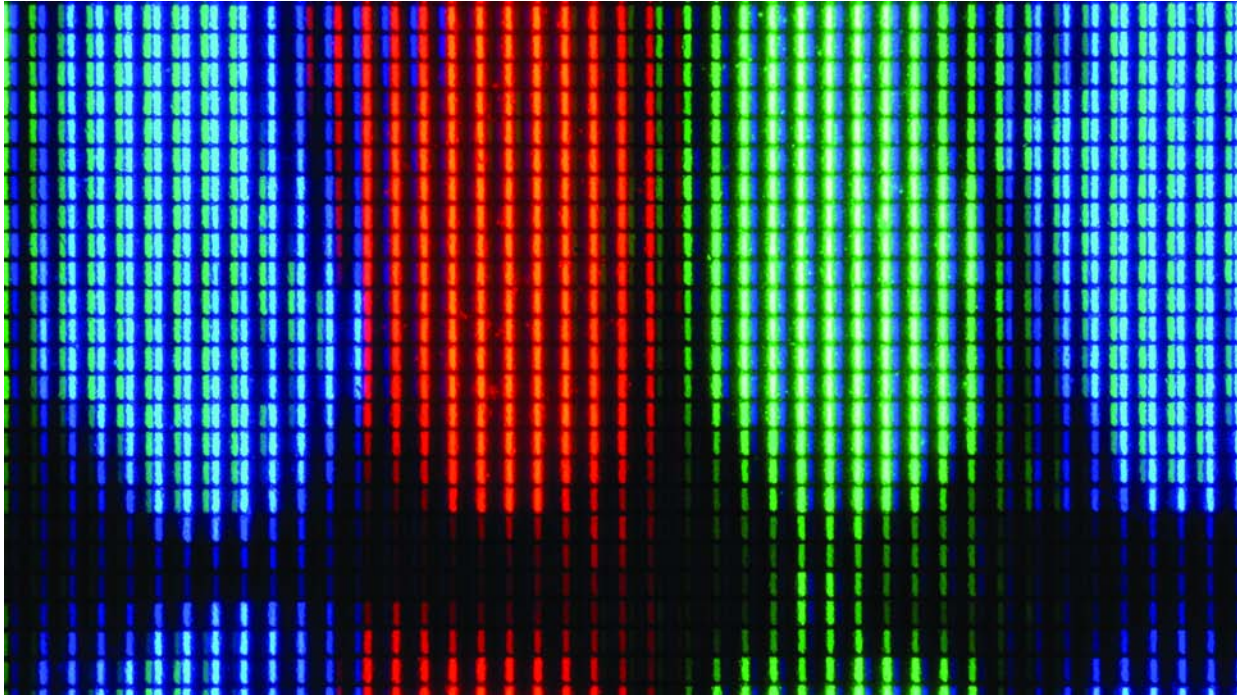
C18H32O2, C20H30O2, C10H16, C22H20O13, 2010. video on loop (still), displayed on 26.5 x 40.5 x 4.5 inch screen



[H₂O(l) ® H₂O(g)], (C₆H₉NO)_n, C₃H₈O₂, C₂₈H₂₀N₂Na₂O₈S₂, 2010. video on loop (still), displayed on 26.5 x 40.5 x 4.5 inch screen



$\text{Na}(\text{aq}) + \text{C}_5\text{H}_8\text{NO}(\text{aq}) \longrightarrow \text{NaC}_5\text{H}_8\text{NO}_4(\text{s})$, 2010. video on loop (still), displayed on 26.5 x 40.5 x 4.5 inch screen



C18H21NO, 2010. video on loop (still), displayed on 26.5 x 40.5 x 4.5 inch screen

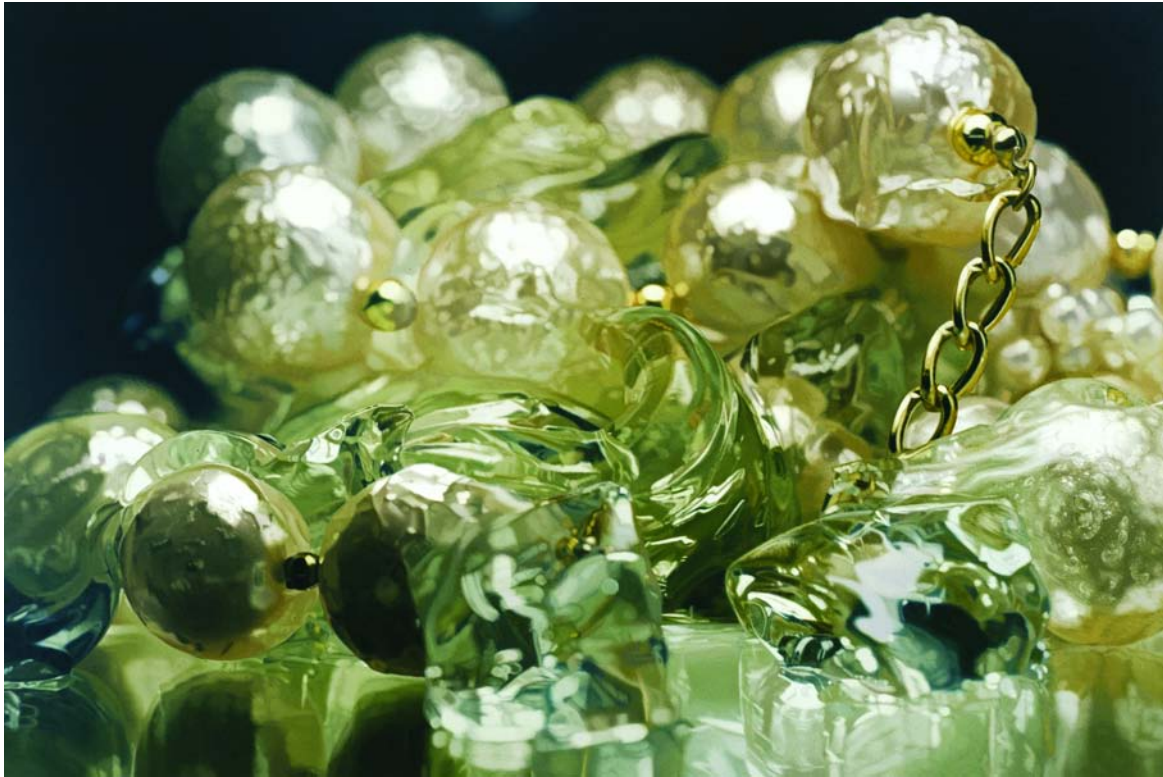


The Crimes of Paris (Pink Hair Gel), 2008. oil on canvas, 64 x 197 inches
Collection of Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, Los Angeles, CA



"His still lifes are filled with subjectivity, exuding a paradoxical mix of sensuous attraction and frightening repulsion that virtually transforms these microcosms of the world into a monumental, sublime universe."

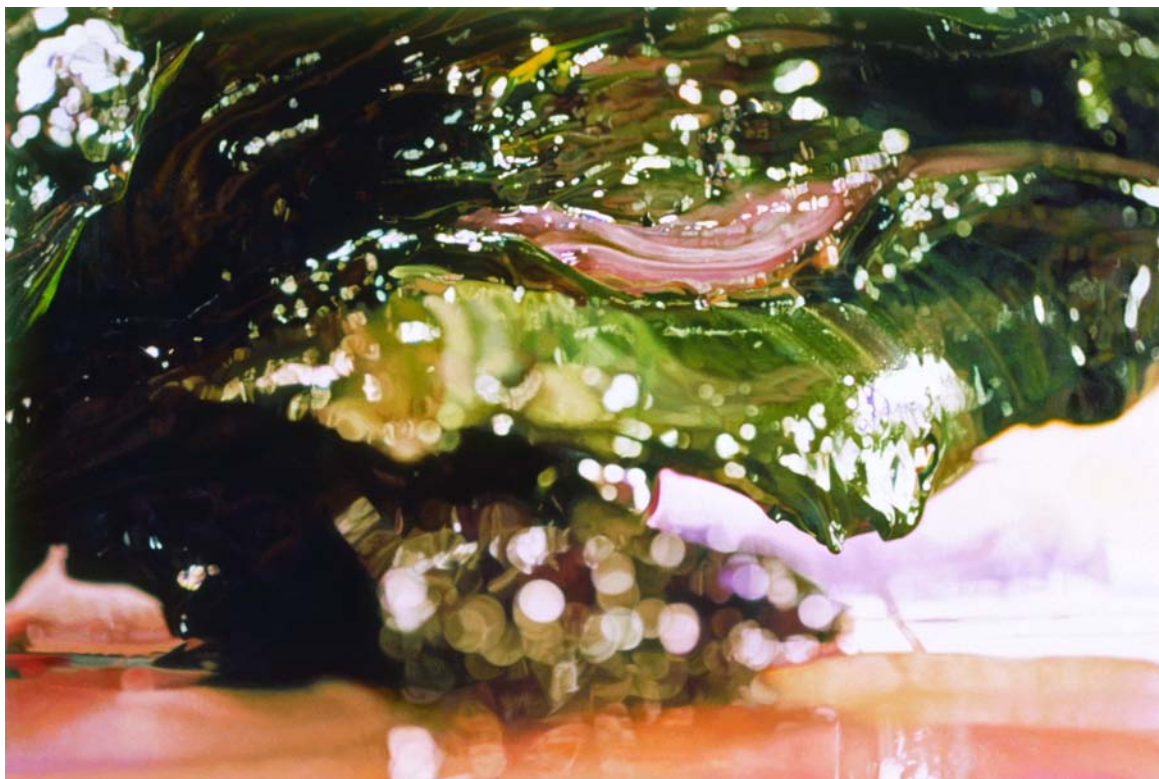
– Joseph Jacobs, Art & Antiques (2007)



Giant Pearls, 2008. oil on canvas, 64 x 96 inches



Oracle, 2007. oil on canvas, 64 x 96 inches



What Came First, 2007. oil on canvas, 64 x 96 inches



Darkness, 2007. oil on canvas, 64 x 96 inches

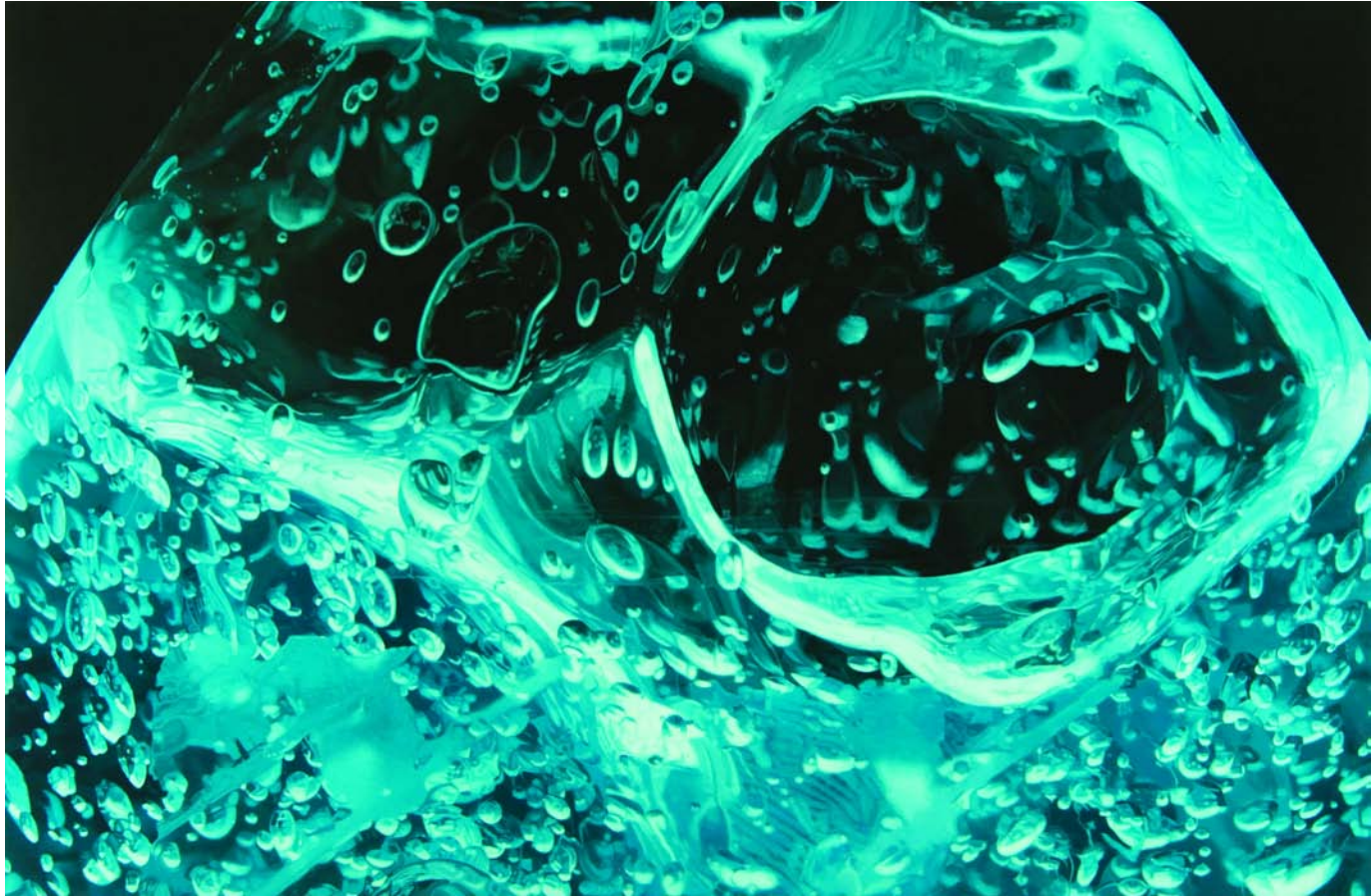
“Weiner relishes every detail of these opulent yet disorienting terrains, casting the soaring peaks and valleys in shimmering halation patterns and atmospheric depths of field.”

– Leslie Markle, ArtUS (2007)





Dream of the Centerless World, 2007. oil on canvas, 64 x 182 inches



The Great New Wave, 2007. oil on canvas, 72 x 110 inches



Science, 2006. oil on canvas, 64.5 x 96 inches



Untitled (mannequin, mirror, accessories), 2005. oil on linen, 40 x 60 inches
Progressive Insurance Collection, Cleveland, OH



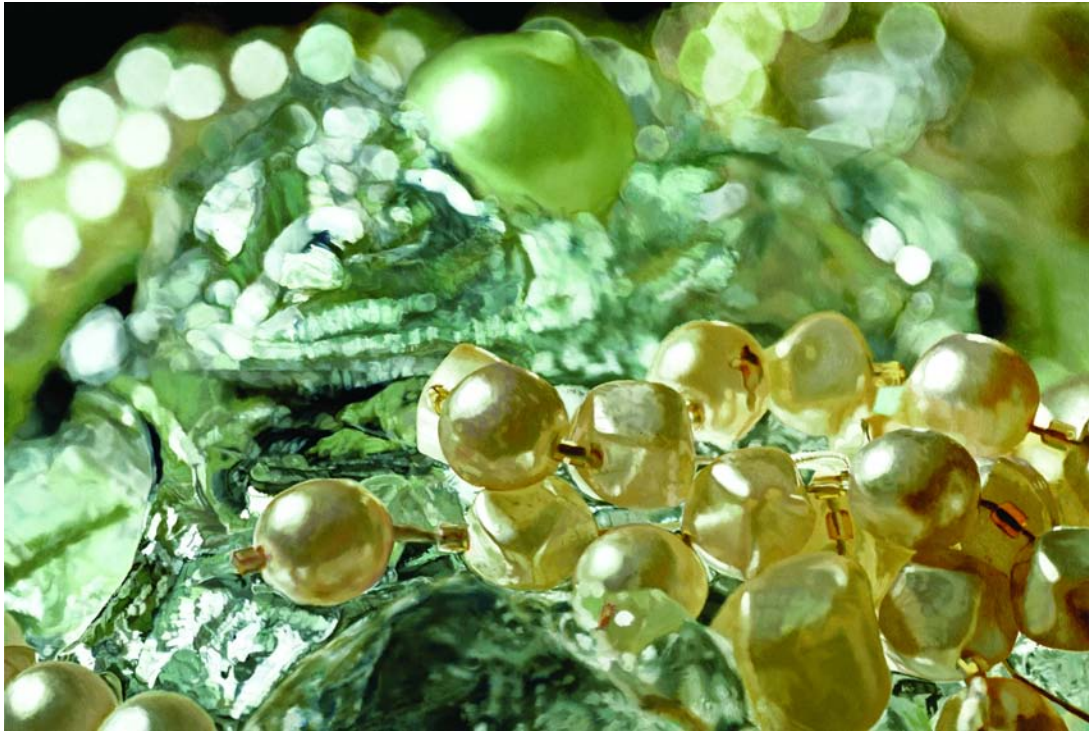
Untitled (graffiti, pipes, electrical meters), 2005. oil on linen 40 x 60 inches



Untitled (styrofoam), 2005. oil on linen, 40 x 60 inches
Collection of Sammlung Mondstudio, Hamburg, Germany



Untitled (freezer interior), 2005. oil on linen 40 x 60 inches



Untitled (pearls, hair gel), 2003. oil on linen 40 x 60 inches



Untitled (oil paint), 2003. oil on canvas, 40 x 60 inches

Ben Weiner

Born 1980, Burlington, VT

Lives and works in New York City

Education

- 2003 BA, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT
- 2000 Universidad de las Americas, Puebla, Mexico.
(Independent Study in Painting)

Solo Exhibitions

- 2010 *Material and Illusion*, Mark Moore Gallery, Santa Monica, CA.
- 2007 *Glamrance*, Mark Moore Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
- 2005 *Ben Weiner: Paintings*, Fine Art in Space, Long Island City, NY
- 2002 *Recent Works*, Plotkin Gallery, Dobbs Ferry, NY

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2012 David Richard Contemporary, Santa Fe, NM
- 2010 *Elements of Nature*, Carnegie Art Museum, Oxnard, CA.
- 2009 *Pulse Miami Art Fair*, Mark Moore Gallery booth, Miami, FL.
Full Circle: Ten Years of Radius, The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT
- 2008 *Painting's Edge*, Riverside Art Museum, Riverside, CA
Pretty Things: Confronting Sensuousness, Artspace, New Haven, CT
Idyllwild Arts campus, Idyllwild, CA
Pulse Contemporary Art Fair, Mark Moore Gallery booth, Miami, FL
- 2007 *Art Chicago*, Jonathan Novak Contemporary booth, Chicago, IL
Pulse New York Art Fair, Mark Moore Gallery booth, New York, NY
- 2006 *Eastern Boys and Western Girls*, Kathleen Cullen Fine Arts, New York, NY
Pulse Contemporary Art Fair, Mark Moore Gallery booth, Miami, FL
Aldrich Undercover, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT

- Ultrasonic International*, Mark Moore Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
- Nova Art Fair*, Kathleen Cullen Fine Art, Chicago, IL
- Pod Art II*, Fine Art in Space/31 Grand, New York, NY
- Scope New York*, 31 Grand, New York, NY


- 2005 *All That Glitters*, Kathleen Cullen Fine Arts, New York, NY
RADIUS, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum/ RGA Gallery
Ridgefield, CT
The Industrial Landscape in Contemporary Painting, Bernarducci
Meisel Gallery, New York, NY
- 2004 *The Gym Show*, New York, NY
- 2003 *Thesis Exhibition*, The Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery, Middletown, CT
- 1999 *Permanent Collection*, Art Really Gallery, Dobbs Ferry, NY
- 1997 *Small Works*, Pace University Gallery, Pleasantville, NY

Collections

- Sammlung Mondstudio, Hamburg, Germany
- Frederick R. Weisman Foundation, Los Angeles, CA
- Progressive Insurance, OH

opposite page and right:
artist in studio





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 $C_{28}H_{20}N_2Na_2O_8S_2$, 2010, video still

back cover: $Na(aq) + C_5H_8NO(aq) \rightleftharpoons NaC_5H_8NO_4(s)$,
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