

INTERVIEW WITH BEN WEINER

SKILLS: ARTIST PROFILE, FEATURED SHOWS, INTERVIEW - FEBRUARY 2014



ArtBlitzLA sought out an interview with New York-based Ben Weiner the moment we found out he had a show opening at Mark Moore Gallery. Read that interview below and be sure to see the exhibition, which is up through March 29.

ABLA: The first thing that came to mind when I saw your images was the word “yummy,” muttered in the heavy accent of my Dutch high school history teacher. Do you have an overall desired reaction in mind as you paint? Or do you just try to capture your subject matter?

Ben: Yeah, haha. I am definitely interested in creating tension between sensual and analytical modes of experience, both in the way my work is perceived, and in my process. My paintings generally depict mass-produced aesthetic materials such as paint and beauty products like hair gel and body wash. I am interested in these subjects for the way they embody the fabricated nature of beauty and sensuality within the consumer environment. In this sense, I take inspiration from Duchamp’s designation of mass-produced paint as a readymade, and therefore all paintings as readymades-aided. In my paintings, I fabricate a sensual experience by observing these mass-produced materials through a digital microscope as I pour and mix them together. I then paint from screen caps of this imagery on my computer screen.

The dripped/poured forms in my paintings have the sensual quality of gestural abstractions, and I’m intentionally channeling AbEx and Action Painting by creating large-scale, heroic compositions. But because they’re observed from a screen-mediated -there is this analytical perspective that puts the viewer at remove, and communicates to her that this situation is somewhat contrived. This enables a material exploration in which the paint exist in two forms simultaneously- as both object, and image.

ABLA: How do you select your subject matter? Trial and error? Based on aesthetics, or based on the cultural significance of the subject matter itself?

Ben: In general, as I mentioned, I am interested in mass-produced aesthetic materials. Cultural significance and physical plasticity are the two salient factors in this choice of subjects.

For the works in MaximumStrengthAgeDefy, I focused on consumer health and beauty products– the artificial materials that surround our bodies in daily living– such as body wash, nail polish, hair gel, moisturizer, sport drinks, 5-hour energy, etc.

The series explores the common preservative function of such cosmetics, and paint. The health and beauty materials reflect a consumer culture driven by the impulse to preserve our bodies, the way a painting preserves a likeness or human gesture. So by observing these materials as the basis for sublime abstractions, I'm exploring painting's memento mori function- its reflection of our mortality. The emphatic newness of the consumer cosmetics- their bright colors, luminous transparency, and slick surfaces- are paralleled in my own efforts to create images of mechanical perfection through handcraft- to transcend the limits of my body. I see these works as monuments to this (ultimately futile) attempt to extend our bodies, beauty, and mortality.

ABLA: The tension between hyperrealism and total abstraction in these new paintings feels more explicit than in your past works. Is that a result of the subject matter or a shift in technique? In other words, in creating them did you feel more free to let that effect occur, or were you working just as tightly as ever?



Body Party, 2013, oil on canvas, 60 x 90 inches

Ben: Yeah, conceptually and formally, this series deals with abstraction more explicitly than any of my previous work. In conceiving of these works, I was inspired by a lot of the exciting abstraction I've seen in the past few years by artists such as Tauba Auerbach, Wade Guyton, Katharina Grosse, Travess Smalley, Ryan Sullivan, and Kadar Brock. In much of this recent process-oriented abstraction, there is a sort of meta-expressionism, in which emotiveness is controlled through some form of mediation, or a system. As I mentioned earlier, the idea of mediated sensuality interests me.

The works in *MaximumStrengthAgeDefy* are the culmination of a gradual shift in my artistic practice, through which I've come to approach it as a form of process painting. This method of manipulating my subjects under a microscope, and then painting from image captured on my computer screen, gives me a lot of leeway to evolve my compositions as I work. But most of the individual passages are still closely observed. As my imagery becomes more abstract, it's essential that I maintain the optical aspects of the image that create that tension you refer to between realism and abstraction. I feel that I'm walking this line more finely than ever, which is one of my favorite aspects of this body of work.



Happiness, 2013, Molly and ink on chromatography paper, 4.5 x 5.5 inches

ABLA: Tell me about the 5 hour energy drawings...

Ben: The small mixed media drawings (around 5 x 6 inches each) present a miniature counterpoint to the heroic paintings. I create them by soaking ink-laden paper in solutions infused with various drugs- 5 hour energy, Vodka, Molly, Marijuana, etc. These drugs break the pigments down into prismatic patterns, with each drug reacting uniquely and producing different chemical effects. I made the drawings on chromatography paper, which records an imprint of the chemical reaction in a quasi-photographic manner. These chemical patterns are material representations of mind-altered experience. They use abstraction to reflect the way perception is rooted in corporality.

ABLA: Do you have a favorite painting out of the show?

Ben: I feel that it's a really cohesive body of work, and I really love them all so it's difficult to choose. I guess if I had to, I'd say either *Excesstraction*, or *Like Frozen Food My Love Will Last Forever*. I am also very excited about the drawings, because they open up a new approach to my exploration of materiality.



Excesstraction, 2013, oil on canvas, 60 x 90 inches



Like Frozen Food My Love Will Last Forever, 2013, oil on canvas, 60 x 90 inches

ABLA: This is your...4th ? show with Mark Moore? What do you value most in an artist-dealer relationship?

Ben: There is a reason we've been working together for this long. Mark Moore Gallery has great integrity, both in the work it exhibits, and its relationships. They think long term, and continue to grow and evolve. And they are tremendously supportive – it's a great feeling to work with people like that.

ABLA: What other galleries or artists do you see when you come to LA?

Ben: It's always a whirlwind when I go to L.A.- tons of studio visits and shows to see. I am excited to see what Mark Moore's other artists are up to- Allison Schulnik, Ali Smith, Stephanie Washburn, Josh Dildine, and 5790 Projects, among others. Also, my friend Max Presneill has developed a really exciting program at the Torrance Art Museum with a focus on local artists, so I'm planning on making a trip there.

As far as shows, I'm really excited to see the John Divola exhibit at LACMA, the Supports/Surfaces show at Cherry and Martin, Liz Larner at Regen Projects, and Annie Lapin at Honor Fraser.

Source: <http://artblitzla.com/portfolio/interview-ben-weiner/>