

Sophia Powers, "Critics' Picks: Mark van Yetter", *Artforum*, March 1, 2023, <https://www.artforum.com/picks/mark-van-yetter-90214>

ARTFORUM



Mark van Yetter, *Untitled*, 2022, oil and wax crayon on paper, 40 x 28 5/8".

NEW YORK

Mark van Yetter

BRIDGET DONAHUE

99 Bowery 2nd Floor

February 10–April 8, 2023

Mark van Yetter's "The Politics of Charm" indeed delights and beguiles, but all is not as it first appears. The show is primarily composed of two sets of works on paper, pastel-Fauvist in palette, marked with a hodgepodge of media such as pencil, watercolor, oil, and wax crayon. These are accompanied by a lone sculptural installation featuring a ceramic teapot and a pitcher on a pedestal. Such humble, incongruous materials draw the viewer into a visual world that is at once baffling and alluring, like a house of mirrors.

Doubling—in several senses—is central to the aesthetic experience van Yetter presents. In the most substantial group of works on paper, all *Untitled* and from 2022, each composition adheres to an idiosyncratic format of six painted panels arranged in two rows of three, one above the other, framed by color-pencil outlines. In each case, the outer panels mirror one other in general form and content, yet the two central panels seem unrelated. In one work, a radiant yellow bird appears to be bursting from its cage flanked by lyrical Matissean cats floating in blue indeterminate space. Above them stands a totemic figure in gray with breasts, a penis, and bloated feet turned unnaturally to the right like bent logs. What meaning is made through this juxtaposition of bird, cat, and ogre?

The puzzle is further complicated by the second series of paintings, all still lifes depicting vessels arranged in an incongruously demarcated architectural space. Such clunky materiality, accentuated by the inclusion of the actual ceramics, provokes a curious comparison with the lyrical fantasy of the counterpart series. What makes this vision cohere?

The cumulative effect of these uncanny tableaux compels the viewer through a dreamlike labyrinth of affective association: a game bereft of ossified logic but brimming with poetic charm.

— Sophia Powers

Steel Stillman, “In the Studio: Mark van Yetter”, *Art in America*, May 1, 2018, 94-101.

Art in America

MARK VAN YETTER

CURRENTLY
ON VIEW
“Mark Van Yetter:
You can observe a lot
just by watching,” at
Bridget Donahue,
New York, through
July 15.

Interview by Steel Stillman
Portrait by Grant Delin

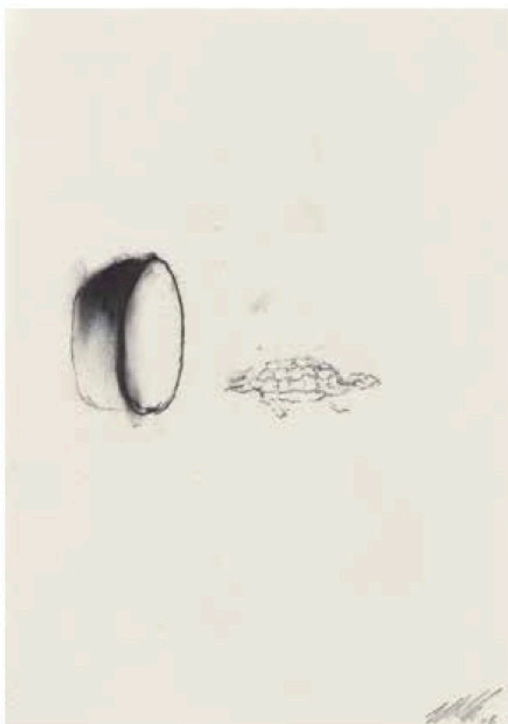
STEEL
STILLMAN is a
New York-based
artist and writer.

IN THE STUDIO



Mark Van Yetter:
The Escape, 2006,
charcoal on paper,
11¼ by 8¾ inches.

All artwork
courtesy Bridget
Donahue, New
York.



MARK VAN YETTER is a representational painter whose ambiguous images are constructed intuitively, melded like dreams from random events, peculiar settings, and unlikely characters. Despite occasional forays into sculpture, collage, and printmaking, Yetter produces, for the most part, modestly scaled drawings and paintings on paper, the latter executed in smooth, creamy oils with masterful nonchalance. All these works marry familiar genres—portrait, landscape, interior, still life—to a style informed by 1930s American painting and illustration, Magritte's enigmatic incongruities, and the occasional disco party poster. The results, from the merest sketches to elaborately detailed tableaux, are populated by suggestive figures and objects, which are often poignant or funny or both. Whether a painting depicts a dog staring at a chunk of red meat on a table or a human figure in a room, caught mid-action like a character in a film, the pleasure in Yetter's work begins with parsing his pictures' sometimes bizarre ingredients and imagining what they might mean.

Adoring the Brutal Instincts, 2016,
oil on paper, 33 by
23½ inches.

Yetter was born in 1978 in the Poconos—in East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania—where his family has lived for seven generations, and where his parents operated a mobile home dealership. Dyslexic, he dropped out of high school at seventeen but managed to complete a GED before attending the School of Visual Arts in New York. After earning a BFA in 2000, he returned to East Stroudsburg to paint, supporting himself with odd jobs and by buying and selling record collections. In 2005, after periodic stints in New York, he moved to Brooklyn, where he and Turkish artist Ayca Odabasi opened Marquise Dance Hall, a used book and record store cum art and performance space, in Williamsburg, named after a nightclub in Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot le Fou*. Yetter lived in the back of the store and worked on his art there until 2008,

when the two decamped to Istanbul, taking Marquise Dance Hall with them. Five years later, Yetter relocated to Berlin, where he was represented by Micky Schubert Gallery from 2007 until the gallery closed in 2017.

Last September, Yetter moved back to East Stroudsburg, after having been abroad for nearly a decade. His travels are evident in his work, although references to particular foreign places or people are rare. Characters in his paintings are vaguely associated with various historical periods—from ancient Rome to the Middle Ages to the present day—and the spaces, whether city streets or subway stations, remain indefinite. Everything he makes gets filtered by his quirky imagination and translated into an anachronistic-seeming language of its own.

When we spoke last winter, Yetter was preparing for his second one-person exhibition at Bridget Donahue, New York, which runs through July 15. Since 2002, he has had nineteen solo shows in the United States, Germany, Great Britain, and Norway, and has been included in approximately two dozen group shows. His studio is a large room with sliding glass doors, attached to what was once his grandmother's house. The structure sits atop a filled-in swimming pool, at the bend of a river, in a mobile home park built by his father. We sat on a couch facing what was then his newest painting, *Damn Forest at Night* (2018), which seemed a rebuttal to the sunny, snow-covered landscape outside.





Untitled, 2007,
oil on paper, 13¾ by
22¼ inches.

STEEL STILLMAN How did you become interested in art?

MARK VAN YETTER I drew constantly as a kid. But my first introduction in a wider sense came at about age twelve, when an ex-hippie couple opened a community art center in town and attracted local and visiting artists of all kinds. Very quickly I realized I wanted to learn more. I soaked up what I could from books and, once I got my driver's license, from trips into New York to see museum shows. Going to SVA at eighteen was a real turning point. I applied in illustration but was steered toward the fine art department. I've never really differentiated between fine art and illustration, but I was excited, at that time, to learn about artists like Mike Kelley, who scorned such distinctions.

STILLMAN Given your later experiences abroad, attending the Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam for a semester in your junior year seems a harbinger. What was that like?

YETTER SVA was organized and rational, while the Rietveld was its polar opposite. There was almost no curriculum; students ran the classes, and teachers rarely showed up. Everything was related to Conceptual art, and no one was making paintings. I'd already become a painter by that time, but it was good for me to be exposed to perspectives that challenged my thinking and, in doing so, strengthened my commitment. If you want to paint, you've got to be able to spend a lot of time alone, and I realized I was fine with that.

STILLMAN Why did you skip graduate school?

YETTER I didn't think about it for a second. All that career building seemed ridiculous to me; there are enough over-studied, over-informed artists in the world, and I didn't want to become one of them. I spent a few months in Berlin after SVA and then came up here to figure things out for myself. For a while, I painted landscapes like a boring old Sunday painter. But I destroyed most of them; what I was making didn't seem to fit in anywhere. Looking back, though, it was a fruitful period. I discovered that I felt more connected to an American strain of modernism, one that runs through artists like Charles Demuth, Thomas Hart Benton, and Palmer Hayden, than to the more widely acceptable European ones derived from Picasso and Surrealism and so on.

STILLMAN Beginning around 2005, certain motifs begin to appear in your paintings. Some of these—I'm not sure what to call them—feature symmetrical, frequently curtained prosceniums that bring to mind theater sets or baroque palaces.

YETTER I never know what to call them, either! Perhaps that's because they start out like doodles. I paint a line on a piece of paper, without any preconceived notion, and the picture builds from there. Using a central vanishing point, subsequent lines begin to suggest spaces, indoor or outdoor, and eventually figures or other objects show up, including vases or fountains. The pictures are a bit like psychedelic images from the '60s, spaces to get lost in. But



Partial view of
*The mere knowledge
of the fact is pale*,
2016, 46 oil-on-
paper paintings,
each 16½ by 23¾
inches, at Kunsthall
Stavanger. Photo
Maya Økland.

“My goal was neither to romanticize nor condemn but to create a clear-eyed portrait of life in America in the '90s.”

they're difficult to pull off without lapsing into kitsch, and often years go by before I can make another successful one.

STILLMAN Another category of paintings focuses on groups of people, gatherings large and small. In an untitled work from 2007, for example, two dozen characters from assorted historical periods congregate at the steps of a government building for a demonstration that has turned violent, while a TV camera records the action.

YETTER That's one of my favorites, a sketch-like painting with freehand smudges that resists precise definition. Though my images are representational and play with narrativity, I generally hesitate to say what they're about for fear of killing them. Viewers' associations are always more interesting than my own. Like most of my paintings, this one doesn't represent an actual event, but it addresses the ongoing theme of oppression, a story that won't go away.

STILLMAN Your exhibitions frequently include a number of sketch-like drawings on approximately letter-size paper. Many are simple, funny images that explode in the mind, with the unnerving after-the-fact obviousness of a joke. How do they fit in?

YETTER The small drawings are at the center of my work, and they crystallize much of what happens in the more developed paintings. I often make them in batches of forty or fifty at a time, very intuitively, and throw most of them away. But occasionally, one or two will excite me a lot. For instance, in 2006, I made one of a turtle walking away from an overturned bucket and was pleased afterward to realize that an image of an animal escaping death could be a metaphor for human beings. Or another work, from around the same time, shows a man balancing on a line in the upper left of an otherwise empty sheet of paper, a high-wire act that might represent the course of one's life. These images came to me spontaneously, and I'm convinced that's why they succeed. If I were to set out to paint a high-wire act, intending it to symbolize x, y, or z, it would never work. Just thinking about it makes me cringe.

STILLMAN Most of your paintings are done with oil paint on easel-size paper. What does that combination offer you?

YETTER Having started out in drawing years ago, I feel comfortable working on paper. And oil paint is smooth and controllable; it doesn't dry too fast or buckle the paper

the way watercolors and acrylics do. But scale is another factor. Except for a short period in Germany, and now here, I've worked mostly in small rooms on short walls or tables, so being able to work efficiently without having stretchers or canvases lying about has been a real boon. It took a long time to find a way of working that felt like my own, and it may be that painting in this way, on these surfaces, provides a kind of continuity that holds my work's diverse subject matter together.

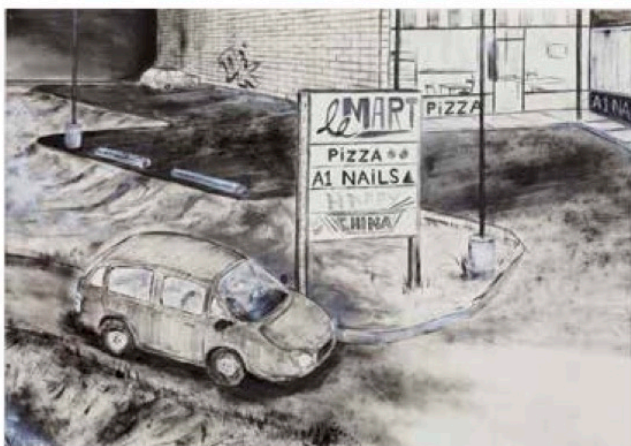
STILLMAN How did living abroad for the past decade affect you and your work?

YETTER The greatest benefit was in getting to know artists from other cultural contexts, people whose interests, histories, and reference points were unfamiliar to me. It's often said that the art world today is global, but outside the international gallery system things remain quite local, even in Berlin. So maybe it's not surprising that I never stopped feeling like an outsider. Despite the fresh stimuli—buildings, landscapes, people, ideas—what I knew best and used in my work remained grounded in American experience.

STILLMAN In early 2016, toward the end of your time in Berlin, you made a large work that looked at America



Forget About Your Problems with Society, 2016, oil on paper, 27½ by 19½ inches.



from a distance. *The mere knowledge of a fact is pale* [2016]—its title comes from Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*—was painted on forty-six pieces of paper and installed edge to edge, like a horizontal scroll, in two rooms at the Kunsthall Stavanger in Norway.

YETTER *The mere knowledge* is a panorama of remembered scenes viewed from a car or train window, traveling from rural eastern Pennsylvania to New York City and back again. The whole thing was done in a grayscale, almost illustrational style. In my studio I set up a row of four or five sheets of paper and worked from left to right; when I finished the furthest left painting, I'd remove it from the wall, shift the others leftward and add a fresh sheet to the right end. One inspiration was a series of Robert Crumb drawings, "A Short History of America," which I'd seen animated in the documentary *Crumb* when I was about sixteen. It showed a rural landscape in Anywhere, USA, becoming urbanized over decades. My panorama depicts people going about their lives in a region characterized by ugly highways, abandoned strip malls, and roads that lead from one parking lot into another. My goal was neither to romanticize nor condemn but, like Crumb, to create a clear-eyed portrait of life in America in the '90s, knowing that, even as I was making it, the country didn't look like that anymore, that development and change are unstoppable.

STILLMAN In recent years your solo shows have presented selections of disparate images in poetic—even political—juxtaposition. For instance, your 2016 show at Bridget Donahue, "The Terrifying Abyss of Skepticism," seemed, among other things, to pit society and its constraints against the lure of escapism.

Two paintings from *The mere knowledge of the fact is pale*, 2016, both oil-on-paper, 16½ by 23½ inches each.

YETTER I don't make thematic exhibitions, but I'm always hoping that individual works will build into something larger. The show at Bridget's opened soon after the 2016 election, and near its entrance were three works that belonged together, advertisements for a fake brand of beer called Society. These were painted on green poster board and featured beer bottles, glasses on tables, and punning tag lines: "Open a Society Today"; "Forget About Your Problems with Society"; "Society, for Those Rainy Days." Then there was a large painting, *A Lack of Imagination Seems to Be the Core of the Problem* [2016], which had started out at half its current size, as a still life of a vase, on the left, opposite marble columns and an open window. I'd begun it on a residency at a castle in southern Germany, focusing on the challenge of painting marble and the effects of light coming in from outside. But before long, I added paper and made the composition symmetrical, with the window now at the center and a second vase on the right. Then I introduced, on the columns flanking the window, a pair of marble cupids who shoot arrows in the general direction of a bird perched right at the middle of the painting, on a branch that rises up from the left-hand vase. The bird can fly away but doesn't.

STILLMAN Another painting from the 2016 show that seems to propose an imaginary escape is *Damn Forest* [2016], a lush landscape that looks part Disney cartoon, part Charles Burchfield. Why did you title it negatively?

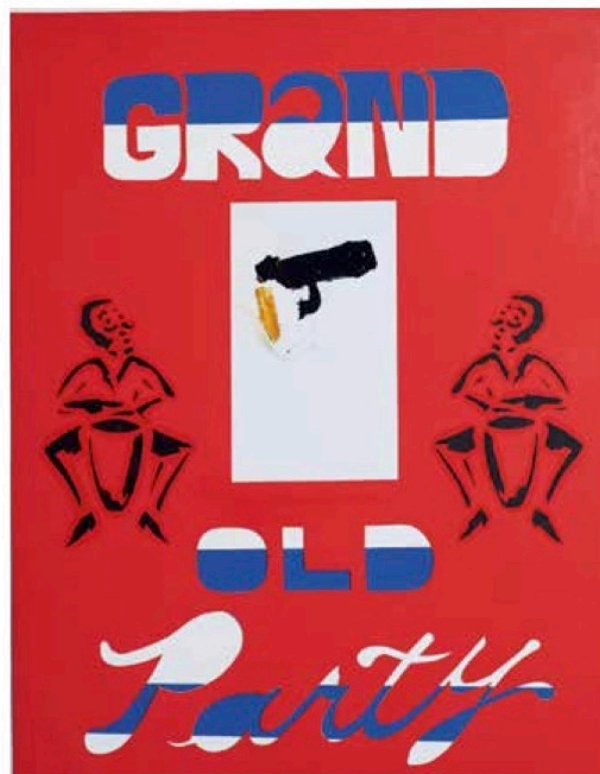
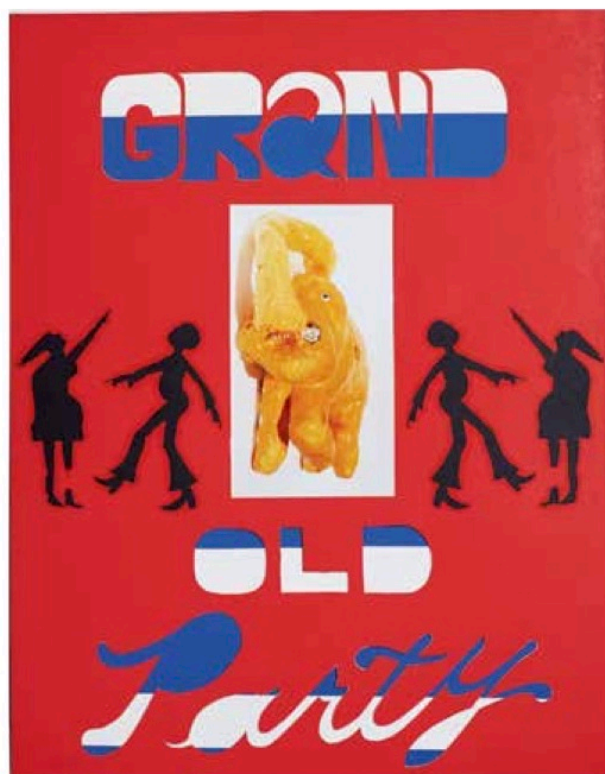
YETTER I don't really remember, but perhaps the forest is in somebody's way. Until a few months ago, when I made *Damn Forest at Night* for the new show at Bridget's, *Damn Forest*, at sixty-six-by-ninety-four inches, was the largest painting I'd ever made. You're right, it does have some Burchfield in it; he's another artist whose work made a strong impression on me when I was young. And there's definitely something cartoonlike in its flattened paint handling and strange scale shifts, with whole trees seeming to be made out of plant leaves or blades of grass. But it's also wonky in less obvious ways, with multiple vanishing points that mislead the eye into dead ends.

STILLMAN Your new exhibition at Bridget Donahue—it's titled with a Yogi Berra-ism, "You can observe a lot just by watching"—picks up threads from the 2016 show. In addition to the new forest painting, there will be a pair of political posters that are considerably more pointed than the Society beer ones.

YETTER Exactly. They're called *Cruelty à Go Go #1* and *Cruelty à Go Go #2* [both 2018], and they use red poster board to frame photographs of two Styrofoam sculptures that I made more than ten years ago—one of an unpainted handgun, the other of an elephant coated in Velveeta cheese and sporting fake human teeth. I came across the elephant photo when I arrived back here, and it looked so Trump-like that I knew I had to exploit it. Except for the photos, the posters are similar, sort of hybrids of '70s disco-party posters and political ones. They feature silhouette motifs of dancers and



A Lack of Imagination Seems to Be the Core of the Problem, 2016, oil on paper, 47 by 66 inches.



Left to right,
Cruelty à Go Go #1
and *Cruelty à Go Go #2*, both 2017,
photograph and oil
paint on colored
paper, 27 ½ by
22 inches each.

bongo players and large hand-cut text that reads “Grand Old Party,” a nod to the Republicans. Between them, I’m planning to hang a slightly larger charcoal drawing of a jailhouse scene, showing a whistling, goose-stepping guard marching in front of a cellblock, with a watchtower looming in the distance. This image feels to me like a picture of America right now, a picture that’s not so different from the way things were a hundred or even two hundred years ago. Whether for slaves, criminals, or immigrants, we’re still building walls and putting people behind them.

STILLMAN Poster board also frames a new series of painted portraits, vaguely medieval- or Renaissance-style headshots of one man and five women, all with the same phrase, “Penny for Your Thoughts,” cut out beneath them in a kind of Olde English typeface.

YETTER I wanted the paintings to feel timeless, not linked to an identifiable tradition or convention of portraiture. The text can be read as if we were asking these characters for their thoughts. Or as if they were asking for ours. At the same time, how much is a thought worth? A penny doesn’t seem like very much. I’m calling the series the “Conceptual Collection” because in today’s art world, where everyone is continually asking artists and their supporters—gallerists, critics, curators, collectors—what the work is about, conceptual premises, which were once beyond reproach, have become marketing tools. Giving the portraits the same tagline turns these people into a group, a jury of peers, maybe, or a gathering of oracles.

STILLMAN In relation to the elephant and gun sculptures, you’ve constructed a shelving unit for the new show with about thirty cubbies to display small figurative sculptures made by dipping thrift store knickknacks in plaster of paris.

YETTER That’s the “Wind Gap Refinement Collection” [2018], named after a rundown indoor flea market in Wind Gap, Pennsylvania, not far from here. Sometimes I find myself thinking about the decorative objects we have in our homes and what happens when we no longer need them. While you’re living with them, they’re sculpture, but when you die or get tired of them they become refuse. Coating them in plaster of paris and sealing them with Elmer’s glue seems to mummify them and give them another kind of life.

STILLMAN These small sculptures are a good example of how the past circulates through your work, whether as echoes of historical artists and styles or as subject matter that feels curiously dated. Are you using the past to say something in particular about the present?

YETTER Paying attention only to the contemporary seems naive to me. We know how quickly things change. Having lived in other countries, I’m particularly aware that earlier times and older cultural influences don’t disappear; they weave themselves into the texture of the present. My work draws on everything going on around me, from the news online to 1920s blues and folk songs to underappreciated artists like Julius Bloch, Bernarda Bryson Shahn, and Jacob Burck. But I’m not a storyteller. And I’m not trying to teach anyone anything. ○

Israel Lund, “Nothing But the Truth: Israel Lund on Four Painters at Magenta Plains in New York”, *ARTnews*, July 1, 2019.

<http://www.artnews.com/2019/07/01/israel-lund-magenta-plains-review/>

ARTNEWS

REVIEWS

Nothing But the Truth: Israel Lund on Four Painters at Magenta Plains in New York

BY *Israel Lund* POSTED 07/01/19 10:30 AM



Installation view of “Im Grunde ist es die Wahrheit / Essentially it’s the truth” at Magenta Plains in New York, with works visible, left to right, by Mark van Yetter, Sophie von Hellermann, and David Ostrowski (verso). COURTESY MAGENTA PLAINS

In our current “post-truth” and “alternative facts” moment, any mention of truth makes for a divisive situation, pitting one group against another on their respective platforms, with little room for nuance. The recent show at Magenta Plains, “Im Grunde ist es die Wahrheit / Essentially it’s the truth” seemed to find a way around that divide, allowing space for subtlety, speculation, and conjecture.

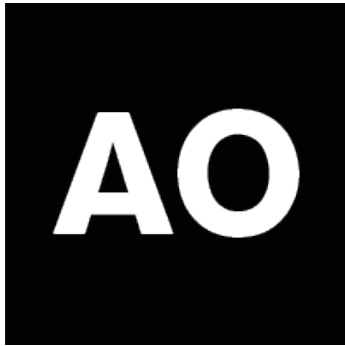
Consisting strictly of paintings, the exhibition included works by Sophie von Hellermann, David Ostrowski, Gerda Scheepers, and Mark van Yetter. The content of the works can be seen as straddling abstraction and representation, each in their respective ways, with Ostrowski and Scheepers leaning more toward abstraction, and von Hellermann and van Yetter toward representation, but only ostensibly so. The paintings hold one in the present moment, allowing for a suspension of any preconceived notions one may have about distinctions between abstraction and representation.



Installation view of “Im Grunde ist es die Wahrheit / Essentially it’s the truth” at Magenta Plains in New York, with works visible, by David Ostrowski (left), Gerda Scheepers (center, on back wall), Mark van Yetter (right). COURTESY MAGENTA PLAIN

Mark van Yetter's paintings are relatively small in comparison to the other works in the show, and figures typically appear in them alone. There is an almost voyeuristic quality to the paintings that heightens what intentionally little narrative quality they convey. All works are oil on paper and framed behind glass. In two works, both untitled from 2016, a grey-painted rectangle borders the image. This frame within a frame creates self-aware, structural paintings that direct one to the illusory space within. In one, a solemn, rainy looking man shields himself under an umbrella from a storm of pennies. A premeditated refusal of good fortune?

M. Donovan, "New York - Mark van Yetter: 'The Terrifying Abyss of Skepticism' at Bridget Donahue Through January 8, 2017", *Art Observed*, December 30, 2016, <http://artobserved.com/2016/12/new-york-mark-van-yetter-the-terrifying-abyss-of-skepticism-at-bridget-donahue-through-january-8th-2017/>.



NEW YORK – MARK VAN YETTER: “THE TERRIFYING ABYSS OF SKEPTICISM” AT BRIDGET DONAHUE THROUGH JANUARY 8TH, 2017

December 30th, 2016



Mark Van Yetter, *A Lack of Imagination Seems to be the Core of the Problem* (2016), via Art Observed

On view at the Bridget Donahue Gallery, the works of Mark Van Yetter demonstrate the power and playfulness of association. The Terrifying Abyss of Skepticism, composed of a series of paintings on paper, allows for multiple readings, drawing on the artist's wide scope of influences, including ancient artifacts and art objects, old masters, graphic illustrations, and folk art. In the expansive range of graphic possibilities and interpretive frameworks provided

by these references, Van Yetter's work calls upon the viewer to locate links between each of his works, and the historical contexts they draw on.

In some ways, this thread appears to be literary. The titles of Van Yetter's works have frequently alluded to an unlikely variety of figures, ranging from James Joyce to Snoop Dogg, each suggesting the artist's interest in ekphrasis, a Greek term referring to the description of a work of art as a rhetorical exercise. His images demand an intellectual dialogue between the viewer and the paintings, between context, meaning and the viewer.



Mark Van Yetter, *A Tad More Upbeat* (2016), via Art Observed

However, a reading of the paintings as purely engaging in the academic falls short of the craft and process evident in his work. Instead, Van Yetter's works seem to entice a sense of emotional participation, drawing on their immediate visual impact as much as they draw on their subtle textual weavings. Despite a number of art historical references, Van Yetter has stated that his works are not meant to be analytical. Instead, they require a certain intuition, riffs on cultural associations in order to locate an initial sense of meaning. This personal, or perhaps social, aspect provides the paintings with a certain sincerity, as they do not need to be entirely explained. The exhibition's lack of narrativity or linearity allows for a dynamic reading that is as playful as it is intricate, rendering visual riddles for the viewer to decipher or work through.

The implication and simultaneous rejection of academia gives the viewer a certain sense of influence and agency as regards the messages and meanings of the artist's works as a whole. In many ways, the seemingly arbitrary nature of

the exhibition matches that of the viewer's thought process, where infinite readings and constructs can be developed, and in which the works are able to play with the personal associations of audience members. Therefore, despite many of the works being grouped together intentionally, it is clear that the artist wishes to guide his viewer while allowing for the individual to determine the themes. In *The Terrifying Abyss of Skepticism*, Van Yetter asks the audience to consider not only what they are looking at, but how they are doing so. In his work's poetic strangeness, the interpretation becomes a form of interaction with the space, and with the works themselves.

— M. Donovan

Will Heinrich, “What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week: Mark van Yetter”, *The New York Times*, December 22, 2016, C22.

The New York Times



Mark Van Yetter's linoleum print "De Liver Kaput," at Bridget Donahue Gallery.
Credit Courtesy of the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York

MARK VAN YETTER

Through Jan. 8. Bridget Donahue Gallery, 99 Bowery, second floor, Manhattan; 646-896-1368, bridgetdonahue.nyc.

There's something pleasantly boozy about Mark Van Yetter's work, and it's not just the tipped-over empty wine bottle that appears in six cheery linoleum prints on the gallery's back wall. (Each bottle is a different color and has a different name on its label, such as "Social Eclipse," "Virgin Dew" or "De Liver Kaput.") It's the neurotic precision of composition and brush strokes masked in the muted reds and browns of a bar that hasn't been redecorated since it was opened. It's the self-conscious, painterly coolness of subjects like a dog sadly contemplating an oversize water dish.

It's the strangely showy modesty of painting in oil on sheets of paper not much bigger than letter size, but then taping multiple sheets together to get a bigger picture. ("Damn Forest," a lush green junglescape, is the biggest piece in the show at nearly eight feet wide.) But most of all it's the whimsical tone of a fantasy that wavers between satire and wish fulfillment. Three turquoise faux advertising posters are dedicated to a dark ale called Society. In one, an empty bottle sits on a beach towel beneath an umbrella, while florid white letters advise, "Forget About Your Problems With Society."

WILL HEINRICH

Mihaela Chiriac and Mark Van Yetter, "Picture Talk: an ekphrasis on four paintings by Mark van Yetter", *Starship*, Spring 2016, No. 14, 119-126.



The Greek term *ekphrasis* refers to a particular practice in rhetoric dating back to antiquity. By it the orator aimed to practice persuasion by testing the emotional effect a well-crafted speech would perform on its listeners. The audience was offered a portrayal in absence of the chosen subject (people, things, landscapes, epochs etc.), but "painted" in such impassioned and vivid a manner that it would constitute itself as a mental image before the auditor's inner eye—so that "to listen," meant, "to see." And what one "saw" by listening would be a convincing image rendered by a selection of accumulated details of descriptive and psychological nature. The point was to produce *mimesis*, and via *mimesis*, emotional participation, empathy.

Aristotle names this technique of vivid textual rendition *enargeia*, and the effect it conveys *energeia*—meaning liveness, closeness to real life, visualization. As a side note: one of the German translations of the latter, *Vergegenwärtigung*, appears more enlightening—meaning literally *making* (something) *present* (to oneself), it emphasizes more strongly the process (the prefix *ver-* suggesting a transformation), as well as the active participation of the subject in this internal process that links mental image making to gaining awareness.

Later on, in *De arte poetica*, more commonly known as *Ars poetica*, 1st century BC, Horace coined the phrase *ut pictura poesis*—as is painting so is poetry—demanding eloquence from any poet, to such a degree that their verses "resemble" painting in its visuality and strive to imitate nature. This dictum shows that despite the inherited Platonic skepticism towards images, a certain degree of importance was attributed to them in classical and late antiquity. But the relation between image and word was to grow in complexity over the centuries to come, as is testified by art, literature and their theory, by philosophical and anthropological studies.

Returning to its history, whilst originally disposed as a subcategory within rhetoric and most often integrated in laudatory speeches, between the 2nd and the 3rd century AD, ekphrasis became autonomous, gradually developing into a genre of its own, specifically deployed to depict fictitious or existing artwork. After a period of neglect and repudiation during early Christian iconoclasm, it became of interest again in the Middle Ages, appearing e.g. as part of minnesongs, or on paintings especially in the form of *tituli* (titles or captions which succinctly indicated the subject of the paintings). Further, it continued to gain emphasis, either deployed as such or addressed in theoretical writings, throughout the Renaissance (Vasari, Bellori, Alberti, Agucchi, Félibien etc.) and afterwards (Addison, Lessing, Diderot, Goethe, Moritz, Winckelmann, Schlegel, Burckhardt ...).

Giorgio Vasari's compilation of artist biographies, which mark the beginnings of art historical writing, contains ekphrases of individual works devised on the principle of a

repetitive formula. His goal was an acclaim of the masters of different generations (retaining the laudatory aspect of the antique ekphrasis) but also an assessment of the evolution of painterly style and technique towards a closer imitation of nature. With the younger Giovanni Battista Agucchi and André Félibien, ekphrases are deployed more independently from biographical data and in a manner offering a more precise and purposefully structured, yet vivid description, so that it could replace a lacking image.

During the Enlightenment, authors like Diderot (despite his own use of a theatricality in his *Salons* that may be linked to a form of ekphrasis) and Lessing (most famously in *Laokoon*, 1766) investigate and determine the boundaries between words and images. Consequently, in the field of art history, ekphrasis is substituted by descriptions with a stronger claim to objectivity, precision and thoroughness of analysis set by the prevailing standards of empirical observation. As reproductions are now available to a larger public, the role of descriptions ceases to be that of placeholders for pictures to the extent they used to be. Eventually, ekphrasis as a transporter of *energeia* became a rather obsolete notion, as did the accumulating and detailing technique of *enargeia*, though they still had their supporters (Karl Philipp Moritz, August Wilhelm Schlegel). The scholarly or scientific description established itself, as the ekphrasis now proved to be a tool widely unfit to serve the purposes of the emerging art historian of the 19th century (which is to be understood in the context of private collections becoming public, the spread of the institution of the museum, and growing public interest).

Although, some exceptions (e.g. Carl Einstein) withstanding, declared defunct by art historians (see Otto Pächt's essay *The end of the imagist theory* from 1930), the ekphrasis continued its life in the guise of various transgressions by numerous writers and poets. There, in the twilight zone between visual and written arts, it had for centuries had a most fruitful terrain. In modern and contemporary literature, too, there are plentiful examples of quite different shades. From Oscar Wilde and Henry James's "prose pictures," to the poetic art criticism of Théophile Gautier (see his descriptions of the *Salons*, but likewise his ekphrastic poem *Watteau*) and Charles Baudelaire (e.g. describing Delacroix frescoes), to the metaphorical picture-poems of Mina Loy (*Brancusi's Golden Bird*, *Joyce's Ulysses*), Sylvia Plath (early poems on Klee, Rousseau and de Chirico), Georg Trakl (*Die Nacht*, about Kokoschka's painting *Windsbraut*), Paul Eluard (*Max Ernst*), Paul Celan (*Unter ein Bild*—about van Gogh's *Wheatfield with crows*), to the nouveau roman of Alain Robbe-Grillet (e.g. *La Jalousie*) where description is completely detached from narration. The list can go on, of course, but there is little room here to dive into the intricacies of all the manifold developments the ekphrasis underwent. Generally, its manifestations have oscillated between two major tendencies: the ekphrasis as the rendition of an impression left by a work of art in the

Mark van Yetter / Mihaela Chiriac, Picture Talk

pink golden dawn piss then gray boatman

Poetical idea: pink, then golden, then grey, then black. Still, true to life also. Day: then the night. All wind and piss like a tanyard cat. The cold of interstellar space, thousands of degrees below freezing point or the absolute zero of Fahrenheit, Centigrade or Reaumur: the incipient intimations of proximate dawn. A boatman got a pole and fished him out by the slack of the breeches and he was landed up to the father on the quay more dead than alive.¹

the most wonderful product floating

Too many dogs are destroyed because their owners can't bear to see them suffer. You have introduced the most wonderful product to this world and I can't thank you enough. Leafs by Snoop's sweets, for example, are called Dogg Treats. A floating shelf with draw. A glass vase with a stunning floral arrangement (real or fake) will hide the control but make it accessible with a photo or artwork on a bronze art stand. The draw can house your keys and mail. A lovely art piece above the thermostat.²

athirst a man a livid fountain rising nippy

A livid swelling had spread all up the leg, on which, here and there, were pustules oozing with dark-coloured matter. "Hold the basin nearer," cried Charles. "Gosh!" said the man, "you'd think it was a little fountain. "My blood's red enough, conscience! You'd say that were a good sign now, wouldn't ye?" Sweat was running down their faces, and a sort of whitish steam, like the mist that rises from a river of an autumn morning, floated between the hanging lamps. "Nippy, isn't it?" he said. The priest rose from his knees to take the crucifix; and then she stretched forth her neck like one athirst and, gluing her lips to the body of the God-Man, she fastened thereon, with all her failing strength, the most passionate kiss of love she had ever in her life bestowed. Emma turned the handle of the door, and there, at the far end of the room, lay a man, sleeping.³

your feet

Of withered leaves about your feet. Or clasped the yellow soles of feet. Or trampled by insistent feet.⁴

Notes:

These four fictitious ekphrases for four existing works by Mark van Yetter were collaged from the www using different text sources and departing from keywords, which sprung up at the sight of the images, and so, prompted the search.

- 1 All sentences from James Joyce, *Ulysses*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4300/4300-h/4300-h.htm>
- 2 In order, from "The most wonderful product in the world": <http://www.gwfnutrition.com/#!/The-most-wonderful-product-in-the-world/c77h/564c8ee80cf2780ba4449907>, from "The Art of Pot Packaging": <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/11/leafs-by-snoop-design-snoop-dogg-marijuana-packaging/416394/> and from "How to create the 'Wow' factor in our entrance": <http://www.houzz.com/discussions/775795/how-to-create-the-wow-factor-in-our-entrance>
- 3 All from Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, <http://people.csail.mit.edu/regina/par/bovary3.txt>
- 4 All from T.S. Eliot, *Preludes*, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173478>

conscience of its author, filtered through his sensibility and reconstituted from his memory (as *Vergegenwärtigung*), and the analytical "geometric" description (e.g. Alain Robbe-Grillet), which zooms in on its subject to the point where the latter becomes almost unrecognizable, thus breaking the narrative stream and shifting the focus from *what* is seen to *how* it's seen. The latter became a prevalent concern in contemporary visual arts and art history and criticism, which have mutually influenced each other in practice. The former, however, has not ever truly found its way back into practical art criticism (naturally, there are exceptions, and one notable example is Italo Calvino's text on Arakawa's paintings in the September 1985 issue of *Artforum*). In specialized, academic circles though, for the past 50 years or so, revitalized by the *iconic turn*—with all its implications and links to semiotics, anthropology, philosophy, media studies—the concept of ekphrasis as an intermediating agent between the realm of images and the realm of words has been a recurring topic.

This massive interdisciplinary project opens new ways of reassessing the past. Such is also the case for the exceptional personality the abovementioned Denis Diderot was, now seen as the founder of modern art criticism. His critical writing enacted the different styles of the described works of art by deploying a wide palette of rhetorical figures, including ekphrasis: e.g. when describing Greuze's sentimental paintings in a theatrical manner as an imagined dialogue, while visualizing Chardin's in a language more sparse, more temperate and contemplative, as narration disintegrates in his paintings.

In *The Trilogy of Knowledge* (1943), Romanian poet and philosopher Lucian Blaga came up with a dual system, which

he saw as leading to the act of knowledge. One, quantitative, horizontal path he named *paradisic cognition*; the other, qualitative, vertical—*luciferic cognition*—is, in a nutshell, initiated by the realization that the objects of our perception latently bear mysteries, and what we see are merely symptoms of these objects. He aimed for a metaphorical thinking, as was the one that Hans Blumenberg suggested, in different terms, with his *metaphorology*, in order to activate the visualization of meanings that, otherwise, can hardly be expressed. The syntax of the metaphor, its structure, its synthesis of inherent ambiguities and abstractions, breaks in narrative and temporal succession, leaps in logic, the simultaneous coexistence of difference—this is, perhaps, the closest we may get to visualizing in words what pictures tell us.

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Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith, "The Nature of Intuition", *Mousse Magazine*, No. 53, April 2016.

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Untitled, 2015.
Courtesy: VI, VII, Oslo; Bridget Donahue, New York; Micky Schubert, Berlin.
Photo: Vegard Kleven

BY CAOIMHÍN MAC GIOLLA LÉITH

THE NATURE OF INTUITION

Mark van Yetter (b. 1978) is an American artist and cofounder of the exhibition space Marquise Dance Hall. His paintings have been presented internationally for more than a decade. Currently he has solo shows at Kunsthall Stavanger in Norway, open until April 10, and Galerie Micky Schubert, Berlin, open until April 16. In 2015 he had a solo exhibition at VI.VII, Oslo, and his next will be at Bridget Donahue Gallery, New York, opening in November. Van Yetter is presently based in Berlin. He won the 2016 Fürstenberg Zeitgenössisch grant.

Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith is a critic who teaches at the School of Irish, Celtic Studies and Folklore at University College Dublin. In addition to his writings on Irish literature, his many publications on contemporary art include recent essays on Lutz Bacher, Nairy Baghramian, Marlene Dumas, Ceal Floyer, and James Welling. He is a contributor to *Afterall*, *Artforum*, *Frieze* and *Parkett*, and has curated exhibitions in Dublin, London, Amsterdam, and New York.

The American artist Mark van Yetter lives and works between Istanbul and Berlin. Forged from a potent blend of memory and imagination, and tempered by the subtle influence of a range of precedents encompassing ancient art, the old masters, folk art and the history of graphic illustration, the imagery in his paintings and drawings is often arresting, but always elusive. Even when inspired by the specifics of his native landscape of rural Pennsylvania, the oblique narratives conjured in these pictures seem to transpire in a pallid, phantasmal elsewhere, much as they might in an exile's dimming recollections or fanciful daydreams. Over time a lexicon of recurring motifs has become apparent, though it has yet to cross the threshold of ready elucidation. Van Yetter's most recent exhibitions include solo shows at the Kunsthall Stavanger in Norway as well as Galerie Micky Schubert in Berlin. The following interview was conducted by email between 9-17 March, 2016.

CAOIMHÍN MAC GIOLLA LÉITH

In a fascinating interview about the development of your current exhibition at Kunsthall Stavanger, you acknowledge a range of influences that informed the work, to a greater or lesser degree, from your roots in the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania to a particular series of drawings by Robert Crumb to the history of American blues and folk music. Could you elaborate on what seems like an intuitive and eclectic melding of personal experience, including notions of home and away, and more communal cultural resonances in your work?

MARK VAN YETTER

I grew up in the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania, and that's where I developed my understanding of the world. Before entering art school, I admired objects and had a fascination with the role aesthetics plays in how humans respond to the world. I guess the difference then was that I was naive in my outlook. I responded to colors and forms around me innately. It was a view not exactly void of theoretical concerns, but it was by all accounts naive. To illustrate what I mean, I can say that I remember at a very young age already being upset, on a gut level, by what I saw as a complete lack of interest and concern for the natural environment. Strip malls, parking lots, and housing communities held no magical intrigue to my rather romantic, daydreamer outlook. Springtime and the re-birth of life in the forest I grew up in was, in contrast, such an emotional experience. As my environment was quite far from a cultural one, nature played a profound role. I knew, by the time I was six or seven, that I would be an artist, having no idea what that meant. I was severely dyslexic, and my parents were told I would never learn to read or write. I was fortunate enough to have a mother who would not accept this and arranged for tutoring, which resolved that issue. Although tutoring proved that I was in no regard slow, it did not mean that I was keen on academic studies. I loved to draw and would do so for hours on end. I was also brought up with an understanding of hard work, thanks to my

father. By the age of fourteen, I knew how to use a hammer, fix water leaks, repair basic electrical problems. These things came in handy but mostly taught me how to be hands-on. He's a business man; he used to sell mobile homes and managed mobile home parks. I tried my best to be a business man because of his influence, but it proved to be something I was not so inclined to excel at. But I did profit in some form from learning to swing a hammer. Ever since college I have been renovating one spot or another and trying to present art exhibitions inside them. I did manage to present some great artists over the years but never managed to sell much work by those great artists.

CMGL Who were your influences in art school?

MOVY

I had Jack Whitten as a painting professor. Haim Steinbach also taught there. At the end of art school, Haim gave a talk to all the students to the effect that art was a business, a professional career choice, and there is a commercial system for contemporary art. You have to strategically position yourself inside this system to make a career, and making a career is the goal. Your work should serve that end. A rather depressing prospect. Jack Whitten, on the other hand, told us that art is a vocation. Don't expect to make a living from it. That, in essence, is what I understood him to be saying, and I think I am correct. Keep it authentic, and believe in it as something that is bigger and more profound. He instructed us to throw away all the work we made in art school, establish a studio, make alignments with people who share our sensibilities, and learn a marketable skill to provide for ourselves in order to focus on what we believe in. I admire Jack Whitten for this sound and profound outlook. I regret that many young artists see things exactly as Haim Steinbach does. In my opinion it is a hopeless view, which contradicts my understanding of how visual arts belong to the world. This explains my lack of interest in much contemporary art, because it is built on a false foundation.

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It may seem like I am rambling off course, but all of this was influential to me and to my practice. When artists are asked what influences them and they give a list of other artists, I often feel robbed of true insight into the person. I also feel I'm influenced by too many disparate things to answer so straightforwardly. I take this chance to discuss my upbringing as a way to subvert a dry discussion about art in very insular terms. I appreciate the question.

CMGL You often speak of the power of intuition.

MVY Intuition is paramount. This is perhaps why I am so enamored of folk cultures. They bring to the arts feeling and emotion without sap. Intuitive logic allows for the subversion of rules that are in essence human-made, and that are quite often traps that lead to inflexibility in thought. A good example is the musical scale. Humans have determined that a scale mathematically aligns with what they find pleasing to hear. Versions of this scale developed independently in both the East and the West, which would grant truth to the argument, but I strongly believe that sound vibrations outside this scale have their place, too. I am a huge fan of traditional folk music. Here we do not see artists afraid to tune out of key, and that is related to intuition. And that is also a form of intelligence and free thinking. I love folk art because it is not fully indebted to the cerebral, whereas educated artists are so often controlled by that, to the extent that they often deal with emotions as a theoretical device. Intuition is a driving force behind creativity, and I understand creativity in the terms laid out by Arthur Koestler in his book *The Act of Creation*. To sum it up in the most simplistic terms, Koestler asserts that the act of creation is the synthesis of two different matrices that previously had never been related. This is how culture advances. And this process requires an ability to question what would seem to be set in stone.

CMGL In light of the particular nature of your Stavanger show, titled *The mere knowledge of a fact is pale*, can you say something about your attitude to painting and drawing as discrete, portable images versus site-responsive installations?

MVY I don't think of that work as particularly site-responsive. In the end it is a long scroll, a long drawing, that could be installed in different spaces. The driving force behind it was my interest in and reflection on time and memory, which is alluded to in the title of the work and of the show, a quote I found in Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. It can be associated with different traditions, such as ancient friezes where time and narrative are compressed in such a masterful manner. In terms of my general attitude to painting and drawing, I should say that the work is in keeping with a consistent mode of production that favors economical means and is tied to my belief that contemporary art would profit greatly from a more democratic system. It sounds so obvious, but an artwork's quality does not inherently benefit from high production costs.

CMGL You've mentioned affinities with folk and ancient arts. Do you have strong feelings about the much-debated question of "the contemporary"?

MVY I was born in a moment when all documented creative traditions from cultures all over the world were available to be examined, thought about, and appreciated. As I mentioned, before I went to art school, I naively admired objects and the role aesthetics played in the world around me, and this fascination propelled me to pursue art. In art school I was introduced to the idea that an artist's job is to be "contemporary". By this I mean art was brought to us students as a strategic process of producing something new. The argument that painting was dead was still vigorously pursued in the mid- to late 1990s when I was an art student. It took me a long time to shed what I now consider a vicious indoctrination, and to realize that the act of painting and drawing is infinitely complex just in terms of formal decision making. The drive to expand on this rather basic fundamental process will always remain interesting and challenging to me. I concluded that the argument that painting is dead is

itself a dead argument. I still admire people like Henry Flynt, who upheld the idea of destroying the commodity aspect of art. But it was already crystal clear to me that "ideas" are as easily bought and sold as paintings. In the end, I decided the world would be an awful place without new paintings. My resolve has settled more to the principle that there should be a democratic system to regulate the current commercial, capitalist-driven system controlling visual art. There is no justification for the prices many living artists command.

CMGL Could you say something about your work's iconography, and where it might spring from?

MVY Often objects take shape through a discovery process, meaning that I begin painting without a fixed idea of what might take form. So they come from I don't know exactly where, and it is later, through reflecting on a work, that I can begin to discover what latent meaning it holds, at least for myself. But through this process of painting, motifs emerge that hold a certain overarching meaning for me. Take for instance the vase, a motif that is steady throughout my work. It is a decorative vessel that is commonly used to put flowers in. Essentially it is a vessel for decay and death, a place for flowers to be admired as they die. This does not mean the objects should be read with this "symbolism" that I adhere to. The works belong to themselves, and those who seek to find their own meaning in them are welcome to do so.

CMGL There is a certain pallor, a ghostliness, common to many of your images, perhaps suggesting the strangeness and indeterminacy of dreams. No?

MVY Yes, there is that dreamlike quality I cannot overlook. I wonder if it is because the act of painting is generally meditative, and, as I mentioned earlier, intuitive. I do not have any clear idea where things are going when I start a work. That makes it interesting to me. It's something I enjoy doing, and it requires a certain mental strength, just like writing or playing an instrument. When one works in this manner of discovery through process, one's mind can create a mood that facilitates projection—in my case, onto the surface of the paper. That strangeness or dream quality just gets in there somehow. It's difficult to describe in words.

CMGL Some of your images seem like static tableaux, though they may be composed of oddly juxtaposed elements. Others suggest some kind of narrative, however brief or curtailed. Are you conscious of such differences?

MVY I wish I were. It sometimes takes other people looking at your work to point out even the most obvious things to you. That can be a frightening revelation, but it is most often also very interesting to learn how someone else sees something you feel so intertwined with. I've seen it happen more than once where an artist makes a sculpture or painting and there is a blaring phallic symbol in it that would seem impossible to miss, but the creator missed it completely. I can say I have noticed that my work very often has a narrative quality. I never thought about my works telling a specific story. But I can imagine now that certain works might offer that.

CMGL What roles do art historical allusion and quotation play in your work?

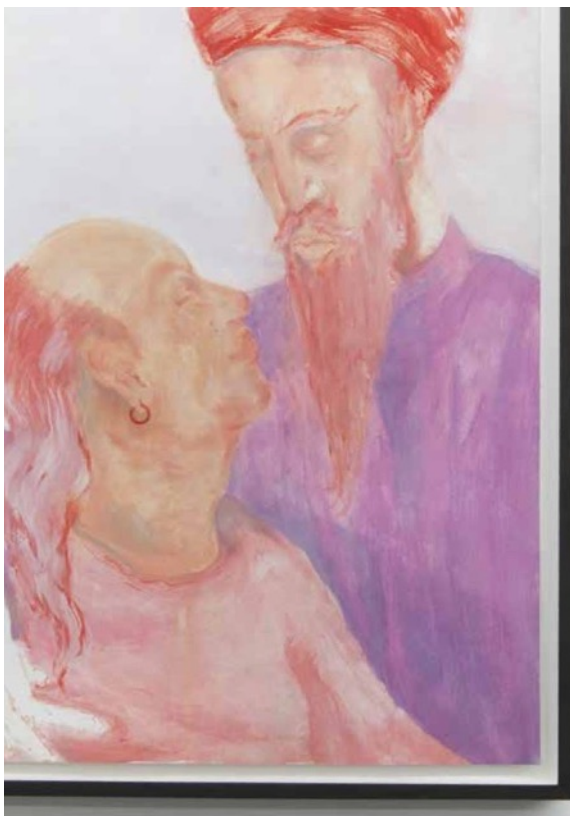
MVY Humans have always had the impulse to create images. As an artist I, of course, tap into the complex and rich history of this primal impulse. This may seem like a banal statement, but I mean to underscore the idea that I am someone who creates paintings and drawings—in essence images—and I belong to this fundamental tradition of all cultures. Art historical references can be found in my work, but they are not meant as quotations or a means of commentary. This sort of analytical thinking is not part of my practice. I do not construct a set of references to be interpreted. Adding such references to invite the viewer, in essence, to decode my work would be destructive to the subtle open-endedness that I consider their source of strength.

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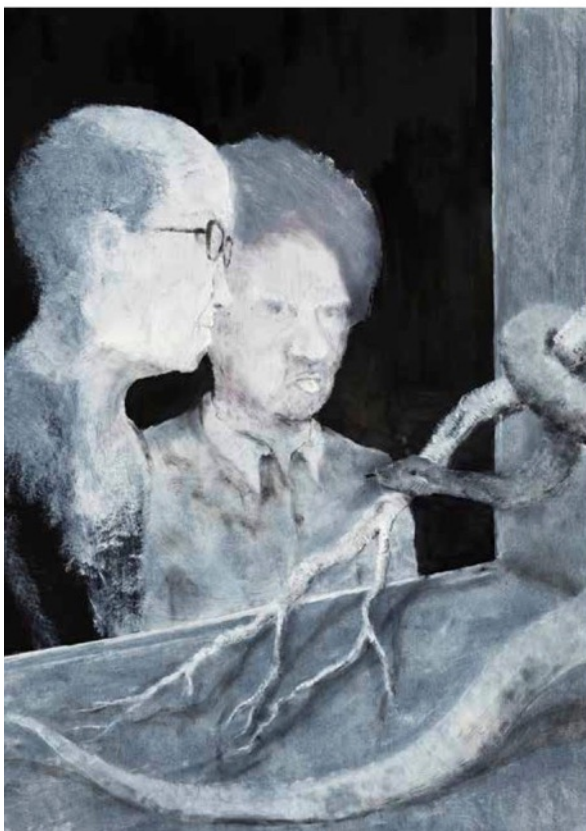
MOUSSE 53
C. MAC GIOLLA LÉITH



Secret moves, 2016.
Courtesy: VI, Oslo; Bridget Donahue, New York; Micky Schubert, Berlin.
Photo: Anna von Stackelberg

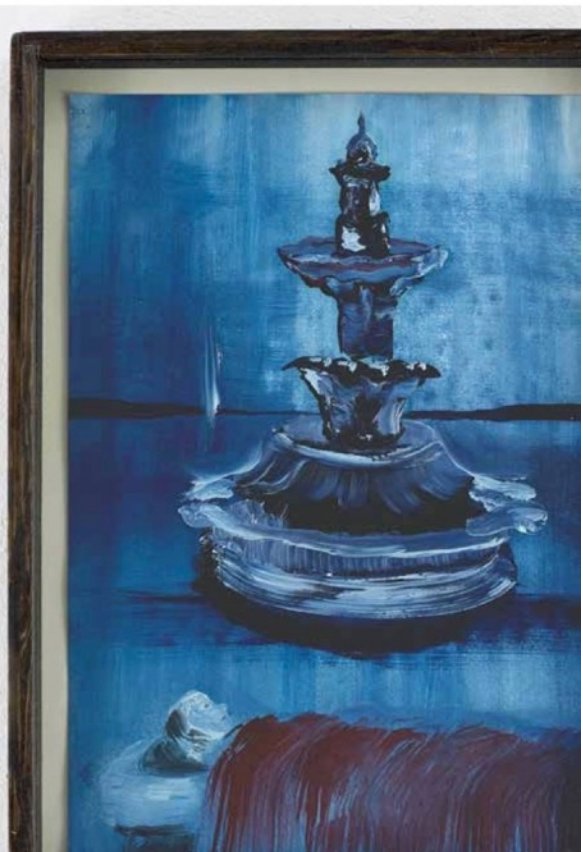


Top, left to right - *Seduction* (detail), 2012. Courtesy: Ringier Collection. Photo: Martin Eberle; *Untitled* (detail), 2016. Courtesy: private collection, Zürich. Photo: Anna von Stackelberg
 Bottom, left to right - *Untitled*, 2015. Courtesy: VI, VII, Oslo; Bridget Donahue, New York; Micky Schubert, Berlin. Photo: Vegard Kleven; *Baptized at the shopping mall* (detail), 2012. Courtesy: VI, VII, Oslo; Bridget Donahue, New York; Micky Schubert, Berlin. Photo: Martin Eberle





Top - "The mere knowledge of a fact is pale" installation view at Kunsthall Stavanger, 2016. Courtesy: Kunsthall Stavanger, Norway.
 Photo: Maya Økland / Kunsthall Stavanger
 Bottom, from left to right - *Untitled* (detail), 2015. Courtesy: private collection, Zürich. Photo: Markus Saile; *Untitled* (detail), 2015. Courtesy: VI, VII, Oslo; Bridget Donahue, New York; Micky Schubert, Berlin. Photo: Vegard Kleven



di Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith

L'artista americano Mark van Yetter vive e lavora tra Istanbul e Berlino. L'immaginario dei suoi quadri e disegni, plasmato da un potente miscuglio di memoria e immaginazione e temprato dalla sottile influenza di una serie di precursori che comprendono l'arte del passato, gli Antichi Maestri, l'arte popolare e la storia dell'illustrazione grafica, è spesso di grande impatto, ma sempre in qualche modo sfuggente. Anche quando si ispirano alle peculiari caratteristiche del paesaggio della Pennsylvania rurale delle sue origini, le narrazioni oblique evocate dai suoi quadri sembrano prendere forma in un pallido, spettrale altrove, come nei ricordi sempre più lontani di un esule o in uno strampalato sogno ad occhi aperti. Nel corso del tempo è emerso un lessico di motivi ricorrenti, che tuttavia deve ancora varcare la soglia di una immediata delucidazione. Tra le mostre più recenti di Van Yetter, le personali alla Kunsthall Stavanger in Norvegia e alla Galerie Micky Schubert di Berlino. La seguente intervista è stata condotta tra il 9 e il 17 marzo 2016.

CAOIMHÍN MAC GIOLLA LÉITH

In un'affascinante intervista sullo sviluppo della tua attuale mostra alla Kunsthall Stavanger hai elencato una serie di influenze che hanno plasmato, in maniera più o meno pronunciata, il tuo lavoro, dalle tue origini nelle Pocono Mountains della Pennsylvania a una particolare serie di disegni di Robert Crumb alla storia del blues americano e della musica folk. Potresti parlarmi di quella che mi sembra una mescolanza intuitiva ed eclettica di esperienze personali, compresi i concetti di casa e lontananza, ed echi culturali più condivisi?

MARK VAN YETTER Sì, sono cresciuto sulle Pocono Mountains, in Pennsylvania, è lì che ho sviluppato la mia visione del mondo. Prima di entrare alla scuola d'arte, ammiravo gli oggetti e mi affascinava il ruolo svolto dall'estetica nel modo in cui gli esseri umani reagiscono al mondo. Immagino che la differenza, allora, stesse nell'ingenuità del mio atteggiamento. Reagivo in modo istintivo ai colori e alle forme che mi circondavano. Non era una prospettiva del tutto priva di riflessioni teoriche, ma era comunque, in generale, ingenua. Per farti capire cosa intendo, ricordo che a un'età giovanissima mi arrabbiavo parecchio, a livello viscerale, per quella che mi sembrava un'assoluta mancanza di interesse e cura per l'ambiente naturale. Centri commerciali, parcheggi, complessi residenziali non offrivano nessuna attrattiva alla mia mentalità da sognatore romantico. La primavera e la rinascita della vita nel bosco in cui sono cresciuto, invece, era un'esperienza molto emozionante. Dato che il mio ambiente era piuttosto lontano dalla cultura, la natura giocava un ruolo fondamentale. A sei, sette anni al massimo, sapevo che sarei diventato un artista, anche se non avevo idea di cosa significasse. Dato che ero affetto da una forma grave di dislessia, i miei genitori si sono sentiti dire che non avrei mai imparato a leggere o a scrivere. Per mia fortuna, mia madre non ha accettato il verdetto e mi ha cercato un insegnante privato, che ha risolto il problema. Anche se questo ha dimostrato che non ero da nessun punto di vista lento nell'apprendimento, ciò non significava che fossi molto zelante negli studi. Mi piaceva disegnare, e lo facevo per ore di fila. Sono anche cresciuto con una familiarità con il lavoro manuale, grazie a mio padre. A quattordici anni, sapevo usare il martello, sistemare le perdite d'acqua, fare piccole riparazioni agli elettrodomestici. Queste cose mi sono poi tornate utili ma soprattutto mi hanno insegnato ad affrontare i problemi in modo pragmatico. Mio padre era un uomo d'affari, vendeva case prefabbricate e gestiva villaggi di case prefabbricate. Spinto dalla sua influenza, ho fatto del mio meglio per diventare anch'io

un uomo d'affari, ma ho scoperto di non essere proprio tagliato. In qualche modo, però, ho sfruttato la mia dimestichezza con il martello. Fin dai tempi del college, ristrutturavo un posto o un altro e cercavo di organizzarci dentro delle mostre. Negli anni sono riuscito a presentare alcuni grandi artisti ma non sono mai riuscito a vendere molti dei loro lavori. Alla scuola d'arte avevo Jack Whitten come insegnante di pittura. Anche Haim Steinbach insegnava lì. Alla fine della scuola d'arte, Haim ha tenuto una conferenza davanti a tutti gli studenti in cui ha spiegato che l'arte è un business, una carriera professionale e che si fonda su un proprio sistema commerciale. Per farsi una carriera, bisogna posizionarsi in modo strategico dentro questo sistema, e farsi una carriera è lo scopo. Il tuo lavoro dovrebbe mirare a questo scopo. Una prospettiva un po' deprimente. Jack Whitten, invece, ci diceva che l'arte è una vocazione. Di non aspettarci di trarne profitto. Almeno è così che ho interpretato le sue parole, ma non penso di sbagliare. Cercare l'autenticità e credere nell'arte come in qualcosa di più grande e profondo. Ci ha consigliato di gettare via tutti lavori che avevamo fatto a scuola, prendere uno studio, stringere alleanze con persone che condivisero la nostra sensibilità, e imparare un mestiere

a una rigidità di pensiero. Un esempio che posso farti è quello della scala musicale. L'uomo ha deciso che la scala corrisponde matematicamente a ciò che gli esseri umani trovano piacevole all'orecchio. Versioni di questa scala si sono sviluppate in modo indipendente sia in Oriente che in Occidente, il che confermerebbe la verità della tesi, ma io sono convinto che anche le vibrazioni sonore che esulano da questa scala abbiano il loro posto. Sono un grande ammiratore della musica popolare tradizionale. Lì non vediamo artisti che temono di stonare, e questo è legato all'intuizione. Ed è anche una forma di intelligenza e di libertà di pensiero. Amo l'arte popolare perché non deve tutto al cervello, mentre gli artisti diplomati ne sono spesso dominati, tanto che spesso trattano le emozioni come un espediente teorico. L'intuizione è la forza trainante che sta dietro alla creatività e io intendo la creatività nei termini espressi da Arthur Koestler nel suo libro *L'atto della creazione*. Per dirla in termini semplicistici, Koestler sostiene che l'atto della creazione è la sintesi di due diverse matrici che non sono mai state legate. È così che progredisce la cultura. E questo processo richiede una capacità di rimettere in questione quello che sembrava inciso nella pietra.

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reddizio in modo da poterci mantenere e concentrare su quello in cui credevamo. Ammiro Jack Whitten per questa visione del mondo solida e profonda. Mi dispiace che molti giovani artisti la pensino come Haim Steinbach. Secondo me è una prospettiva che non porta da nessuna parte e contraddice la mia concezione del ruolo che hanno le arti visive nel mondo. Questo spiega il mio scarso interesse per molta arte contemporanea, che secondo me è costruita su una base fittizia. Potrà sembrare che io stia divagando, ma queste cose hanno avuto una grande influenza su di me e sulla mia pratica. Quando agli artisti viene chiesto da cosa sono stati influenzati e loro fanno una lista di altri artisti, spesso mi sento privato della possibilità di capire in profondità quelle persone. Inoltre, sento di essere influenzato da troppe cose diverse per dare una risposta così precisa. Colgo l'occasione per parlare della mia educazione come modo di sovvertire un'arida discussione sull'arte in termini molto autoreferenziali. Apprezzo la domanda.

CMGL Hai anche accennato all'intuizione.

MOVY Vorrei precisare che l'intuizione per me è qualcosa di fondamentale. Forse è per questo che mi appassionano tanto le culture popolari. Nel caso delle loro relazioni con le arti, riescono a immettere nell'arte sentimenti ed emozioni. La logica dell'intuizione permette la sovversione di regole che in sostanza sono determinate dall'uomo, e spesso rappresentano trappole che portano

CMGL Alla luce della particolare natura della tua mostra alla Stavanger, intitolata *The mere knowledge of a fact is pale*, puoi dire qualcosa sul tuo atteggiamento verso la pittura/il disegno come immagine discreta ed esportabile vs. l'installazione site-specific?

MOVY Non ho concepito il lavoro in relazione allo spazio. In fondo si tratta di un lungo rotolo che potrebbe essere installato anche in un ambiente diverso. In sostanza, è un disegno più lungo del solito. L'impulso scatenante di questo lavoro è stato il mio interesse e la mia riflessione sul tema del tempo e della memoria, a cui allude il titolo del lavoro e della mostra, una citazione che ho trovato in *Un americano alla corte di re Artù* di Mark Twain. Può essere associato a diverse tradizioni, per esempio i fregi antichi, in cui il tempo e la narrazione venivano compressi con tanta maestria. In termini del mio atteggiamento generale verso la pittura/il disegno, direi che il lavoro è conforme a una mia tipica modalità di produzione che predilige i mezzi poco costosi ed è legata alla convinzione che l'arte contemporanea trarrebbe un gran beneficio da un sistema più democratico. Suonerà banale, ma la qualità di un'opera d'arte non trae per forza giovamento da alti costi di produzione.

CMGL Hai già accennato alle tue affinità con l'arte popolare e antica. Hai un'opinione forte sulla questione tanto dibattuta del "contemporaneo"?

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MVY Sono nato in un periodo in cui tutte le tradizioni creative documentate delle culture di tutto il mondo erano disponibili e potevano essere esaminate, studiate e apprezzate. Come ho già detto, prima di iniziare la scuola d'arte, nutrivamo un'ammirazione ingenua per gli oggetti e il ruolo che giocava l'estetica nel mondo che mi circondava, e questo interesse mi ha spinto a buttarmi nell'arte. A scuola sono stato introdotto all'idea che il compito di un artista sia essere "contemporaneo". Con questo intendo che l'arte è stata proposta a noi studenti come procedimento strategico per produrre qualcosa di nuovo. Nella seconda metà degli anni Novanta, quando studiavo arte, la tesi della morte della pittura era ancora sostenuta da molti. Mi ci è voluto parecchio tempo per scartare quello che oggi considero un pregiudizio deleterio, e per rendermi conto che l'atto di dipingere e disegnare è infinitamente complesso, anche solo per quanto riguarda i processi decisionali relativi agli aspetti formali. Il bisogno di approfondire questo processo fondamentale resterà sempre interessante e stimolante ai miei occhi. Ne ho concluso che la tesi della morte della pittura sia a sua volta una tesi morta. Ammiro ancora persone come Henry Flynt, il quale sosteneva l'idea di distruggere l'aspetto mercificato dell'arte, ma mi era già molto chiaro che le "idee" vengono comprate e vendute alla stessa stregua dei quadri. Alla fine ho concluso che il mondo, senza quadri nuovi, sarebbe un posto orribile. Mi sono più che altro convinto del fatto che dovrebbe esserci un sistema più democratico capace di regolare l'attuale sistema commerciale e capitalistico che controlla le arti visive. Non c'è nessuna giustificazione per i prezzi ragguardevoli da molti artisti viventi.

CMGL Puoi dire qualcosa sulla tua iconografia e la sua possibile derivazione?

MVY Spesso gli oggetti prendono forma attraverso un processo di scoperta, il che significa che inizio a dipingere senza un'idea prestabilita di quello che potrebbe prendere forma. Quindi non so da dove vengano di preciso, ed è solo più tardi, attraverso una riflessione sul mio lavoro, che inizio a scoprirne il significato latente, almeno per me. Ma attraverso il processo pittorico emergono motivi che per me possiedono un significato più ampio. Prendi il vaso, per esempio. È un esempio di motivo che torna spesso nel mio lavoro. È un recipiente decorativo che di solito viene usato per metterci i fiori. In pratica, un contenitore per la decomposizione e la morte, un posto in cui i fiori possono essere ammirati mentre muoiono. Questo non significa che gli oggetti dovrebbero essere interpretati alla luce del "simbolismo" a cui io aderisco. I lavori appartengono a se stessi, e chi cerca di trovarvi un suo significato è libero di farlo.

CMGL Molte delle tue immagini hanno qualcosa di pallido e spettrale che ricorda la stranezza e la vaghezza dei sogni, è vero?

MVY Be', sì, c'è una qualità onirica che non posso ignorare. Mi chiedo se sia perché l'atto di dipingere in generale è meditativo e, come ho detto prima, intuitivo. Quando inizio un lavoro, non ho un'idea chiara sulla direzione che prenderà. È questo a renderlo interessante ai miei occhi. È un modo di lavorare che mi piace e che richiede una certa forza mentale, proprio come scrivere o suonare uno strumento. Quando una persona lavora con questo atteggiamento di scoperta attraverso il processo, la mente può creare un'atmosfera che facilita la proiezione, nel mio caso, sulla superficie di carta. Questo aspetto stragante o onirico in qualche modo emerge, tutto qui, ed è difficile descriverlo a parole.

CMGL Alcune delle tue immagini sembrano scene statiche, anche se magari sono composte da accostamenti insoli-

ti. Altre suggeriscono un qualche tipo di narrazione, per quanto breve o sintetica. Sei consapevole di queste differenze?

MVY Vorrei esserlo. A volte c'è bisogno di altre persone che guardano il tuo lavoro per notare aspetti anche ovvi. Può essere una rivelazione inquietante, ma spesso è anche interessante sapere come gli altri vedono una cosa che ti riguarda così da vicino. Mi è capitato più volte di vedere sculture o quadri caratterizzate da un simbolo fallico molto evidente, che sembrava impossibile non notare, e il creatore non se n'era proprio accorto. Posso dire di aver notato che spesso il mio lavoro ha un aspetto narrativo. Non ho mai pensato che i miei lavori raccontino una storia precisa, ma posso immaginare che diano questa impressione.

CMGL Per finire, che ruolo hanno nel tuo lavoro le allusioni alla storia dell'arte e il gioco di citazioni?

MVY Gli esseri umani hanno sempre avuto l'impulso di creare immagini. Come artista, naturalmente, pesco a piene mani dalla storia ricca e complessa di questo impulso primordiale. Sembrerà un'affermazione banale, ma voglio sottolineare l'idea che sono una persona che crea quadri e disegni, in pratica immagini, e dunque appartengo a questa tradizione primordiale appartenente a tutte le culture. I riferimenti alla storia dell'arte possono apparire nel mio lavoro, ma non sono intesi come citazioni o commenti. Questo tipo di pensiero analitico non trova spazio nella mia pratica. Non costruisco una serie di riferimenti perché siano interpretati. Aggiungere questi riferimenti per invitare lo spettatore, in sostanza, a decodificare il mio lavoro distruggerebbe la sottile apertura all'interpretazione che considero un punto di forza.

Melissa Canbaz, “Mark van Yetter”, *Frieze*, March 27, 2016, <https://www.frieze.com/article/mark-van-yetter>.

REVIEW - 27 MAR 2016

Mark van Yetter

BY MELISSA CANBAZ

Micky Schubert, Berlin, Germany



Mark van Yetter, *Untitled*, 2016, oil on paper, 245 x 90 x 4 cm. Courtesy: Galerie Micky Schubert, Berlin

In his solo show ‘We are what we walk between’, Mark van Yetter draws our attention to the associations that arise when we ‘walk between’ his paintings, rather than the meanings of the works themselves. Van Yetter’s painting style ranges from accurate depictions to intuitive gestures, and this seemingly irreconcilable mix corresponds to his choice of motifs, none of which seem to have much to do with each other. Typically his compositions are tightly cropped, pastel coloured surreal moments or still lifes: potted plants and bananas, pool scenes, portraits of dogs, or two classical reclining female nudes facing each other in a large-scale piece that resembles an antique tiled frieze (all works untitled, 2016). The works seem to have fallen out of time, evoking a cross between the themes of Modigliani and the style of George Grosz. At the same time, Van Yetter’s pictorial repertoire, with its poetic yet bizarre motifs, recalls his contemporary Jonas Lipps – perhaps because both painters are so refreshingly uncontemporary.



Mark van Yetter, 'We are what we walk between', installation view, Galerie Micky Schubert, Berlin; photograph: Anna von Stackelberg

Though it's tempting to create a sequential narrative from the eight oil paintings in the main gallery space, it's ultimately one that feels interrupted or recombined in random order. Consequently, the three monochrome linocuts in the back room – with their amateurish style and rather fusty medium – look less displaced (even if I can't remember when I last saw linocuts in a contemporary gallery context). Van Yetter's alternation between different formats and styles becomes part of the generative process of viewing the exhibition.

In spite of this, I caught myself in the classic 'viewer' role, asking myself, where is the thread running through this show? Briefly rummaging through my knowledge of current discourses on painting, I noticed how this distanced me from the pictures themselves, causing them to start losing their agreeable lightness. Finally, it makes no sense to keep interpreting these works until they take their place within a narrative sequence. Why should they? Perhaps they are just images meant for intimate contemplation, ultimately allowing them to escape any kind of attribution or contextualization in the history of the medium. Perhaps Van Yetter's scenes simply point to everyday moments that are taking place outside the visible frame, thereby pushing the intimate values of a metaphorical 'inner space' into the foreground. In this light, the meaning of the lid-less toilet bowl or the box of tissues lying beside the person under a blanket eventually become important details – evidence of a larger narrative outside the frame. The individual pictures are loaded with stories yet offer nothing more than the surfaces of the things they depict. The special quality of all these pictures, however, is that they do not close themselves to the viewer, but rather stimulate a more intuitive reading – counter to how we might usually approach figurative painting.



Mark van Yetter, 'We are what we walk between', installation view, Galerie Micky Schubert, Berlin; photograph: Anna von Stackelberg

Because we can extend the conditions in the paintings into suggestive, hypothetical scenarios, the gallery setting itself becomes more relaxed, more organic. Nonetheless, it would be naïve to think that this amounts to decoding Van Yetter's painterly strategy. 'We are what we walk between' is a good example of painting that has both feet firmly in the present, but which skilfully evades being pinned to any specific discourses of the past.

Translated by Nicholas Grindell

Heather Jones, "Interview: Mark van Yetter", Kunsthall Stavanger, February 17, 2016.

February 17, 2016

Interview: Mark van Yetter



By Heather Jones | Interviews

American artist Mark van Yetter's work *The Mere Knowledge of a Fact is Pale* is on view at Kunsthall Stavanger through April 10, 2016. In this single work stretching across two galleries, the artist, now based in Berlin, has depicted a seamless memory map of his home town in the Poconos, a mountain range in the Northeastern United States. Below, van Yetter further describes his process in creating this work as well as his influences and relation to various art historical lineages.



Image courtesy of VI,VII, Oslo.

At first glance, your work straddles many genres – painting, illustration, sequential story-telling, and it seems like a variety of mark-making techniques are employed. Do you consider your work in specific relation to any one lineage?

I do not think I build off any certain lineage. I look at lots of different things and one way or another certain influences seep in. My approach is generally intuitive and hands on. I try not to over-think things.



Mark van Yetter, Meek Commandments. Image courtesy of VI,VII, Oslo.

For the works in long, scroll format that you are presenting at Kunsthall Stavanger, you mentioned that they were too large to fully unroll in your studio. Can you describe your process for creating these works? Are they carefully planned or do you let the works evolve as they unroll?

I had a basic idea to start with. Often those are the best. In a nutshell it was to create a long scroll depicting the landscape that I grew up with. One that I am intimately familiar with but have not lived in for a very long while. I have actually spent more than a decade away from America. But my roots are there, in the Pocono Mountains, Pennsylvania an hour and a half drive to New York City. In regards to the previous question, this work I can trace to certain influences. The American social realists were clearly on my mind but I would be scared to say it is in their lineage as I believe the terms of that chapter in art history expired quite some time ago. I also clearly recall a series of drawings by Robert Crumb that depict an American landscape. Each drawing in this series depicts the same landscape at different periods of time. You see the view changing from the country side to the modern city. This series is titled "A short history of America" and was presented as an animation in the documentary "Crumb" which I saw at the cinemas in New York City when I was 16 years old. It made a very profound influence on me as I remembered the animation quite clearly 20 years later. At that point I had no idea about traditional American Blues and Folk music. I did not discover this music through the film at that point, perhaps I was too young to register it or perhaps the film soundtrack catered more to ragtime piano and prewar jazz which Crumb is fanatic about in addition to his obsession with the blues. It was a few years later when I was around 20 years old that I first heard Harry Smith's "Anthology of American folk music" and that was a turning point in my life. This music, in a way that is very difficult to describe, was also a huge influence on the scroll I present at Stavanger Kunsthall. The early blues and folk music touch me in a profound way. They go to my bones. When I look at contemporary art I am less affected. It could be that this music is not overtly concerned with the cerebral. It is intelligent but it is also emotional and most certainly it is untainted by commercialism. I think that's what I am hoping for in my work. A certain sincerity and truth. I don't think my work successful if it requires to be

explained to be understood. That's perhaps why I originally skated around the question of my relation to any one lineage in art. I am not necessarily trying to fit into contemporary art. I think art exists in so many forms and it seems strange that artists are expected to be original yet they stick firmly to certain codes. It's as if there are rules that everyone is denying exist, but fulfill them nevertheless. For example after my studies at art school I moved back in the area I grew up and painted landscapes for 2 years. You could imagine the response from the art world I left behind in New York.

As far as the process for creating this work goes it was simply hands on. I started and just moved forward. It is installed like a scroll but actually it is made on separate sheets of paper 40 by 60 cm each that connect to one another. I have a 2.5 meter wall to work on in my room so I could set up 4 pages on the wall at a time. After finishing the plate furthest to the left I would remove it from the wall and move the other three plates left and add a fourth to the right and I continued in this manner. Sketching out the work with oil paint then filling in details. I used no source material only my head, this kept it fun to work on. I also used no pens or anything else but black and white paint and a few brushes. What I regret most is that it is not one long continuous roll of paper. It could have been as I did not discard any sheet of paper and restart. It was done intuitively and executed directly, simply planning the next element on the spot as it came to mind.



Mark van Yetter, *The mere knowledge of a fact is pale*, 2016. Installation view, Kunsthall Stavanger. Photo: Maya Økland.

Your use of the scroll as a format here is interesting – many of your previous works seem to be more straightforwardly contained by the picture plane / the edges of the canvas or frame. Has working with the scroll as a format changed your process or thinking around the work in any way?

No it has not really changed my way of thinking about my work too much. It was fun to keep going without an edge to stop it. Reminded me of Stan Brakhage who thought of his films as one continuous never ending work. I think, if I remember correct, that he never discarded any film that he shot. But I like to have a contained space to work on. It's a very exciting thing to have to construct a composition to see what those delineations can command of the elements, the space you create in it. I'm not sure if I would make a scroll again. Maybe. I would need another simple idea to carry me through it, one that seemed worth it.



Mark van Ytter, *The mere knowledge of a fact is pale*, (detail), 2016. Photo: Maya Økland.

Can you discuss your choice for subjects/objects in this work? They seem to be figures depicted in familiar landscapes and social situations, but more seems to be presented here than what immediately meets the eye.

Well it is hard to say what the subject is. I hope that is something that people can relate to in their own way. What meets the eye meets the brain and each brain must have a wealth of associations that I could only hope to dream of.



Mark van Ytter, *Meek Commandments*, installation view.
Image courtesy of VI,VII, Oslo.

In an earlier interview, you were quoted as saying something that stuck with me: you said, “honoring the intrinsic human quality of imperfection grants painting credence.” Can you elaborate on that statement? Would you describe your works as purposefully imperfect? Or perfect in their imperfection?

Interesting question. I guess that it is hard to say that something is perfect. I would be frightened to death if I was to encounter perfection and am quite certain no one has been afforded such an opportunity. By this I meant that people often strive for perfection and in doing so miss the whole beauty of things. They miss the big picture. There is no rule for perfection and likewise it is not about breaking rules. I could think of countless examples but as I touched on the blues I would like to reiterate with another example. A blues singer singing a song with true feeling would not be concerned with the strain of his voice tilting out of key as he would be singing with an emotional drive. A person that studied music could easily make the mistake to try and resign the song in perfect key. Perhaps because their idea of perfection is set by a system of rules that may not actually exist. This all gets very theoretical. It is actually the point where emotions and intellect cross. Art is not purely an intellectual thing it is a human endeavor and must come from all facets of the human condition.

Can you tell us about any current projects or upcoming exhibitions?

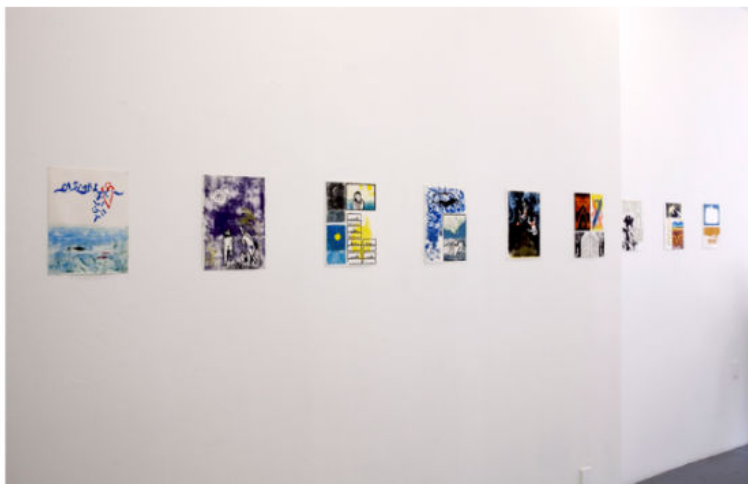
Currently I am thinking of a new series of works but have yet to begin. This is still a thinking stage. The next series will be presented in New York in November at a great new gallery called Bridget Donahue.

Tobias Carroll, “Checking Out ‘Dismal Plight’ at Cleopatra’s”, *Vol. 1* Brooklyn, June 6, 2014.



Checking Out “Dismal Plight” at Cleopatra’s

By Tobias Carroll On June 6, 2014



Do I like visual art? I do. What about sequential narratives? Those, too. This is probably why I so enjoyed *Dismal Plight*, which features work from Jonas Lipps and Mark van Yetter. It’s currently on view at the Greenpoint gallery Cleopatra’s through June 8th. The gallery refers to it as “[a] series of etching and linoleum prints loosely employ the format of a comic book as a means to create a narrative” — and that’s a pretty spot-on description.

The show involves solo work from Lipps and van Yetter, but the sequential works that the two made in collaboration sit at the heart of it. They hang there, brightly colored, laying out a fragmented, dreamlike story. Maybe the dream of a story? There does seem to be an underlying logic; actually putting that into words isn’t quite as easy. But it’s definitely worth your time.

Howie Chen, "Mark van Yetter: Getting the Picture", *Howie Chen Archive*, 2009.

Mark Van Yetter

GETTING THE PICTURE

In 1929, German neurosurgeon Otfrid Foerster performed surgery on a conscious patient who during operation on his midbrain began to uncontrollably blurt puns and sound associations at the doctor. Though disjointed, the patient's utterances reflected an awareness of his condition as a subject undergoing surgery yet immediately proliferated into an unexpected series of connections through language and sound.

Thought of as the basis for metaphorical thinking, these leaps in logic rely on a kind of lateral deviation beginning at one subjective point and its departure into the realm of contingent associations æ surfing on coincidences, contradictions, reversals, and juxtapositions.

The work of artist Mark Van Yetter draws on these associative sequences, relating to the tipping point at which formalism becomes untethered to reveal multiple possibilities while referring to the underlying impossibility (absurdity) of its original premise.¹

This is where the construction and operations of a pun come into play æ the deliberate conflation and misuse of language, sounds, and symbols to logically improbable effect. Yetter's practice employs this strategy, pointing to a lexicon of staid art formalisms and the risky limit at which the very destabilizing maneuvers become an easily recitable pun.

¹ Known as Foerster Syndrome or *Witzelsucht* derived from the German *witzel(ei)* meaning pun or joke, and *sucht* meaning addiction or yearning.

Re: hey hey hey hey

Primarily a painter and draftsman, Yetter pulls from a range of intuitive and art historical styles, sometimes recalling the color and gesture of Eugene Delacroix or late Edgar Degas to the frenetic compositions of Georg Grosz and melancholic expressionism of Edvard Munch. Other times his work recasts elements of early conceptual art using language, installation, performance, and architecture. At play is an irreverent conflation of academic modern art and the historic avant garde rendered as a series of stylistic and representational cues. At the same time, there exists a subtle critique of our habitual fondness for legacies that have since receded over the horizon æ those appearing as one undifferentiated aesthetic off in the distance. Equal caution is given to emergent contemporary practices that are destined for the same fate.

His exhibitions consist of arrangements of seemingly mismatched work both in style and medium yet rooted in the practice of painting. These are spare constellations of painting, collage, drawing, watercolor, found object, word pieces, woodwork, and sculpture situated in considered spatial orientations. The early projects of expressionists and surrealists resonate in the arrangements; however, this could be a misperception constructed from the parallels, parallaxes and anachronisms Yetter convincingly presents us.

Re: sorry last time sent the unfinished here is finished

This is where the processes of metaphoric thinking enter as a means to connect unrelated and often contradictory information in a new

context. Yetter cites Arthur Koestler's book "The Act of Creation" (1964) as a reference to the way various types of analogical thinking subvert the rational and formally routine logic of everyday life.²

Just as Yetter's exhibitions consist of different series of object arrangements, the compositions and themes of his individual works continue these multidimensional relationships. To achieve this effect, he employs collage strategies and anachronistic period quotations to comprise coherent, presentable images to the viewer. The juxtapositions, however, are rife with oppositions, symmetries, and parallaxes. The painting "Anywhere" (2007) depicts a protest rally scene placing a Vietnam war veteran demonstrating in front a pastiche of German Reich architecture, the cornice of one building defaced by an incomplete graffiti tag. "Bourgeois" (2007) is an oil work on a misshapen piece of wood that extends the subject of 19th century bucolic revelers into a scene including a looming battleship on the horizon and a desert camel entering the scene.

As demonstrated here, Yetter's work is not one of reactionary aesthetics or modes but rather an attempt to articulate the contemporary moment with various urgencies of the past.

Waiting for the punch line

Referring to Martin Kippenberger's practice as an "infinity of anticipation", Yetter seeks to prolong the contradictory tensions in his work to an extreme, keeping the pun going as an continuing generative process without closure æproliferating and fugitive. It

² "I have coined the term 'bisociation' in order to make a distinction between the routine skills of thinking on a single 'plane', as it were, and the creative act, which, as I shall try to show, always operates on more than one plane." Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*.

forestalls authoritative finality through constant interruption and transfers with humor as the intrinsic leveling device.

With the playful reworking of one word in the expression "laughter is the best medicine", Yetter explains how a proverb can profoundly turn on itself: "laughter is the only medicine". The macabre joke here is about the idea of closure is at odds (complicit) with what Koestler described as the ridiculousness of the punning patient "tied facedown to the operating table with his skull open." Laughing in the face of death.

In the performance piece "rhythm in chaos" (2006), Yetter is seen sitting at a drum set attempting to play a continuous beat. With his drumsticks slipping out his hands with each movement he is unable to complete a coherent run, yet in the fluidity of these accidents and flubs it has accomplished something else, a potential generative process.

Caracas Arepas Bar

Jean-Luc Godard's film "Pierrot Le Fou" (1965) uses the disjunctions and intrusions of mass culture and market in a narrative about the adventure of two characters whose lives are itinerant, fugitive, and on the make. As with Godard's earlier films there is a mixture of conflicting parody and tribute. Towards the end, the characters arrive at a roadside club called Marquise Dance Hall from where a sequence of relationship mix-ups and betrayals ensues.

Taking the name from the film, Yetter and his wife opened a short-lived business in Brooklyn, New York in 2005 called Marquise Dance Hall. A record store, bookstore, occasional gallery, studio, and hidden home, it was a situation in which the form and content operated at the bare formalisms of a store. It had an inventory of vinyl records and used books, opening hours, cash register, and some customers. At the same time it was a little bit more. It was an arrangement of a series of activities that intimated a certain sensibility: the avoidance of habitual practice without abandoning the premise.³

Perhaps there is still something in language, music, and art that could be a great beginning of an inappropriate pun. Always on the move. Perhaps then, it is not a stretch of the imagination that Marquise Dance Hall has now moved to Istanbul in some form and its former location in Brooklyn is now a fancy Venezuelan restaurant, Caracas Arepas Bar.

Howie Chen, 2009

Howie Chen is an independent curator and co-director of Dispatch, NY.

³ "They put up minds for sale on the market, everyone liked his own mind" is a Turkish phrase that Yetter references to an upcoming project.

Michael Wilson, “Mark van Yetter and Matt Hoyt: Dispatch”, *Artforum*, Summer 2008, Vol. 46, No. 10, 443-444.

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Mark Van Yetter and Matt Hoyt DISPATCH

Image: Matt Hoyt, Untitled, 1998–2008

Dispatch, a small Chinatown gallery established in 2007 by regular collaborators Howie Chen and Gabrielle Giattino, presents itself with formidable seriousness: “Dispatch offers a model for curatorial production: an office for receiving and originating exhibitions, projects, and concepts treated as time-sensitive transmissions. The activities of Dispatch reflect the independent ability to mobilize with tactical urgency, editorial decisiveness, and critical rigor.” That Dispatch’s most recent “time-sensitive transmission” was one of the quietest little exhibitions imaginable, intriguing and alienating in pretty much equal measure, makes the self-conscious institutional rhetoric—tongue-in-cheek or not—seem all the more unnecessary. Artists Mark Van Yetter and Matt Hoyt seem to appreciate that showing a few modest works, made by well-established means, is a complex enough undertaking on its own.

Yetter and Hoyt are both graduates of the School of Visual Arts, and also share anaesthetic modesty that Dispatch’s press release is at pains to contextualize as consciously oppositional to contemporaneous high-production-value art. The impression the show gives is, however, less one of critical responsiveness than of something close to timelessness, a retreat into semiprivate obsession rather than an overt refusal of a prevailing trend. In any case, we have recently seen the emergence of an opposing tendency: See the New Museum of Contemporary Art’s recent “Unmonumental” and the current Whitney Biennial’s concentration on “lessness” for starters.) On the evidence of this outing, teasingly dubbed “Escalator to Common Art,” Yetter’s practice is a rather scattershot affair, while Hoyt’s revolves around an almost Zen-like introspective focus. What seems to bind the two artists together is an attraction to the anachronistic and opaque, an interest in making objects and images that pull away from the here and now.

In this exhibition, the Pennsylvania- and Istanbul-based Yetter showed three paintings and three mixed-media works in which various influences, from dada to German Expressionism, are discernable but muddled, and any kind of consistency continually gives way to a discomfiting restlessness. No two works share the same format, media, or subject. *Bourgeois*, 2008, an oil painting on wood, depicts a sketchy pastoral scene populated by two languid figures. Yetter allows the grain of the wood-panel support to suggest surreal embellishments, one surface swirl becoming the incongruous form of a leaping dolphin. *Portrait of Jonas Lipps as Young Man*, 2001, is a scrappy head-and-shoulders study of the young German artist in a medium—watercolor on paper—often used by the subject in his own work. *Untitled*, 2008, a collage of fragmented classical figures sandwiched between a wall and an oversize sheet of glass, seems to represent yet another disorienting change of pace.

If Yetter's work tends toward obscurity, Hoyt's is a little easier to parse (though his admission that "the pieces are never the execution of a technique nor the expression of any clear and logical idea or concept" seems less than encouraging). Apparently, the New York-based artist's *Untitled*, 1998–2008—a pair of grubby painted wooden shelves bearing an unprepossessing selection of mostly tiny sculptures—represents ten years of work. But what might seem at first like a glacial work rate comes to seem at least partially explicable as one learns more about the artist's process of thinking and making. Though the bits and pieces on display are mostly abstract (what appears to be a rat's head on the end of a length of wire is one notable exception), and insubstantial (a shell-like wood carving on the upper shelf is the only component that might conceivably hurt one's toe were it to fall on it), many are also variations on formal themes—several look like bones, for example; others resemble machine parts—or perfected versions of some privately imagined ideal form. Apparent manifestations of a childlike fetishism, Hoyt's sculptures resonate precisely because they seem at first so inconsequential, their individual significance seeming to hover just out of reach.