



## 11 Emerging Artists Redefining Abstract Painting

The divide between abstraction and figuration is a false, but helpful, dichotomy. Painters who are primarily concerned with the interactions between color, line, and form also make marks and shapes that may suggest body parts, landscapes, and objects traditionally relegated to still lifes. Even monochrome paintings can conjure familiar settings: A gray canvas might evoke a rock face, while a blue one may suggest the sea.

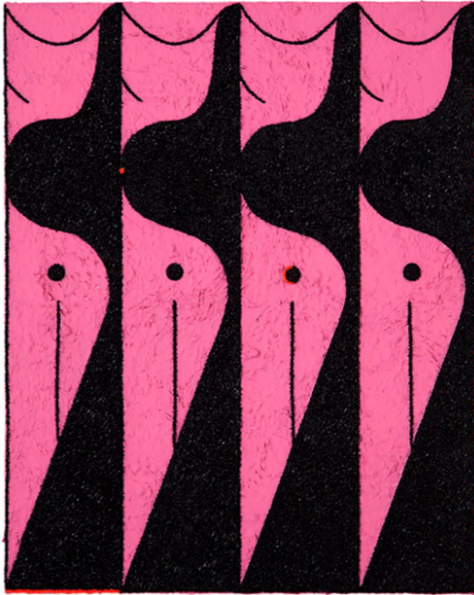
This principle can go the other way, as well. “I would consider myself a figurative painter fundamentally,” artist Louise Giovanelli told me, “but I certainly have a loose idea of figuration—anything that suggests a form, even if this suggestion is faint.”

A new generation of painters, all 40 years old or younger, are rethinking what we might call, for lack of a better term, abstraction. For them, labels aren't important. They're more interested in the infinite ways paint can be applied to develop suggestive, beguiling, and transcendent compositions. They explore what it means to make a painting in the digital age and use contemporary research to generate new patterns and designs. Despite the diversity of these artists' practices, a near-mystical devotion to the act of making and a desire to communicate via symbols and hues unites them all.

Cohen, Alina, “11 Emerging Artists Redefining Abstract Painting,”  
*Artsy*, January 2020.

# Tracy Thomason

B. 1984, Gaithersburg, Maryland. Lives and works in New York.



The gritty surfaces of Tracy Thomason's oil and marble dust paintings recall stucco siding and the scratched-into exteriors of ceramic urns. "I aim for a clay-like surface to accept scars and constellations through carving into something like a stalactite or initials on a tree trunk," Thomason said. Her process can be slow or quick, as she employs tools she describes as "surgical" to develop the biomorphic shapes on her canvases. Thomason noted that her grandmother was an artist and a practicing Buddhist. "I no doubt inherited a level of patience from her in making," she said.

Thomason's restrained palette conveys a sense of cohesion. With a palette of bubblegum pinks, chalky whites, lemon yellows, and fire-engine reds—mingled with soft, feminine curves—she turns her canvases into sites of strange, female symbolologies. The works recall Hilma af Klint's spiritual communions through painting, or of Joan Miró's abstract storytelling via repeated, rearranged shapes.

Cohen, Alina, "11 Emerging Artists Redefining Abstract Painting,"  
*Artsy*, January 2020.

# THE NEW YORKER

ART GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

## Tracy Thomason

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Through the careful application of marble dust, paint, and clay, the Brooklyn-based artist evokes the heft of masonry and the formality of stone etching. Though executed on linen, her spare and abstruse abstractions seem to be something other than paintings. In “Black and Blue,” a periwinkle rectangle is the backdrop for a curving glyph, drawn with a raised black line of crushed stone. The symbol is echoed in several busier vermillion works, seen in radiating patterns alongside other recurring motifs, including a star surrounding a circle, a backward “E,” and an eyelid shape. Throughout, Thomason seems to be obeying her own strict, if secret, rules.

Through Dec. 22.

Marinaro  
1 Oliver St.  
Downtown  
212-989-7700

[Website](#)

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## Symbols, Signs and Signals: Tracy Thomason At Marinaro, New York



**Clayton Press**, CONTRIBUTOR  
[FULL BIO](#) ✓

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Refreshingly bright and beguiling, Tracy Thomason's oil and marble dust paintings are an antidote to most unfettered abstraction. Thomason makes "hard work" paintings that result from manual methods, using brushes, stone carving tools and knives. Her surfaces are veneers on linen, almost like Tibetan sand mandalas, executed in red, blue, gray, black and white. The artist's lines refer to sketches of landscapes and female forms, carefully calculated, direct and refined. The paintings hint at Abstraction-Création, the loose association of artists formed in Paris in 1931, which included Alberto Magnelli, Barbara Hepworth and Naum Gabo. These small paintings, generally 20 x 16 inches, easily hold your attention and hold the wall.



©2017 Tracy Thomason; Courtesy Marinaro, New York.  
*Tracy Thomason. In Public. 2017.*

Tracy Thomason at Marinaro, New York, through December 22, 2017.

Press, Clayton. "Symbols, Signs and Signals: Tracy Thomason at Marinaro, New York." *Forbes*, November 2017.



# BLOUINARTINFO

## Tracy Thomason's Emotive Abstraction

BY SCOTT INDRISEK | NOVEMBER 21, 2016

### Tracy Thomason's Emotive Abstraction

Detail of a 2016 painting by Tracy Thomason.  
(Scott Indrisek)

#### RELATED

ARTISTS  
Peter Halley  
([artist/397521/overview](http://artist/397521/overview))

Peter Halley with Tracy Thomason at Teen Party. Photo by Camilo Fuentetaja.

Named after a Spotify pop-music playlist and located in the converted home office of a Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn apartment, Teen Party is no ordinary gallery. (To be fair, as one of its co-founders, I'm probably a little biased.) The space's debut exhibition, on view through early December, pairs art-world star Peter Halley with rising talent [Tracy Thomason](http://tracythomason.tumblr.com/work) (<http://tracythomason.tumblr.com/work>), drawing connections to their shared facility for uncommon textures: achieved, respectively, with [Roll-A-Tex](https://www.rustoleum.com/product-catalog/consumer-brands/zinsser/additives/roll-a-text-sand-texture-additive) (<https://www.rustoleum.com/product-catalog/consumer-brands/zinsser/additives/roll-a-text-sand-texture-additive>) and marble dust. I spoke with Thomason about these meticulously composed "feely wall tablets."

**One of the first thing that struck me when I saw your paintings was the complexity of their surface textures. Can you explain, without getting *too* technical, how you're achieving these effects, using media like marble dust and activated charcoal?**

I've always been interested in my finished work feeling human and active, so there is an element of everything being overly touched and handmade. I like the build-it-from-the-bones-up mentality; the process of assembling my own structures, stretching my own canvases, being as self-reliant as possible. Not that painting is life or death, but if the world was to end or begin again I want to know that I can feed myself, which is where creating my own grounds and pigment mashes to sculpt and to record everything comes from.

It started by adding these elemental materials you mentioned above (marble dust and activated charcoal) to pre-existing oil and wax paint binders in quantities that allow for it to become a different material, not to paint with, but to sculpt with. Aside from using my hands the three tools I'm most indebted to are my bookbinding awl and various blades to carve and sculpt the work. I see it very much in tradition with a Hannah Höch "Cut With the Kitchen Knife" agenda combined with a first woman [Lucy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucy_(Australopithecus)) ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucy\\_\(Australopithecus\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucy_(Australopithecus))) mentality where I smash together chunks of alabaster and grind up other additive materials. I think of these works as additive marble sculptures, albeit quite shallow! In this space I can disrupt classical methods and imagery and still operate in the space of painting, using its format as these feely wall tablets to collect and deliver information.

**Are the shapes and forms in your compositions purely abstract, or are they referential, in some oblique way?**

All of the forms are quite referential. I'm interested in accessing different ways of understanding, beginning with looking at and reading about being a female-bodied person. One layer is comprised of figurative life drawing extractions where I typically disobey what I'm looking at: anatomical illustrations for precision, and imagined forms to keep an active intuition. The second comes from looking at tools that I use for making such as scissors, knives, pliers, or a compass. The third layer directs itself to structures of language and how something is read in print or as an image. Punctuation and letters are incorporated in a way that becomes an image, and spinal structures divide the painting like the page of a book. There is an economy of language and structure that I'm interested in when things are abstracted. Hinges on handles mimic the joints on a body; a leg is like a blade that cuts through wind when walking; the index of a book holds all the major muscles and allows for everything else to orbit. Objects for making and reading completely overlap with how a body is structured.

**How do you approach color? You tend to work with a fairly self-limited palette.**

The colors I use are ones that would appear while developing a text or a blueprint or signage. I'm really into the nature of abstraction, materiality, and gesture of form so it's important to that there is also a quality of 'readability' to them in addition to 'feelability'. I use color to encourage a connection between feeling and thinking. They are all very elemental and have interconnectivity with mineralogy, body, and cognitive affectation. For example cadmium red light is like the poison berry out in nature in the way it visually sets off an alarm, and at the same time it's used to make edit corrections.

Indrisek, Scott. "Tracy Thomason's Emotive Abstraction." *Blouin ARTINFO*, November 2016.

**During a recent studio visit I saw a much larger canvas that you're currently working on. Has it been a challenge, trying to scale up the 20 x 16 inch works into those more imposing dimensions?**

I'm really excited to climb into these larger pieces. In some ways I feel more comfortable working on a large scale as it feels more accurate to map out whole ideas and questions in real time; the scale can exist in a one-to-one ratio with the body. My dominance becomes more incidental. Any aberrations that occur read like less like that of a scar on a skin and become more of a geologic blip in nature. That being said the practical impositions are something that can be a bit daunting, the increase of weight and material cost due to scale is a bit intense. I can drag the paintings around my studio but in order to actually move them anywhere I need assistance, I keep joking that I'm beginning my 'Rose' period (DeFeo [http://www.jaydefeo.org/therose.html#img/therose1\\_full.jpg](http://www.jaydefeo.org/therose.html#img/therose1_full.jpg)), not Picasso). There is something to be said about learning from that which is larger than what can be carried around on one's own. There also is something comforting and new era about being tethered and committed to an object that can keep growing through time in a way that I lose track of. I know I can make a small painting in two weeks, but for the 6 x 8 foot paintings I have no idea. I'm interested in how my emotional connection to my work increases when time becomes immeasurable.

**There was also quite a bit of faux-fur in your workspace. Explain?**

Ha, true. To be accurate it's actually *real* fur that I procured from Ikea a couple years ago so inadvertently there is a connection to warmth, home, and design, but I'm more interested in its material use for a performative uniform, which I see as being different from a costume. I'm thinking about fur's presence in films like "*Barbarella*" (<http://www.cinestylography.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/barbarella-screenshot-60s-jane-fonda-space-age-17-fur.jpg>): the heroine dons a uniform of furry/sexy/subversive function as opposed to just parading around for the other's pure pleasure. It's a funny flip of the hunter-gatherer mentality as Jane Fonda is the one out saving the world. It makes it for an interesting material language to translate abstract expressionist painting gestures through since that is an area has been historically written to be male-dominated.

**At Teen Party you're showing new paintings alongside some works by Peter Halley, a 1981 painting and a new wall-based work. What would you say you two have in common, in terms of an aesthetic and an approach, and where do you diverge?**

The first thing I notice is the build up of an uncannily similar texture while having an understanding of the differences in application between us. Peter is coming from the readymade by using a rolled-on, institutional texture that has the effect of "magically appearing" and looking barely touched. My surfaces are *very* touched, obviously uneven, and are slowly built and then eventually attacked with carving tools. The nubs of the linen are the first layers of texture for my grounds to hold on to, layer after layer, almost like the formation of stalactites. Peter and I are both looking at painting as a space and an object while conforming to the constraints of the rectangle. Peter has explored this in depth beyond, examining the effects of institutional and architectural prisons via a structural mimicry. My approach is more internal, looking at the entrapments of the body and mind as pre-existing structural boundaries, which is why I layer extractions of the figure with textual elements. Exploring notions of a prison or boundaries sounds pretty bleak as a subject, but I like to think it is inherently optimistic. By confronting these ideas through image, color, texture, and critical writing the work becomes an exit strategy, shocking the system through experience. I see Peter achieving this immediately through color, whereas I use a careful, and almost meditative, conditioning process. Our work is abstracted from specific points; when images have a familiar entry point I believe they can become an access point for empathy.

**Who are some other painters who have inspired or affected you, as mentors?**

I feel really grateful to be able to commune with my graduate school mentor, Beverly Fishman ([http://www.beverlyfishmanstudio.com/beverly\\_fishman/welcome.html](http://www.beverlyfishmanstudio.com/beverly_fishman/welcome.html)). She is on sabbatical in New York from Cranbrook Academy of Art right now and it has been very inspiring and affirming to connect with her at this time when there is a strong platform for women artists to be historically contextualized and given an appropriate platform that can exist independently from gender marginalization. There is something very special about having an oral history of feminism being passed along from her, especially regarding abstraction, as it is inherently non-verbal and is instead read by formal, physical, and material signifiers. As much as I love a book or a documentary they are typically too impartial to understand the intricacies of influence and friendship between peers and mentors.

**What's the most embarrassing pop song on your studio playlist at the moment?**

It's hard to choose just one, but ever since the election results rolled in I have been going hard on the Spotify playlist "Lilith Fair Ladies of the 90s." So everything by Sarah McLachlan. She reminds me of my adopted cat Louise, and my mother.

# OBSERVER

## Highlights From NADA New York

The best artworks from a mixed art fair

By [Ryan Steadman](#) • 05/07/16 11:25am

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A painting by Jordan Kasey in the booth of Nicelle Beauchene. Photo: Courtesy of Ryan Steadman

With thinner crowds and less amped up dealers, day 2 of the New Art Dealer's Alliance New York fair was the perfect day to hole up in the Basketball City compound and see some new art from up-and-coming artists.

Steadman, Ryan. "Highlights From NADA New York," *Observer*, May 2016.

Though this year's fair looked decidedly more amateur than last year's (perhaps due to an influx of faux-naïve figuration) it remains a breezy, easy to navigate affair, and it still offers the potential to stumble upon some exciting work.



Jenine Marsh at the booth of Cooper Cole. Photo: Courtesy of Ryan Steadman

One gallery that always seems to deliver at fairs these days is the Toronto-based space Cooper Cole, who offered up a sizable helping of dreamy and wistful material from three Canadian-born artists. The highlight was Jenine Marsh's floor work, which consisted of polyurethane-infused flowers that had been painted over into one gun-metal gray area with protruding annuals. The work was perfectly completed by some one-off silkscreens of subliminal messages in commercials by Jesse Harris and hypnotic photos that reinvent horse clichés by Davida Nemeroff, who also happens to be the dealer that runs the successful Los Angeles-based space, Night Gallery.

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ARTS

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Not far from this was a solo presentation from the master of the essential touch, painter Joe Fyfe, at the booth of Galerie Christian Lethert. A range of modestly-sized collage works—made up of textured paper, printed photos, tape and painted paper or cloth—commingled here, always to a delicate and beautiful balance, like a dirty boulevard version of Richard Tuttle. Needless to say, Mr. Fyfe (unlike Mr. Tuttle) has been overlooked for too long and deserves a longer look.





Dave Hardy in the Regina Rex booth. Photo: Courtesy of Ryan Steadman

The artist-run space Regina Rex proved that they are not only here to stay, but that they're becoming a go-to gallery with one of the most impressive booths at the fair. Victoria Roth's jazzy and mottled large-scale paintings, which hint at weather systems, vegetation and flesh but wholly become something else, were an ideal fit with the veteran sculptor Dave Hardy's biomorphic forms made from tinted furniture foam, plexiglas, and other materials that range from ballpoint pens to coconuts.



Paintings by Bernhard Buhmann in the booth of Carbon12Dubai. Photo: Courtesy of Ryan Steadman

Steadman, Ryan. "Highlights From NADA New York," *Observer*, May 2016.



On the other side of the fair, Carbon 12, who came all the way from Dubai, had some luminous paintings on display by Viennese artist Bernhard Buhmann—a suite of highly controlled yet vexing objects. With an austere yet surprisingly wide-ranging palette, Mr. Buhmann fills his abstract spaces to the brim with partitions, tilting curves, thrown shadows and shimmering tints that all suggest the real world, but which stay utterly of another world. Pure painting at its best.

Speaking of painting, Nicelle Beauchene mounted an utterly gorgeous pairing of very different painters: The young breakout figurative painter Jordan Kasey and the masterful mid-career abstractionist Jim Lee. Mr. Lee, who has been perfecting his own balance of formalist painting and DIY Mr.-Fix-It-isms for years, offers up a wonder-wall teeming with small, gerrymandered flat works, complete with beautifully convoluted frames. Adjacent to these is an operatic, almost brazen, painting by Ms. Kasey, who, at the age of 27, has already forged a distinct style that mines the gutters of art history to brilliant effect. In this painting, a distorted female figure (in black and white) lounges on a disturbingly calm beach, with her face obscured by windswept hair. Using tropes nearer to Botero and Kostabi than Richter or other sycophantic favorites, Ms. Kasey also manages to integrate subtle color shifts that hint at computer or mechanical manipulation, making these works a marvel of timeless and finely crafted emotion (by the way, she also has a solo show coming up at the risk-taking Brooklyn gallery Signal, which was represented at the fair by a booth of also excellent paintings and Virtual Reality works courtesy of artist Rachel Rossin).



A painting by Andy Cahill in the booth of Safe Gallery. Photo: Courtesy of Ryan Steadman

The smaller project spaces which ring the fair were generally disappointing this year, but there were a few standouts, including gritty, punchy abstractions by Tracy Thomason at the Cuevas Tilleard booth, the postcard-sized, postminimal spatial mappings of Sophia Chai in the

Brooklyn gallery 106 Green's booth and a wallpapered reproduction of another Brooklyn gallery's space, Safe Gallery, which contained a suite of lovable works, highlighted by a bewitching painting by Andy Cahill that successfully picks up on the fairytale madness of Mike Kelley.

Other highlights included strong updates from Elise Ferguson in the booth of the East Hampton gallery Halsey McKay, Marlon Mullens via Portland, Ore.'s Adams and Ollman and Sam Levi Jones courtesy of the young gallery Patron from Chicago, Ill.

Overall, NADA has become more mixed talent-wise in order to survive (only so many great galleries can afford booths in major cities year after year) but as a fair known for being a "place of discovery," it continues to do its job, and patient viewing always seems to reap rewards.

## Art in America

PREVIEWS JAN. 13, 2016

### The Agenda: This Week in Los Angeles

by A.i.A. Editors

Saturday, January 16, 4:00 p.m.

Panel Discussion: "Sibling Rivalries"

Preceding the opening of "Sibling Rivalries," an exhibition of work by 14 New York-based artists and 14 Los Angeles-based artists, curators Max Presneill

and Ashley Garrett will moderate a panel discussion with the participating artists. The curators approached emerging art spaces in New York to nominate the New York-based artists, who each chose a Los Angeles-based artist to exhibit in the show. The pairings include Tracy Thomason with Harry Dodge, C. Michael Norton with Tim Hawkinson, Leah Dixon with Barnett Cohen, and Tatiana Kronberg with Dwyer Kilcollin.

**TAM**, 3320 Civic Center Drive, Torrance



# BLOUINARTINFO

## 5 Must-See Gallery Shows in New York: Jamian Juliano-Villani, David Salle, and More

BY SCOTT INDRISEK | MAY 06, 2015



David Salle's "Odes and Aires," 2014, currently on view at Skarstedt Gallery.  
(© John Berens Photography)

Jealous of jetsetting friends who are currently simmering in the tang of Venice's canals, getting hopelessly lost en route to the Giardini? Here are five stellar shows currently on view in New York that might help soothe that Biennale envy.

**Jamian Juliano-Villani at JTT, through May 17 (170a Suffolk Street)**  
(<http://www.jttnyc.com/6953,6955>)

It seems like just yesterday that Juliano-Villani, a former studio assistant to Erik Parker, was making pleasantly funky paintings that roiled with slapstick absurdities, stoner humor, and laidback cartoon idiocy (in a very good way). But don't expect to feel so good after leaving her solo exhibition on the Lower East Side, which crams three epic, multi-paneled works onto as many walls, and oozes with the lurking dread of a bad trip. "Fly Kama Sutra" appears to depict a masturbatory alien and a voodoo doll, while "Windmills of Humanity" could be a 21st-century videogame landscape orchestrated by Dali. "Penny's Change," though, is the real slobbering nightmare: The head and torso of a woman in a black puffy jacket — her features smudgily erased, her mouth a gummy, decrepit hillbilly mess — floating in zombie bliss over a wasted desert landscape.

**David Salle at Skarstedt, through June 27 (550 West 21st Street)**  
([http://www.skarstedt.com/exhibitions/2015-04-30\\_david-salle/](http://www.skarstedt.com/exhibitions/2015-04-30_david-salle/))

The 62-year-old artist, who has the impertinent curiosity of a painter half his age, shows a series of "Late Product Paintings," colorful blasts of jarring imagery — tires, toothpaste, cigarettes, breasts surfacing from a bright, Richterish splat — along with another series of "Silver Paintings." The latter are photo transfers to canvas using shots taken, in 1992, in Salle's studio, showing a model in front of that decade's "Early Product Paintings." As their name suggests, they have a silvery sheen, but there's nothing perfectionist about the surfaces, which are uneven, at times pocked, as a chance result of the photo-transfer process itself. The juxtaposition of the two series is brilliant — we get capitalism's hypercolorful cheerleading face side-by-side with its elegiac, quasi-funereal flipside. In certain "Late Product Paintings," Salle incorporates samples of the "Silver" paintings, the kind of self-cannibalization that makes you think of the artist as a haywire idea-machine — part paper-shredder, part cerebral blender — drawing absolutely everything in before spewing it back out by hand. "Faster Healing," 2014, places a "Silver" image in the center of a comparatively bright composition — some sort of cascading crackers, a smattering of vaguely AbEx splatter — as if the monochrome element is a concert poster rudely wheatpasted over the canvas by a vandal. With a sharper, less painterly touch, that everything-and-the-kitchen-sink aesthetic might seem like a response to the overload of digital culture (as it does in Jeff Koons's similarly dense, assistant-rendered

paintings from recent years). Salle's "Late Product Paintings" don't seem to take a critical stance toward what they regurgitate — there's too much joy here in the mismatchings and oddball alignments of unrelated things, and I imagined he enjoyed overstocking these compositions to the point of bursting — but the somber "Silver Paintings" punctuate that feverish mood, dragging the consumerist bombast back down to earth.

**"Tide Pool" at Greenpoint Terminal Gallery, through May 30 (67 West Street, Suite 320, Greenpoint, Brooklyn)**  
(<http://greenpointterminalgallery.com/Exhibitions/TidePool/work.html>)

This four-person show — Andrew Guenther, Jordan Kasey, Nicholas Moenich, and Tracy Thomason — is worth venturing out to the industrial banks of the East River. Kasey's inventive figurative paintings depict bodies as porous landscapes or, in "Person Asleep In A Beach Chair," as looming voids. Thomason's small-scale, textured abstractions — made using marble dust, sheepskin, and other materials — recall the kitschy eeriness of Donald Moffatt.

**Charles Burchfield at DC Moore, through June 13 (535 West 22nd Street)**  
([http://www.dcmooregallery.com/exhibitions/2015-05-01\\_charles-burchfield-the-nature-of-seeing](http://www.dcmooregallery.com/exhibitions/2015-05-01_charles-burchfield-the-nature-of-seeing))

An almost painfully good survey of the late artist's paintings and drawings, this show is a must-visit for anyone whose Burchfield mania was reignited by the pair of works in the Whitney's "America Is Hard to See." Nature in his hands is always wildly alive — shimmering, squiggling, shaking its branches. Poetic realism morphs into the psychedelic blur of the early '60s works. A series of early ink-on-paper drawings — bare lines and shards of text ("the spirit of winter lurking in a woods") — posit Burchfield as some unexpected proto-Raymond Pettibon (<https://twitter.com/indrisek/status/594238209162350593>). These are delicious landscapes of the mind, alternately joyous and riddled with anxiety.

**Math Bass** (<http://momaps1.org/exhibitions/view/397>) **and Jos de Grueter/Harald Thys** (<http://momaps1.org/exhibitions/view/399>) **at MoMA PS1, both through August 31 (22-25 Jackson Avenue, Long Island City)**

A one-two punch of terrific spring shows at PS1. Bass's "Off the Clock" works magic with pared-down sculptural elements: ladders, stacked terracotta pots, a metal zigzag on the floor, a vibrant yellow fence. Her paintings are similarly simple, speaking in their own language of cigarettes, alligators, pyramids, and coyly suggestive geometric anatomies. The Belgian oddballs de Grueter & Thys have a selection of films screening in MoMA's basement — slow-burn strangeness, with their actors generally frozen in place while computer-altered voiceovers spin implausible tales. Upstairs, "Fine Arts" creates a mini-museum of elegant watercolors, all in black frames with straightforward descriptive labels. There seems to be no rhyme or reason to the choice of subject, or how the works are arranged. Hunting scenes, moments from history, and quirky animal scenes all coexist, none more important than the others — "The Eruption of Mount Vesuvius" just as privileged as "Four Dogs And a Cat On a Bicycle."

**ALSO WORTH SEEING:** Hope Gangloff at [Susan Inglett Gallery](#) (<http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1146506/hope-gangloff-colors-the-everyday>), through June 6; David Shrigley at [Anton Kern](#) (<http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1135422/painting-tongue-firmly-in-cheek-david-shrigley-gets-colorful>), through May 23.



## “FRESH FOR(U)MS” *Garden Party/Arts*

by Kara L. Rooney

BROOKLYN | MAY – SEPTEMBER 2012

Back in May of 2012, I was invited to attend a dinner by an artist friend of mine, Alyse Ronayne. Ronayne, a graduate of the Maryland Institute College of Art and current M.F.A. candidate at Bard, was featuring work in conjunction with a new project starting in Brooklyn, centered around the theme of roving feminist exhibitions. The “organization” (I use quotes because the project is in such an early stage of its tenure that even the founders are not sure how to categorize the venture), called Garden Party/Arts (GP/A), is the brainchild of E.E. Ikeler and Ariel Roman, two Brooklynites whose artistic and social proclivities happen to overlap in interesting ways. Ikeler is an astute academic and painter committed to furthering queer dialogue in art, while Roman, who originally hails from Mexico and more recently, the Oakland area, runs an art and design studio called HellaCrisis with her husband that coupled with her role as co-owner of a food truck in California. Together, Ikeler and Roman have conceived a platform that engages both the social and visual idiosyncrasies of art viewing in a way that is intelligent, fresh, and surprisingly accessible: the backyard gardens of friends.

GP/A’s first exhibitional installment was titled *HUZZY*, its premise based on the canonical essay by David Getsy, “Immoderate Couplings: Transformations and Genders in John Chamberlain’s Work” (in D. Tompkins, ed., *It’s All in the Fit: The Work of John Chamberlain*, Marfa, Texas: Chinati Foundation, 2009), in which the author offers a transgendered reading of the work of John Chamberlain, specifically referencing one of the artist’s earlier crushed metal sculptures from the 1960s of the same name. Riffing on the slang term for a loose woman (hussy), as well as on Chamberlain’s encoded use of the word as an underlying feminine trope for a body of work typically associated with the über-masculine heroics of the 1960s, Ikeler curated an exhibition of three female artists—Tracy Thomason, Ronayne, and herself—whose approaches were similarly clever, playfully cajoling the viewer into a participation in feminist critique, albeit without the heavily wielded hammer of theory.

Instead, the work exhibited in the back garden of 147 Halsey Street featured pastel and Day-Glo-flecked sculpture and painting: Thomason’s transparent, amoebic three-dimensional form, splayed flat on the ground and filled with gallons of bright pink L.A. Looks hair gel; Ikeler’s monochrome abstract renditions hung on the fence of the property, the painting’s surfaces obscured by chain and nylon mesh laundry bags; and Ronayne’s spray paint and mixed media compositions on free-standing metal sheets wedged into the earth (the closest in terms of material execution to Chamberlain’s crushed metal sculptures). Neither gender-specific nor traditionally installed, these objects, all executed in the language of abstraction and left to the mercy of the elements, took on associations much larger than any individual body-politics could offer—exactly what Ikeler and Roman were shooting for. In Ikeler’s words, “An artist’s work is often enriched by an understanding of its context within the world...how it is written about and discussed. We at GP/A wanted to have those elements built in.”

GP/A’s platform is two-pronged: it consists of a monthly exhibition with accompanying text, open to the public one Saturday each month and staged in different locations throughout Brooklyn. The following evening is reserved for an invitation-only dinner party; the guest list comprises participating artists, academics and/or critics of their choosing. “The premise of the dinner,” according to the organizers, “is that the [exhibiting] artists can use the occasion of their show as an opportunity to invite a guest they wish to be in dialogue with, but are perhaps not already [acquainted with] in a personal or professional sense.” They go on to say that “the dinner does not serve the function of a critique situation. It’s a social event. It is meant to be a critical and intellectual discussion, but it is also informal.”

As a guest of this first installment, I can attest to the refreshingly collegial atmosphere created by Roman and Ikeler: a sit-down event with home-cooked fare where, finally, a group of contemporary female artists who were not afraid to call themselves feminists sat down to discuss art, life, and on a more serious note, the art market and gender politics. Granted, this platform for social and academic exchange is nothing groundbreaking—the associations with Rirkrit Tiravanija’s performative explorations and Judy Chicago’s “The Dinner Party” spring immediately to mind. What sets GP/A’s platform apart is the fact that these gatherings are not staged as a public event, but rather, aim to mimic the intimate dinner-table discussions of bygone eras by bringing together a small, select cohort of like-minded individuals within a determined domestic setting.

On a more subversive note, and as Ikeler mentioned in our conversations surrounding the birth of the project, “We also like that the “garden party” evokes Victorian proto-feminism, so that a leisurely afternoon spent sipping drinks in a backyard is an opportunity for feminist scheming.” To achieve this level of critical discourse, art viewing, and social exchange in one weekend in a backyard garden in Bedstuy is hardly par for the course; rather, by grounding the participants within such historical frameworks, and consciously stepping outside of those boundaries by using them to present an occasion for the viewing of contemporary feminist art, it is downright avant-garde.



Alyse Ronayne, Installation view of “Moon Math” and “Untitled (DomeMath),” 2012. Spray Paint, Cellophane, Aluminum.



E. E. Ikeler “Mesh Mediation” and “Mesh Mediation (Rainbow)” 2012. Enamel, Spray Paint, Canvas, Wood, Mesh on Panel.

## PEACH FUZZ AND CREAM

**On Tracy Thomason's *Highlights, Low Fades, and Deep Cuts at Tiger Strikes Asteroid*.**

Before I've even had a chance to slide the door closed behind me, fully entering Tracy Thomason's Brooklyn studio, she's carting a massive rectangular canvas, glowing green and peach, across the room. Her small feet shuffle beneath its bulk, the scene evoking an abstracted Incredible Hulk, mid-transformation. She's speaking of transparency, "the layers that are happening," when the canvas appears behind a zebra-print cloth with cut-outs, the backdrop as skin, cleavage, "the nature of revealing something through making and abstraction."

Animal references abound in Thomason's work along with humanity's more animalistic tendencies. She was drawn to the zebra fabric because of its similarity to some of Georgia O'Keeffe's abstracted flower paintings. The cutout pieces represent the areas of the pattern that most resemble mustaches or vaginas, she explains.

Thomason's paintings, sculpture, and combined pieces (three-dimensional "accessories" attached to two-dimensional surfaces) stir an impulse to touch, try on, wrap oneself up inside the history of her chosen (often donated and/or recycled) materials, evoking sunny afternoons spent rifling through a rack of threadbare jeans and faded leather jackets at a thrift store, a faint pencil mark waiting to be brushed away like a stray hair off a lover's shoulder. Actual hair drapes from abstract canvases like a lowered false eyelash or Amish-style beard. A chunk of alabaster glows with the embarrassed blush of expertly applied rouge. Splotches of hair gel blot a stretched canvas like sex. A felted and dyed yoga mat is infused with a sense of abandoned (or repurposed) idealism. Simply put, her pieces speak for themselves.

Alas, an essay requires words. A logical place to find them might be her media lists, which read like a found poem: Hand-felted and dyed wool, deconstructed leather gloves, and oil and tears on wood. Acrylic, paper clay, chalk pastel, clairvoyance, eye shadow, and collaged canvas on canvas. LA Looks hair gel, oil, and temperance on canvas.

The art resonates even without these small revelations of the artist's process and intent. But with them, it radiates—intangibles, implication, and conventional materials combine to form a transparent layer of emotion and mystery: Is temperance a play on words, an admixture of tempera and permanence? Or is it in reference to the restraint of the work, its sobriety?

*Blue Shift*, with its muted horizon, a field of blue above beige, stained with globs of hair gel (flexible hold), resembles a Rorschach test. If you stare long enough, a face comes into view, or a coffee-stained treasure map. The gel's gassy, sporty, overpowering scent requires that Thomason act quickly, and its liquidity necessitates working on the ground, Pollock-style. "I just squirt it on; it's like a quick cum shot," she says, inhaling hesitant laughter, then explaining, "I use that for lack of a better term." Her statement, and near-retraction, speak to overtly sexual gestures that permeate her pieces, as well as the overarching hum of modesty-cum-temperance that provides their quiet beauty.

Giannini, Melissa. "Peach Fuzz and Cream." *Tiger Strikes Asteroid*, August 2011.



*Blue Shift's* sister, *Rocky Spine*, has a curved ridge of raised white beads down her center, like an arched back or pearl necklace. Other feminine references, a hair flip, comb, hand mirror, and pony emerge from the acrylic and eye shadow like illustrations from a 1950s children's book about sugar and spice and everything nice. In an earlier piece, *Copper Mine*, our eyes are invited down a rectangular shaft of increasingly copper-toned canvas, its wrinkles and imperfections blasted with a healthy dose of spray tanner. There's a feeling of transformation, of waking up to Joan Rivers's voice peddling leg makeup on a late-night infomercial.

*Stormy Leather*, a more recent piece, also speaks directly to transformation and conflicting desires to reveal and cover up, desire itself versus virtue. A bare stretcher frame is draped and wrapped with hand-felted and dyed wool and a deconstructed pink leather glove, resembling fiberglass insulation, a wall's guts and inner-workings exposed. It is in conversation with the artist that I learn of the felt's former life as a yoga mat. The gloves were a gift from a friend, an attempted dye job gone wrong. As a whole, the piece recognizes the beauty in failure, frames it, and puts it on display.

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# title

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## Tracy Thomason: Highlights, Low Fades, and Deep Cuts



### Tiger Strikes Asteroid

By Jacob Feige





Corruption, bodies, and sexuality are foremost in my mind as I look over the nine works in Tracy Thomason's first solo exhibition at [Tiger Strikes Asteroid, Highlights, Low Fades, and Deep Cuts](#). I'm surprised by my own thinking, really, because the deconstructed, highly material canvases and single freestanding sculpture that comprise the show are firmly planted in twentieth century abstraction. There are nods to the experimental Italian painter Alberto Burri in fabric pasted onto canvas, gestural homages to Joan Miró and Georgia O'Keeffe, and even a few forms that channel the minimalist painter Robert Mangold. Thomason, who lives in Brooklyn, expands these twentieth century tropes, making them vulnerable, nostalgic, tarnished, and exuberant through material association and degradation.

The materials list for *Surround and Compress* (all work 2011) reads "Hand-felted wool, LA Looks hair gel, pencil prudence, and oil on canvas." The piece is a wooden hoop that precisely inscribes a square canvas touched with subtle gestural marks and diagonal lines. A dirty rainbow of felt wraps around the hoop, and I'm reminded of cotton candy on wet pavement that I saw as I left the circus twenty-five years ago. The marks on the surface of the canvas, which are straight abstract painting from six feet away, resolve into the residue of bodily fluids or cheap cleaning products on closer inspection. Made with hair gel, they make me think of a dirty, sweet smelling bathroom. I feel a little guilty and voyeuristic just looking at this work.

For all its material association, I'm brought back to the diagonal lines, irregular, hard-edged blobs, and general formality of this work. These are, after all, highly composed pieces, carefully considered, largely balanced, and formally resolved. Reconciling the two sides of Thomason's work—the part that makes me think of Robert Mangold and the old cotton candy part—is the most difficult and interesting part of the show.

Materiality's supreme position in painting has been an institutional and aesthetic norm since the modernist critic Clement Greenberg insisted on it in the early 1950s. Art that acted outside its own material character, so Greenberg said, subordinated itself to other genres, especially literature. I have to admit that I find it irksome when contemporary artists bow down to this staid idea more than sixty years after it was first articulated. A recent resurgence in this Ab-Ex philosophy makes me extra-wary. On the surface, Thomason is a materialist in the modernist vein, avoiding transcendence and limiting her approaches to straightforward manipulations and applications. Considered more associatively, there's a whole lot to think about in the old felt, cosmetics, and traditional materials that comprise this work.

In *Chatter Dusted Light*, zebra-print fabric practically falls off the canvas, irregular ends just barely touching the floor. There's some spray tan on the zebra print, according to the materials list. I think about real zebras, then fake zebra prints, and then a fake tan on someone wearing a crummy zebra print. Before long, a narrative portrait of sorts emerges, telling an ambiguous story cobbled together from the past uses and lives of the stuff in the painting. The abstracted orifices, eyelashes, and mustaches in nearly every piece in *Highlights, Low Fades, and Deep Cuts* take these narratives in seedy, bodily directions.

Thomason's work delves into materiality in such complex ways as to break through to the other side, ultimately telling formalism to shove off in favor of open-ended, hair gel and zebra print association. This is a tricky brand of abstraction that brings faded, worn memories into materialism as it flirts with you. Greenberg would've hated it, and I hope that Thomason would consider that a compliment.

*Jacob Feige is an artist and teacher. His work has recently been shown at Chambers FA, Beijing, Movement, UK, and Jolie Laide, Philadelphia.*

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