

# FRANKLIN EVANS

someofsomeofall

MILES

McENERY

GALLERY

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## BRAINSPACE: RECENT WORKS BY FRANKLIN EVANS

By David Ebony

*The hypercultural is an immediate side by side of different cultural forms. In the hypercultural space, in the hypermarket of cultures, there is no “hiking”: different cultural forms, ideas, sounds and smells are offered up as borderless hyperspace. ... The hypercultural space involves no transition or transit. Hyperculture produces a singular “here.” If heterogeneous contents lie adjacent to one another, there is no need for the “trans.” Contemporary culture is marked not by the trans, the multi or the inter but by the hyper.*

—Byung-Chul Han, *Hyperculture: Culture and Globalization*

Evans's work is process-oriented, with an improvisational, open-ended, and provisional quality that is part of his concept of the "perpetual studio." He works on several paintings at once, and he occasionally places the canvases on the floor to be trampled at certain stages in the process, providing the finished works with a weathered, vintage patina. Evans recently presented a full-scale painting installation titled *perpetualstudio* in the exhibition *What a Wonderful World* (2022-23) at the MAXXI Museum in Rome. Sue Scott, whose New York gallery hosted one of Evans's earliest *perpetualstudio* installations, in 2009, referenced the MAXXI work in her essay for the recent book *Mothers of Invention*. She notes that Evans sees "in the push and pull between abstraction and representation, a way to deal with biographical issues such as queer identity, his Mexican heritage on his mother's side, his life as an artist, and his background in economics and finance. ... Each contiguous installation is an extension of his studio practice and continues exploration of what he sees as his 'brainspace.'"<sup>2</sup>

A self-proclaimed maximalist, Evans loads his compositions to the bursting point—with many lines, colors, abstract shapes, and figurative elements activating the surface. Contradictorily, all elements seem to thrust out of the confines of the picture plane and pull the viewer back into this boisterous and seemingly anarchic brainspace. In a recent series that Evans refers to as *someofsomeofall*, however, a sense of order ultimately prevails, indicating a sort of ad hoc, incomplete compendium of painterly and personal introspection and exploration.

In works such as *tapescape2twofour* and *tapescape2008atdilig* (both 2024), the bands of color often resemble long strips of masking tape still attached to the canvases. The surfaces are basically flat, but subtle drop shadows here and there—among the tools in Evans's arsenal of subtle *trompe l'oeil* effects—lend many of the works in this exhibition a collage feel. Rigorously abstract, *tapescape2twofour*—a large composition (70 by 50 inches) with long, compact rows of colorful bands defining large triangular shapes—nevertheless suggests from a distance an aerial view of a cityscape with a traffic-jammed intersection and labyrinthine overpasses and underpasses. I like to think of this particularly mapped-out brainspace as a "brainscape."

Superhighways of color bars—roads to nowhere and everywhere—form elongated chevrons on either side of the canvas that press toward each other near the upper center in a tense exchange. Here, Evans elicits this maplike reading by means of a quasi-Cubist visual language, or perhaps by offering a dialogue with Orphism, as in early 20th century modernist abstractions by František Kupka, or Robert and Sonia Delaunay.

Allusions to art history abound in Evans's work. Like an archeologist of modernism (as well as of recent developments), he mines art history in novel ways. References to Paul Cézanne, Henri Matisse, Stuart Davis, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Barnett Newman, Norman Lewis, Kerry James

<sup>2</sup>Eleanor Heartney, Helaine Posner, Nancy Princenthal, and Sue Scott, *Mothers of Invention: The Feminist Roots of Contemporary Art* (London: Lund Humphries, 2024), pp. 132-33.





Judy Pfaff, *Grasshopper* (installation view), 2016,  
Multimedia, CR 10, Linlithgo, NY



Jasper Johns, *Between the Clock and the Bed*, 1981,  
Encaustic on canvas, three panels, 6' 1/8" x 10' 6/8"  
(183.2 x 321 cm). Gift of Agnes Gund,  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

Marshall, Frank Stella, and many other artists haunt Evans's compositions in fragmented reiterations of familiar images and in re-creations of iconic signatures. This is not ironic appropriation, however; Evans's strategy aligns with the art critic Leo Steinberg's description of Rembrandt's adoption of images and motifs from other artists in his introduction to the 1978 book *Art About Art*. "As I see it," Steinberg writes of Rembrandt, "he did not crib, quote or borrow from need; he adopted from an over-plus of generosity. He did not copy to supply a want of imagination, nor to mock or parody—you can see that the transcription was made with reverence and affection."<sup>3</sup>

In his work and in conversation, Evans is generous in acknowledging his appreciation for the great modernists, as well as for many peers—among them, Dana Schutz, Inka Essenhigh, James Siena, Charline von Heyl, Dona Nelson, Jackie Gendel, Elena Sisto, and especially Judy Pfaff, whose process-oriented sculptures and vast installations, such as *Grasshopper* (2016) at CR-10 in upstate New York, resonate with Evans's own brainspace.

The art-historical references in *tapescape2008atdilig* are of a somewhat personal nature. In this rather intimate work (28 by 20 inches), a quiltlike cross-hatching of colorful lines in the lower part of the composition recalls Jasper Johns's recurring linear geometric patterns in Johns's 1989 painting *Between the Clock and the Bed*. Johns, in turn, borrowed the motif from the 1940-43 Edvard Munch painting of the same name. The patterning also alludes to the striped floors of one of Evans's early perpetualstudio installations. On the upper right is a triangular space crammed with repeated images of a bird, the gracefully delineated heads and beaks accentuated by touches of translucent pastel hues. The bird motif is a direct reference to the painter John Dilg, one of Evans's mentors and an influential teacher at the University of Iowa, where Evans earned his master of fine arts degree. In this way, Evans's work can be seen as self-reflective and autobiographical.

In several other works, Evans manages to suggest a narrative or impart an autobiographical statement without using conventional figures or traditionally defined social spaces. In *tapescapestuescott* (2024), for instance, at the center of the composition, the bird motif borrowed from Dilg recurs above a side-

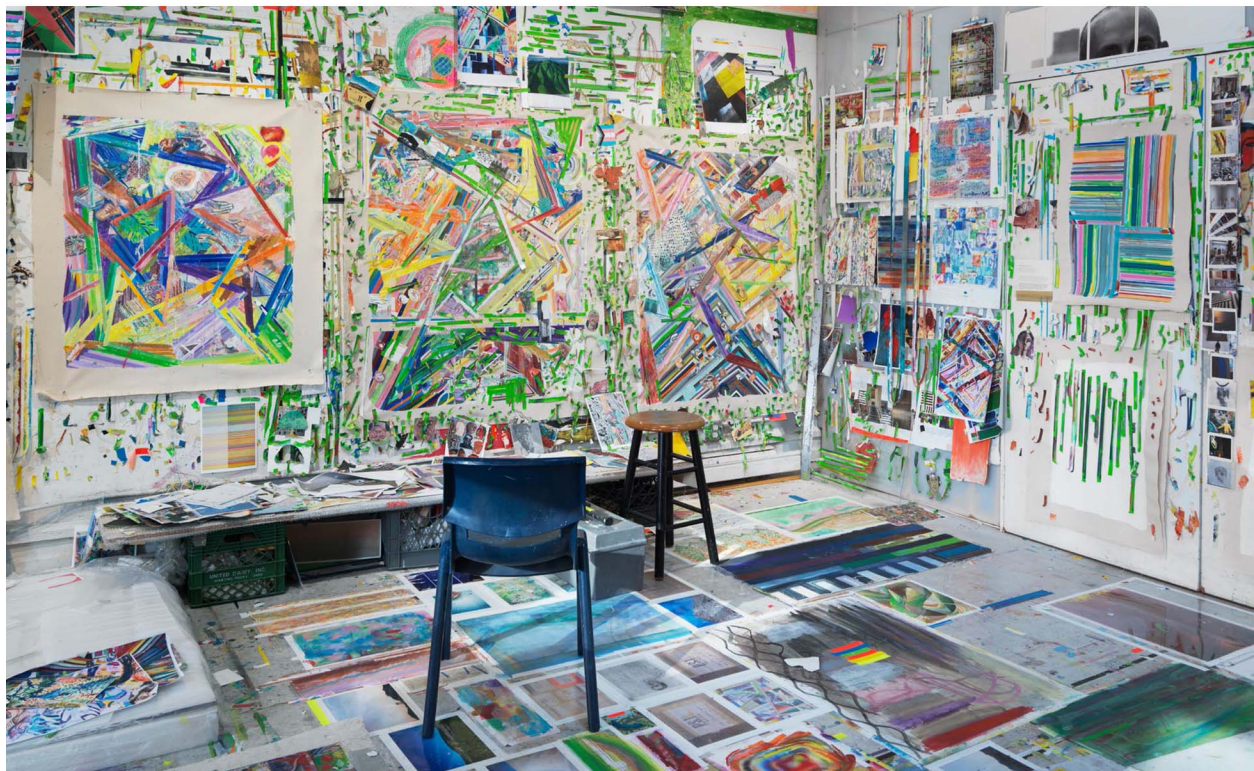
<sup>3</sup>Jean Lipman and Richard Marshall, *Art About Art*, introduction by Leo Steinberg (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978), p. 28.




ways image of a schematic head with an elaborate headdress—derived from a work of pre-Columbian art. These delicately etched images appear against a network of colorful, irregular crosshatch lines that one might find in a rag rug or a Gee’s Bend quilt. This luminous palimpsest alludes to Evans’s student days at the University of Iowa (Dilg) and his Mexican heritage (pre-Columbian art), while the geometric stripe patterns refer to details of an early iteration of the *perpetualstudio* at Sue Scott Gallery in 2009, as indicated in the work’s title.

Evans’s special variety of intense, hyperbolic narrative is in full bloom in *compressionscape* (2024), a large work (68 by 69 inches) in which layered clusters of various human and animal heads jostle one another for visual predominance. Fragmented quotes, apparently cribbed from Pablo Picasso or German Expressionist portraits—small, large, upright, and upside down—emerge from the dense, sensuous, and unruly atmosphere. Across this hedonistic expanse, jaguar heads materialize in several places as if peering through the thick forest of signs and signifiers, triumphant creatures in this unique jungle brainscape. Protectors, transformers, and gods of time and the underworld, jaguars were central to pre-Columbian religion, especially in Maya culture. The jaguar images, a stand-in for the artist (a self-portrait of sorts), recur in many of Evans’s works. The repetitions in this composition (and indeed throughout his oeuvre) establish intricate networks of roadways, tunnels, corridors, conduits, alleyways, and even meandering forest pathways. Ultimately, they provide metaphoric transport to another place, time, or dimension, with the destination being a singularly inevitable “here.” ■

**David Ebony** is a contributing editor of Yale University Press online, *Art in America*, *Snapshot of the Art World*, and *The Brooklyn Rail*, among other publications; he is also the author of numerous artist monographs. He lives and works in New York.





A photograph of Franklin Evans, a man with glasses and a dark shirt, standing in his studio. He is positioned on the left side of the frame, with his arms crossed. Behind him is a large, vibrant, and complex abstract painting that fills the right side of the image. The painting is composed of numerous overlapping, colorful geometric shapes, lines, and patterns, creating a dense and dynamic visual field. The studio environment is visible in the background, with various art supplies and other works hanging on the walls.

Published on the occasion of the exhibition

## FRANKLIN EVANS someofsomeall

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# MOTHERS OF INVENTION

THE FEMINIST ROOTS OF CONTEMPORARY ART

Eleanor Heartney, Helaine Posner,  
Nancy Princenthal and Sue Scott



# BEYOND TRAGIC AND TIMELESS

WOMEN, ABSTRACTION AND FEMINISM

Sue Scott

*I want to reclaim abstract art for women and transform it on our own terms.<sup>1</sup>*

—Harmony Hammond

the oral histories that exist around the world, and this story has many names. In most versions, an acorn or a coconut falls on an animal's head with a resounding thump. Believing the end is near, the animal goes on a campaign to spread the news that the sky is falling. Everyone she meets joins the hysteria, not believing what they see with their own eyes but what they hear from others. Myth congeals into fact quickly. Just as McClelland absorbed the ambient sounds of the playground, social media has become an ambient situation. With the rise of social media and cable news shows, the speed with which rumors fly can have devastating effects. The word *Boo* is both a sound and a word. It emerges, like a warning to Dorothy to turn back, in white and black cursive, floating across the skies as if it's in on the cosmic joke. The sky isn't really falling.

### Post-Postmodern

'Feminism is no longer univocal', art historian Jeanne Willette notes. 'Feminism has become a movement of many voices, male and female, Western and non-Western.'<sup>43</sup> Today, artists of both genders making abstract work are deeply indebted to the pioneering contributions of the female abstract painters who preceded them. In a postmodern art world, 21st-century artists can draw from any number of sources, many of which came out of feminist innovations – including Performance art, Process art, a multiperspectival approach to artmaking, the use of unorthodox materials and means and reimagined craft. Unlike so many of the women painters working abstractly who had an ambivalent relationship with the pulls of pure abstraction and content, these artists use abstraction to explore the explicitly political and the deeply personal. While this reflects postmodern tendencies and styles, it is also deeply indebted to feminism for its objection to established hierarchies and rigid rules.

This is certainly true for Franklin Evans (b.1967; fig.30) who sees, in the push and pull between abstraction and representation, a way to deal with biographical issues such as queer identity, his Mexican heritage on his mother's side, his life as an artist and his background in economics and finance. 'My work has a strong relationship to the



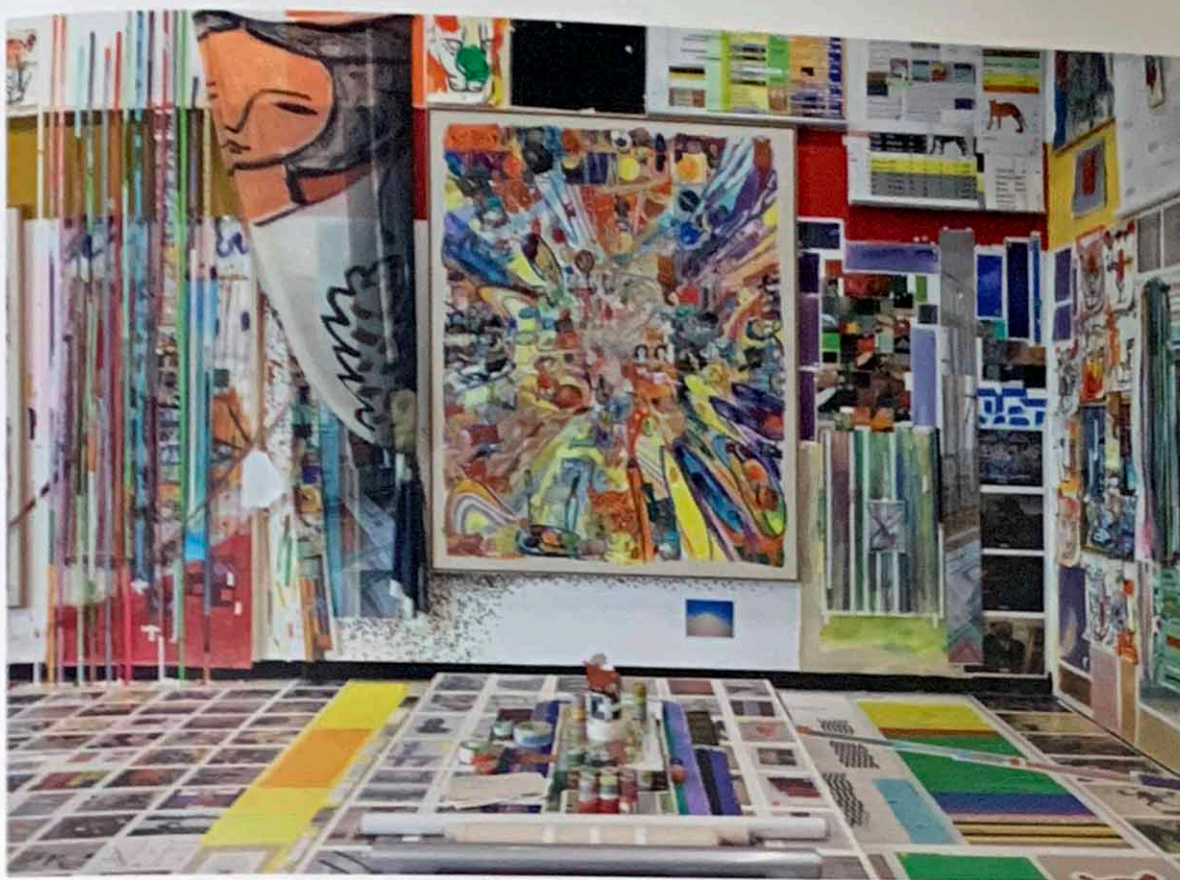


Fig.30 Franklin Evans, *perpetualstudio*, 2022, painting, collage, site-specific installation, dimensions variable, commissioned by MAXXI – National Museum of 21st Century Arts, Rome

aspect of feminism that challenges the white cisgendered heteronormative patriarchal position of modernist painting/abstraction.' Evans says, 'My work as queer and absorptive uses the powerful impulses and visual knowledge of modernism'.<sup>44</sup>

Each contiguous installation is an extension of his studio practice and continued exploration of what he sees as his 'brain space'. Evans is not only a cannibal of other artists but dismantles and reassembles his own work for each successive installation. The cacophony of visual images in any exhibition can include traditional paintings on canvas; floor to ceiling screens made from painter's tape; press releases from other art shows; art books; paint cans; faux Polaroids of friends or trompe l'oeil paintings of the Polaroids and homages to an entire litany of artists from Caspar David Friedrich and Henri Matisse to Donald Judd and Frank Stella. Recently, Evans has looked to the work of Pat Steir. She is, he says, 'now powering several of my paintings as I collapse her forceful drip onto my imagistic paintings – as a sort of dance among process, abstraction, and image memory'.<sup>45</sup> He sees in Helen Frankenthaler a connection to the way he uses the floor to make some



of the work, the staining of the canvas and paper, but also in the way the floor is an important element of his installations.

Evans acknowledges his debt to feminist art practices, noting:

The awareness that the specificity of singularity is contingent upon the forces surrounding it (history of patriarchy, colonialism – both the gains and losses of each). I tend to draw from the gains, but I also see that this lens is tied to feminism in its powerful grasp of agency. Feminism grabs the situations and negates, expands and creates from a new vantage. It is multivalent. It employs the history of otherness as a force, materially, perspectively, imagistically, abstractly.<sup>46</sup>

Early on, Evans was inspired by Judy Pfaff's expansion of painting into an abstract field to realize his own paintings in the third dimension. While Pfaff's use of materials – pigment, canvas – was familiar to Evans, it was the way she pulled them apart and into an environment that he connected to, and it is the reason he now describes his own work as 'painting installations'. His environments are 'othered', a place to enter, a way to experience time and space. The paintings are worlds within worlds, psychedelic without a single-point perspective. A recent incarnation of Evans's ongoing explorations entitled *perpetualstudio* (2022) commissioned by MAXXI, the National Museum of XXI Century Arts in Rome, as part of the exhibition *What a Wonderful World* (2022) allowed him to increase the experience to even a grander scale.

It is through his lived experience that Mark Bradford (b.1961) channels the ever-widening aftershocks of feminist art, both with his choice of subject matter and materials and the way he looks at art history. As Dallas writer and poet Darryl Ratcliff writes, Bradford felt 'the most revered artists were, as he describes them, "white male cowboy macho heterosexual painters," and declar[ed] himself, as a six-foot-eight-inch skinny Black gay man, to be just as macho. "I was hiding behind the material and having a conversation with art history and who wasn't there," referring to people of color and women.'<sup>47</sup>

Bradford came to art in a circuitous way, working as a stylist in his mother's hair salon in South Central Los Angeles for most of his 20s, saving money to make extended visits to Europe each year. He enrolled at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) at the age of 30, earning

Many of the most important tendencies in current art are rooted in the ideals of the early feminist movement. This original and thought-provoking book examines four key areas where art and feminism have entwined to transform society while offering a vision of a world that works for all.

Blurring the boundaries between art and life, the painters, sculptors and performance artists featured here have been instrumental in shaping issues now dominating the art world: the vulnerability of the environment, the rise of activist art, the challenge to the reign of high technology (including digital culture), and the development of a new language of abstraction.

Illustrated with a spread of work from the last sixty years (and including contextual discussion of earlier practitioners too), this book makes a compelling case for the ways that feminist art and artists laid the groundwork for today's globalized, multi-media, postmodern art world.

'In one genre after the next, with clarity and a wealth of insight, the essays here show how critical innovations by women artists have been not merely additions or correctives to established art history, but have served as the beating, living motor force that has kept the entire corpus of recent art alive and vital.'

*Ben Davis, National Art Critic, Artnet News*

'*Mothers of Invention* is a vital contribution to the ongoing re-evaluation of women's role in the evolution of contemporary art. These four remarkable writers draw on decades of experience to create a narrative that profoundly reshapes our understanding of art today.'

*Susan Fisher Sterling, Ph.D., The Alice West Director, National Museum of Women in the Arts*

'In *Mothers of Invention*, Heartney, Posner, Princenthal, and Scott have given us the most comprehensive and convincing argument for why women artists should not be seen as outliers, second thoughts, or "nice to haves", but rather integral to our understanding of both the contemporary moment and to the history of art itself.'

*Hall W. Rockefeller, founder of Less Than Half*

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## Franklin Evans: The Studio as Episteme

Raphael Rubinstein, 2021



## Franklin Evans: The Studio as Episteme

Raphael Rubinstein

Every artist, every writer, every practitioner in any creative field, assembles a pantheon of predecessors and contemporaries. The art-gods given a place of honor in such aesthetic temples can be welcome influences or potent adversaries, they can be figures to emulate, or foils to rebel against, or all these things at once. Various models have been theorized to describe how such relationships function. In his influential 1919 essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” T.S. Eliot argued that a poet’s full engagement with literary tradition entailed a process of depersonalization: “What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.” A little more than a half century later, Harold Bloom, in his 1973 book *The Anxiety of Influence*, depicted the dialogue with one’s predecessors as an agon, a Freudian battle for psychic and artistic dominance, that often hinges on intentional misreadings.

The same year Bloom’s book was published, Philip Guston, by then deep into his late figurative period, created *Pantheon*, a medium-size oil on panel painting of a lightbulb and a tiny canvas on an easel surrounded by the names of the artists who had nourished him: Masaccio, Piero, Giotto, Tiepolo and de Chirico. Of course, Guston had many more influences, many more inspirations, than these five Italian artists. We know, for instance, that he loved the work of Max Beckmann and that Sung-era Chinese painters were his supreme ideal, but in no other painting is he so explicit about his artistic debts.

If Eliot portrays tradition as a means of escaping from the self and Bloom argues for influence as a tense struggle, Guston expresses something more like gratitude and love for the artists who inspired him. Franklin Evans, an artist who has long grappled with questions of tradition and influence, avails himself of all these approaches. In his anthological paintings and installations woven from countless art-historical citations he subsumes his own identity into the visual heritage of the past (and present), confronts questions of originality and

innovation and, last but not least, invokes the artists in his own pantheon with an intensity that borders on obsession.

Like all of us, Evans inhabits a culture increasingly defined by its networks of innumerable, instantly available images. As a painter, that is, someone who produces unique analog objects that belong to a medium with roots in the pre-digital, pre-Internet, indeed, pre-photographic culture, Evans has a choice whether to reject or embrace current technological realities. There are many painters who define painting as a mode of resistance to the visual overload of digital media, while others rejoice in painting's ability to assimilate new visual languages and technologies. Evans partakes of both stances: he is at once an upholder of painting's traditions (it's hard to think of another contemporary as deeply enmeshed in art history) and an innovator guiding (or dragging?) this venerable medium into the 21st century.

As one becomes involved in recognizing (or failing to recognize) the myriad borrowed motifs in one of Evans's tightly packed compositions, it is easy to miss a crucial point: *Evans's paintings actually look nothing like the work of the artists he is citing*. His canvases might be rich with details from Matisse, Bonnard and other modern masters and from accomplished contemporaries such as Laura Owens and Kerry James Marshall, but taken as a whole, in what might be an extreme instance of Bloomian "misreading," the paintings bear little or no resemblance to any of the artists they reference. Instead, they offer patchwork compositions that often resemble crazy quilts or messy desktops. (The only artist who immediately comes to mind when I look at an Evans painting as a totality is Edouardo Paolozzi, whose collage-based screenprints of the 1960s bear an uncanny resemblance to some of Evans's paintings--I say "uncanny" because until very recently Evans was unaware of Paolozzi's work.) It is, thus, in the structure of the paintings--and in the organization of Evans's studio and installation environments--that we encounter the essence of his work.

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As we look at Evans's paintings our usual habits of viewing and categorizing can fall short. The paintings are not solely abstract nor

solely figurative; compositionally, they are neither exclusively relational nor all-over; many of them contain more visual information than we can assimilate, more citations than we can trace, more cross-references and juxtapositions than we can keep track of, more stylistic diversity (from geometric abstraction to trompe l'oeil, and everything in between) than we can make sense of. Nor does it help that many of the images are positioned upside down or sideways in kaleidoscopic jumbles. We also have to contend with how Evans embraces what he calls “provisional studio processes” by basing his paintings and installations on the teeming temporary arrangements of taped-together collage material he creates on the walls and floors of his studio. All of this results in a marvelous instability that requires constant adjustment on the part of the viewer.

Rather than trying to parse these works in relation to painting alone, we need to expand our scope to encompass video, film, installations and the sprawling wilds of social media. In 2014, Evans presented an ambitious well-received exhibition titled “Painting as Supermodel” at Ameringer McEnery Yohe Gallery in New York. While the primary reference for this show was Yve-Alain Bois’s 1986 essay “Painting as Model,” Evans was looking at models outside of the medium of painting. During a 2013 interview in *The Brooklyn Rail*, he mentioned his interest in the speed and “discontinuous focus” of Ryan Trecartin’s mid-2000s work and the “multi-viewed” effect of installations by Jon Kessler and Yayoi Kusama. More recently, he has felt a strong affinity with the work of Arthur Jafa, specifically his rapid-fire video *Apex* (2013). Evans’s willingness to look beyond painting has resulted in a powerful cross-fertilization of mediums.

A different kind of extra-painting references appear in some of his new paintings in the form of sculptural imagery, chiefly classical busts and precolumbian heads. Intentionally or not, the scattered, fragmentary heads evoke the ritualistic practice among the Mixtec and other Mesoamerican peoples of intentionally breaking apart and discarding fired-clay figurines. As well as reminding us of the debt that Western modernism owes to non-Western cultures, and positioning the painting as a kind of archeological dig, the presence of this Mesoamerican imagery is also a reference to Evans’s own Mexican heritage.



Further close looking uncovers allusions to current politics, for example an “I Voted” sticker (surrounded by a Kusama Infinity Net painting) just a few inches away from a portrait of Martin Luther King. As usual, the paintings are littered with the signatures of other artists. (One could write an entire essay on how Evans deploys signatures.) Provocatively, Evans pursues autobiographical content via appropriated images. Sometimes this can be a covert operation, as in a recent painting referencing only works from the Figge Museum in Davenport, Iowa, which Evans frequented when he was a grad student at the University of Iowa. As usual Evans relishes unexpected juxtapositions, here planting what looks like a ‘57 Chevy taken from a painting by local Iowa artist John Shepperd in front of a Matisse detail. Letting no square inch go to waste, he turns to a Fairfield Porter landscape for the path of green lawn just in front of the Chevy & Matisse image. A surprising insert in a painting that is otherwise a joyful remix of Matisse’s *Joie de Vivre* and a Cezanne landscape is a grid of X’s from a napkin drawing by the late Tony Feher (1956-2016), whose signature with date is also visible, albeit upside down. I never would have connected Feher and Matisse, but Evans’s painting makes me aware of their similar love of direct, unadulterated, luminous color. I can also see why Evans would be drawn to Feher, who was known for, among other things, incorporating blue painter’s tape into his work.

Among the new paintings are several that feature more open, non-grid compositions. In one, a ground of large biomorphic shapes from Matisse cutouts is overlaid with elliptical target motifs, green and red apples (from Cezanne and Patrick Caulfield), proliferating copies of Roy Lichtenstein’s 1965-66 portrait of art dealer Holly Solomon, that strange child’s head from Matisse’s *Piano Lesson* and other shapes and images (some from California Abstractionist Frank Lobdell, whom Evans studied with). There’s a kind of centrifugal energy being unleashed, threatening to send the elements of the painting spinning off into adjacent spaces.

In other paintings, Evans depicts a work-in-progress on the floor of his studio, rendering it as we would see it in a close-up photograph where the edges seem to fall away. Here more precolumbian motifs appear,

though taken from painted codexes rather than clay figurines. Intensely patterned, the painting begins to resemble a map. A different kind of distortion is visible in a group of watercolors where Evans depicts increasingly pixelated versions of his own paintings.

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Ultimately, painting is not so much Evans's medium as it is his subject, or one of his them. He pays as much attention to the site where his paintings get made--the studio--as he does to the paintings themselves. In 2017, he explained in a statement written for his "paintingpainting" exhibition (also at Ameringer McEnery Yohe) how for the previous decade he had made "the studio in the round" the subject of his paintings. Another way to think of the studio in Evans's work is as, along with traditional paints and brushes and the inkjet printer that Evans relies on to print out hard copies of his source images, one of his primary tools.

Because of Evans's practice of sourcing images online, some might think of him as a "post-studio" artist who only needs a laptop and a highspeed internet connection, but he is emphatically a studio artist. The conditions of his workspace (its light, its walls and ceiling, its location, and, perhaps most importantly, its floor) are as crucial to his art as his choice of canvas size and type of paint are to his paintings. Another important distinction to make is that rather than working from digital images, Evans always turns to his printer to make hard copies before painting them. As he succinctly explains: "Everything gets printed so I can see it."

For Evans, the studio is the support that receives material and the frame that unites it. As such, it is a contemporary mutation of the "flatbed picture plane" that Leo Steinberg identified in the work of Rauschenberg and other postwar artists. Like the artists Steinberg discussed, Evans alludes to "hard surfaces such as tabletops, studio floors, charts, bulletin boards—any receptor surface on which objects are scattered, on which data is entered, on which information may be received, printed, impressed—whether coherently or in confusion." (Not surprisingly, Evans is well aware of this affinity: he titled a 2012

show in Milan “flatbedfactum02,” a dual reference to Steinberg and to Rauschenberg.) Importantly, Evans’s “flatbed” material is by no means limited to screengrabs of paintings. Along with his ever-expanding reservoir of painting details, Evans has corralled documents from the day-to-day operations of the artworld (gallery press releases), texts from the domains of literature and art history, photographs of artists and of his own neatly-ordered bookshelves and various accumulations of information and data. He has also incorporated sound into his exhibitions through audio installations of actors reading from texts that influenced the work on view.

Another useful reference in approaching his work is Daniel Buren’s essay “Function of the Studio.” It is a mark of changing circumstances that while Buren proclaimed in 1971 that all his work proceeded from the “extinction” of the studio, Evans has built a radical painting practice not on the ruins of the studio but from its repurposed survival. For Evans, the studio is like a Foucauldian episteme, less a space than a condition that establishes what it is possible to say within his work.

Clearly there is an archival dimension to Evans’s practice. His thronging compendia of art history belong to a tradition that encompasses Aby Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Walter Benjamin’s Arcades Project, Gerhard Richter’s *Atlas*, Christian Boltanski’s *Lessons of Darkness*, Fred Wilson’s *Mining the Museum* and Jean-Luc Godard’s *Histoires du Cinema*, to which we could add more recent contributions by Thomas Hirschhorn, Walid Raad, Tacita Dean, Loren Munk and Arthur Jafa. We might also add Andre Malraux’s *Museum without Walls*--nothing is more Evansian than Maurice Jarnoux’s famous photograph of Malraux surrounded by the loose pages of his soon-to-be-published volume of art reproductions, a scene that scholar Walter Grasskamp refers to as “the book on the floor.” Yet even as we note Evans’s fluency in this archival discourse, we need to always recognize the subjective, personal aspects of his work. For all their precise visual quotations, Evans’s paintings are not “gallery pictures” in the manner of the 17th century painter David Teniers, nor are they exercises in “art as critique” in the manner of so many late-20th century artists. Think of them, rather, as citational self-portraits. Evans’s subtle



fusion of autobiography and appropriation is yet once more instance of the radically hybrid nature of his project.



**pigmentpolymerpaintsplat, 2021, Acrylic on canvas, 70 x 68.75 inches**

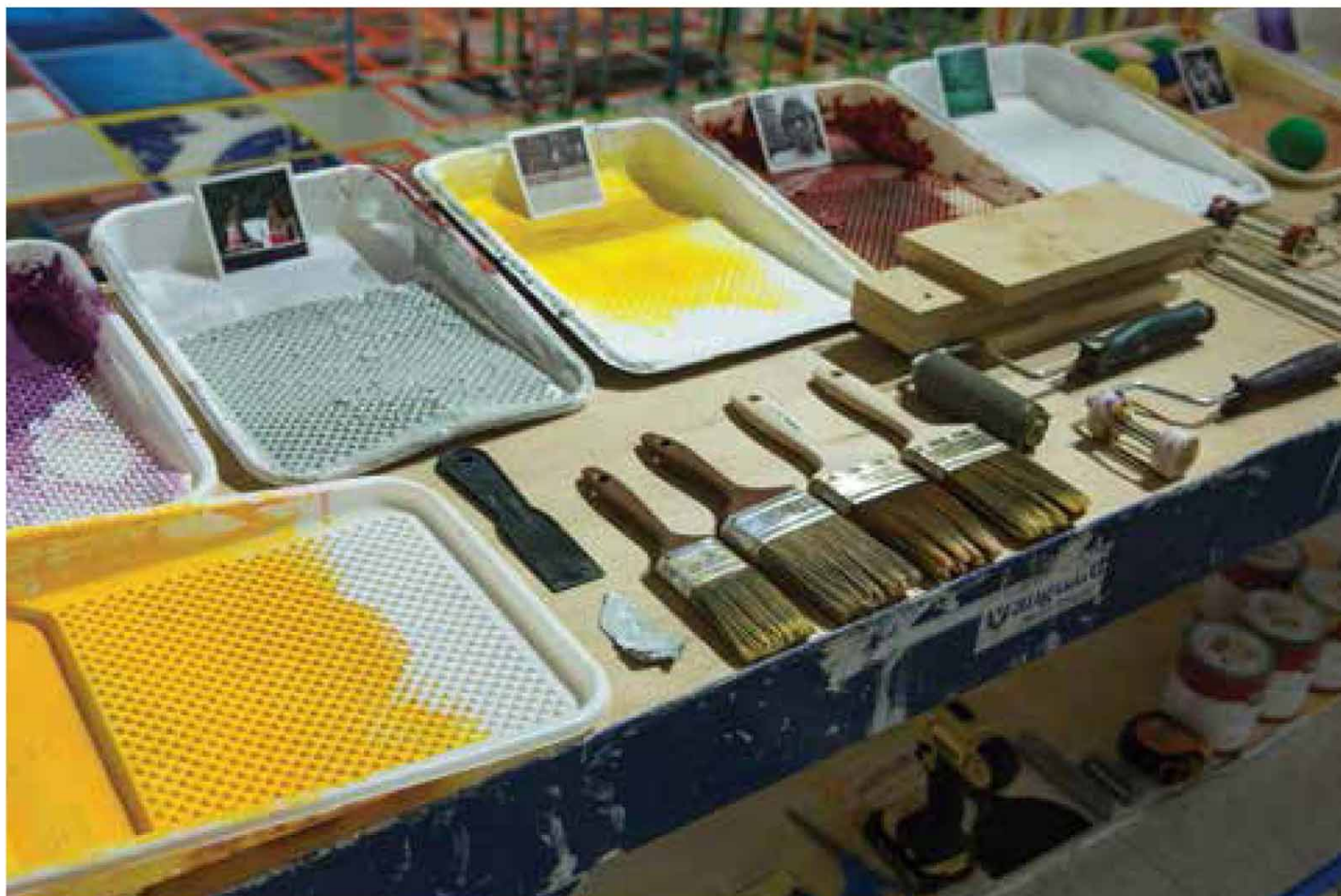


**juddrules**  
**MONTSERRAT GALLERY**

September 17 – December 13, 2014

# Franklin Evans

CURATED BY  
**Leonie Bradbury**



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Montserrat College of Art  
23 Essex Street  
Beverly, Massachusetts 01915



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*Franklin Evans: juddrules*

installation view

Montserrat Gallery, 2014





# Minimalism, Maximalism and Judd as Model

Patrick Neal



To get a clue as to what's on the mind of the artist Franklin Evans, one need only look at the snippets of words and phrases that populate his exhibitions of painting and installation. Evans uses his own studio practices and the process of painting as raw material for his work. This includes all manner of residual painterly activity from cast-off materials and traces of labor as well as source materials like appropriated pictures and text. Amidst bits of personal and statistical ephemera, he likes to theme his shows around art history, particularly thinkers concerned with critical issues surrounding art at a particular time and place. In his last show he had been poring over the essays in Yve-Alain Bois's *Painting as Model* and for the site-specific project at Montserrat College, titled *juddrules*, he is concentrating on the writings of Donald Judd.

Judd, a forerunner of Minimalism, and galvanizing critic and sculptor was a force to be reckoned with and still exerts a considerable influence in 2014. His art and writings are admired by critics as different as Roberta Smith and Jed Perl. Smith, who early in her career, typed and gathered the writings of Judd, recalled in a lecture at The New School his influence on her, "...encountering Judd was sort of like discovering a world where I was both at home and completely shocked by its intensity, its completeness, its level of purely visual criticality. Meeting Judd helped me find something critical in myself...when you come up against someone like that you can either take it or leave it, I took it." (Smith)

Perl writing admiringly of Judd as a key character in his book *New Art City*, considered Judd to be an artist's artist, who appreciated a wide array of his peers work even as he sought a radical simplification of forms within his own work. Perl examines how around the 1950's attitudes had been developing toward artworks that sought to embody a totalizing "all-in-one"



viewing. Judd advocated for this sort of vanguard, unfettered experience even as he never lost sight of craft and his own personal relationship with the sensual, particularities of his sculptural materials (Perl, 517).

Judd's writing took different forms, the majority being reviews written for Arts magazine around the early 60's. With a few blunt sentences, he could size up the successes and shortcomings of a piece as art. He had a great eye, carefully describing what was in front of him noting what had conviction or appeared fraudulent, all informed by a vast repository of art history. Judd valued progress in art and eschewed the irrelevance of the "old European tradition (Judd, 77)." He held the painter Barnett Newman in high esteem as they both shared a radical, pared-down, allusion-free aesthetic that, at the time, was the hallmark of a new sublime in art freed of all historical baggage concerning beauty (Harrison and Wood, 572-574).

Like Judd, Evans began as a two-dimensional painter, and both artists would move into three-dimensions as their work evolved. Different from the imposing, solid objects Judd created however, Evans's extension outward into the gallery space has tended to be more tenuous and conceptual. Similar to Judd, Evans also works out of tradition, invested in craft but also intellectually curious and pushing boundaries. Evans's work is often discussed around "institutional critique" being that it is cognizant of the social forces contiguous with art world commerce and it is interesting to consider this in relation to discussions of "theatricality" that orbited around Judd's work in the 60's. In both cases, questions are raised over how artworks are tethered to the outside world. When Evans introduces fragmented words and sculptural bits into his work, the viewer viscerally experiences the artist's body and mind at work in a to-and-fro network of self and society.

For his project at Montserrat, Evans is perusing a variety of artists that Judd reviewed that range from the obscure to modern masters and, in relation to our current climate, one ponders what Evans finds personally

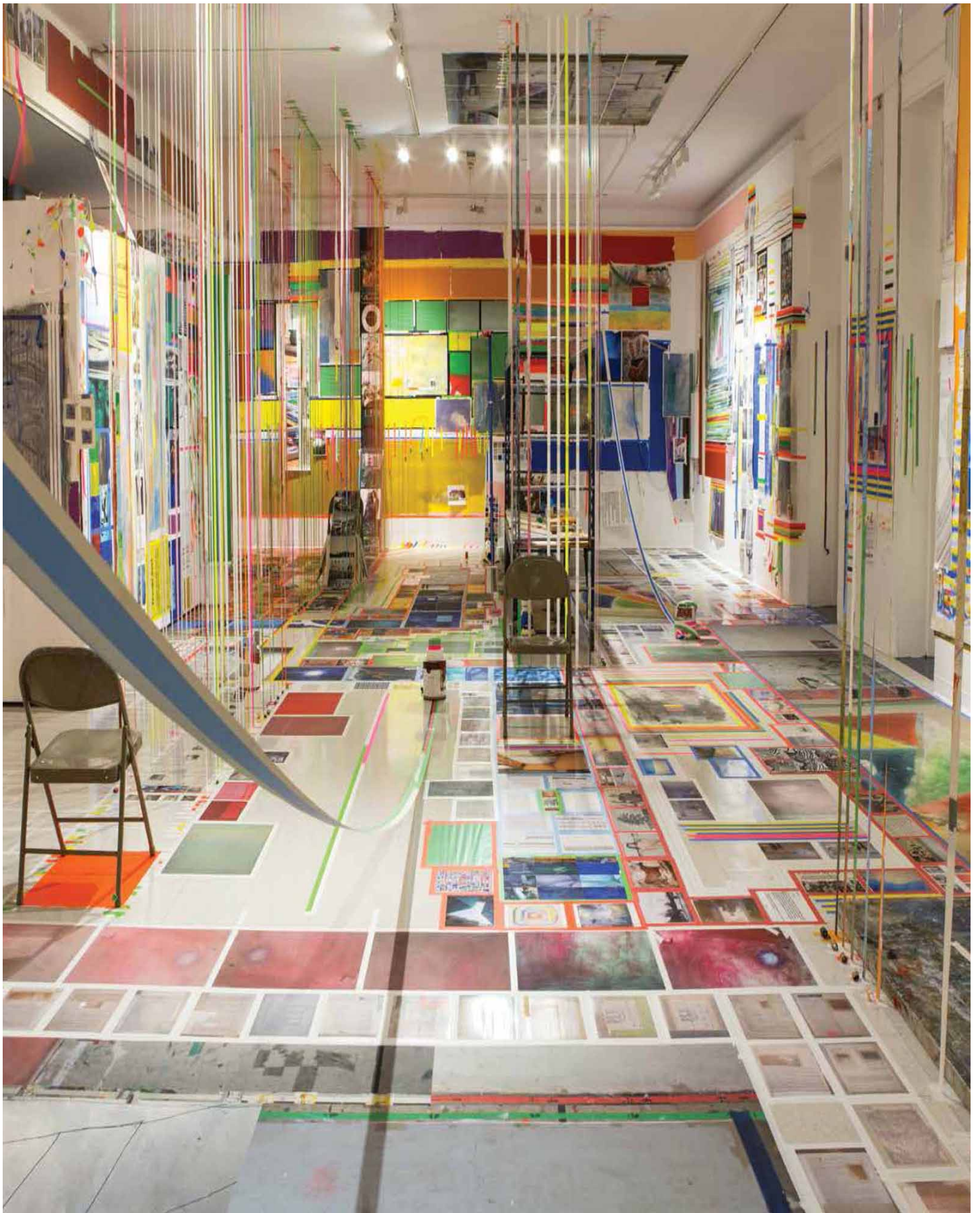
compelling about Judd. Certainly, the essays get you thinking about why some art lasts or disappears to history and what artists do with innovations from the recent past and present. When Judd mined art history, he was far-seeing enough to know what to keep or discard as he fashioned his own unique works.

In 2005, when Judd's collected writings were republished, the conceptual artist Mel Bochner asked "why now?" the interest in Judd. In a thoughtful essay, Bochner shared Smith's regard for Judd as an authoritative figure with firm convictions and noted the absence of such a character on the scene today. Bochner pointed out that there was a do-or-die urgency to Judd's observations that revealed an artist working out an aesthetic he could believe in Bochner. Fast forward to 2014 and it's hard not to reflect on a situation that is very different; one need only look at the labeling of much contemporary abstract painting i.e. – zombie, casual or crapstraction to get a sense of a more disaffected mood soured by the nefarious influence of money.

There are also new realities confronting artists in the 21st century. David Joselit's recent book *After Art* offers interesting insights on what could be a move away from specific art objects toward the potential for art making to harness the power inherent in various global networks. He makes a case that since the advent of digital technology, images can be recomposed as bytes, disseminated as "populations" and traverse time and space in whole new ways. Images have a newfound "scalability" and "currency" in their global transmission and as such, it may be more appropriate for artists to create "formats" or provisional, connective acts that leverage and capitalize on this newfound plasticity (Joselit, 43, 55). Much of Joselit's ideas align with Evan's art-making practices, but like Judd, I would say Evan's works are further enriched by his facility with materials – particularly paint coupled with a distinct, baroque sensibility.

A case in point is Evans's fondness of watercolor paint. He capitalizes on









the diaphanous, ribbon-like quality of the medium and handles acrylic with a similar light touch working with shadows and residue and overlaying spills, drips, and smudged images. As he moves into the third dimension, he paints with recycled tape that is in turn painted upon and we look at his installations through levitating bands of tape that interact with the surrounding room. One can free associate artists like Robert Irwin or Fred Sandback who also made works that interact with the environment or see traces of Barnett Newman's ideas and process. The illusions keep multiplying as we're swept through scrims and transparencies, recollecting and learning as we do when clicking hyperlinks that propel us through cyberspace or like deKooning's characterization of himself as a "slipping glimser."

As I write this, Evans is working both in the private and public realm putting together his installation by collaborating with students at Montserrat and inventing stratagems for how the piece will unfold. What the final outcome will be is anyone's guess, but in contemplating Judd, I'm con-



vinced the strength and staying power of Evans's work succeeds on its formal and conceptual complementarity.

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# Franklin Evans : A Moment of Complexity

Leonie Bradbury

## Introduction



Traveling, wandering, meandering, Franklin Evan's creations spread across the gallery walls and floors like an ever-growing organic mass. Evans' practice involves the bringing together of items ranging from fully finished large scale paintings, digital printouts, tape scraps, and string from the studio. While on site in the gallery or museum, he then adds even more items, including site-specific blocks of color painted directly onto the wall, printed-out texts from art books and gallery press releases, layering and connecting the various elements into a site-specific installation. Evans describes his installations as, "walking into a painting" and "snapshots of the studio at any moment in time."<sup>1</sup>

In the fall of 2014, Evans was invited to be in residence at Montserrat College of Art in Beverly, MA. For three weeks he spent ten to fifteen hours a day compiling images, printed text, tape screens and a small selection of objects, resulting in the exhibition *juddrules*. Evans considers himself first and foremost a painter, but his installations go beyond any traditional definition of painting. Continuously transitioning, between assembled and dismantled – reconnecting and disconnecting, configuring and reconfiguring form temporary moments of "congealance" in their site-specific installations, whether in the studio or in the gallery.<sup>2</sup>

As the viewer approaches the gallery entrance, they are confronted with an overwhelming presentation of materials that cover the entire gallery floor, each of the seven walls, and part of the ceiling. The overall color palette is bright and broad ranging from earthy yellows to neon pinks and oranges. Brightly colored strips of painters tape hold down and adhere printed reproductions of pages of books, found images, personal photographs and vinyl album to the gallery floor. Visitors are immediately surrounded by

more images on the walls and ceiling and feel themselves become part of the all encompassing installation.

Upon entering *juddrules*, your eyes try to settle on a place of focus and as you are trying to understand what it is you are looking at, you are physically confronted by a large structure that spans from floor to the ceiling. It is a large piece of blue metal and wood scaffolding that has been partially covered with strips of painted painter's tape that connects it to both the ceiling and the floor. On the three-foot high scaffolding platform the artist has placed ten paint trays that show paint remnants in the colors used on the gallery walls.

The painters' tape 'screens' are created by the artist by adhering the end of the roll of tape on the ceiling and rolling out the roll until it hits the floor, where it becomes secured. Evans' excessive use of the ubiquitous tan masking or blue painters tape, a medium used to assist the painter in making clean, 'professional' straight lines, is the visual focus of the installation. A product usually relegated to walls in the artist's studio has now been allowed to come into the gallery space, where it is no longer a substrate, or mere tool to aid in the production of a painting, but rather the primary medium.

The tape is used not only to create visual screens but also throughout the installation to adhere the images to the floors and walls of the gallery. Small leftover strips and bits are places on the walls throughout visually referencing the artist's studio walls, as well as, providing a playful color element in the exhibition. The strips of tape move gently and subtly as the result of the airflow in the room. Although visually arresting, the rolls of tape appear fragile and could be easily damaged by a sudden movement by a viewer or collision with a backpack or elbow.

A second wall features a partially defined grid of color blocks, mostly in the mustard yellow color (the color of the artist studio floor), with the exception of a block of purple on the far left. Parts of the grid are paint-



ed, other delineated in tape. The painted grid on the gallery wall roughly uses the floor and tape measurements of the studio floor, but transposes them onto the wall. On the upper right hand corner of the grid blocks of a brighter hue of yellow paint are alternated with 14 x 17 inch printouts. Some are abstract textural details of photographs of the artist's studio and loft (both printed to scale and enlarged), another features the partial torso of a nude male, one image placed sideways at the top of the grid features Henri Matisse's painting *Romanian Blouse* of 1940. Reproductions of this image are repeated throughout the installation and in a variety of colors and states of distortion. At the center of the grid we see a large, mediocre quality print out 'collage' of one of Evans canvas paintings, comprised of a grid of nine rows of nine 11 x 8.5 inch sheets each (the ubiquitous copy machine or home printer dimension).

This paper grid is interrupted in the middle by a gap where the white wall of the gallery partially peeks through and one can see some of the mustard under paint as well. At the center of the gap, Evans has placed a finished stretched canvas painting, the only one in the exhibition. The painting features the same image as the one on the paper grid. It consists of many, multi colored horizontal bands that look like a printed version of the vertical tape screens placed on its side. Near the top of the painting one of the bands is a realistically painted metal ruler from the looks of it covered in paint and strips of painters tape. At the near center of the painting Evans has painted a trompe l'oeil version of one of the Polaroid reproductions as if it's held onto the canvas with painters tape. It reveals part of this painter's process of placing photographic images on the canvas and then copying them in great detail right next to it. As is normally the case for Evans, the original is removed leaving only the copy. Elsewhere in the exhibition, though, the artist has left the printed out image in place next to its painted copy.

The viewer is asked to consider two versions of the same image in different states and different material manifestations. One a highly finished painting, the other a pixelated enlarged version of that same image printed out and

taped together as the interrupted paper grid. On top of the painting itself Evans has placed two laminated images of a work of street art, a graffiti cartoon sun spray painted on a metal garage door, which was located downstairs of the artist's studio and apartment for many years. The images are nearly identical, although one is extremely pixelated and the other less so. To the right of the painting, the grid is interrupted a second time. This time the gap is small (about three inches wide) and features not an image group but rather a tape strip at the width of two strips of tape stuck together. Instead of stretching from floor to ceiling it starts in the middle of the wall and extends out to the floor where after about 20 feet it is held in place with a half full paint can. On top of the can Evans has stacked another laminated image and three rolls of unused painters tape. The image is black and white and features an unidentified painting.

Evans' process is in its essence a blend of traditional and digital technologies. He effectively combines Realist painting methods with computer technology and the Internet, the latter two functioning as tools, sources for inspiration and information simultaneously. They also form a filter through which information is transformed from one form to another. Evans has a sincere interest in the peripheral, ephemeral materialities that evidence one's life and collects digital images and texts in an effort to rematerialize them in his art works. As part of this process, he draws attention to a contemporary or historical occurrence that is individual and/or cultural.

*juddrules* comes across as a giant, trans-historical mashup of high and low culture: fine art meets digital printout.<sup>3</sup> Evans incorporates elements that could be classified as belonging to each of these binary categories. For example, his exquisitely painted trompe l'oeil paintings are an example of 'fine art' and can thus be classified as so-called 'high culture.' Evans juxtaposes these paintings with popular culture ephemera, or lowbrow images, such as the pixelated print outs of drag queens, porn stars and additionally includes family snapshots and portraits of himself ranging from the artist as a child to a recent photo of Evans at an opening reception of one of his exhibitions.

The obsessive referencing to outside source materials, visual, and textual is an embracing of information overload rather than a critique. Certain sections of the exhibition read like an art history textbook with many reproductions of well-known paintings. Others read more like a Google image search, but one where the images are interrupted, and conjoined by color test prints and strips of tape. Evans' process reflects our ability to actively consume and produce information using the Internet as a tool. It simultaneously addresses its utility and its overwhelming complexity and contradictory nature.

### **Gallery as Studio**

Evans materializes information that was once immaterial, Internet content and its limitless distribution now fixed in material form, statically suspended on the canvas or momentarily detained in a temporary gallery installation. Likewise he digitizes his own work, photographing it, scanning it, uploading and downloading it, before presenting it next to (or as part of) the original in a gallery setting. The boundary between the studio as a place of production and the gallery as its displaying counterpart is intentionally and creatively blurred.

In 1971, when Daniel Buren wrote that the "analysis of the art system must inevitably be carried on in terms of the studio as the unique space of production and the museum as the unique space of exposition. Both must be investigated as customs, the ossifying customs of art" he was correct in including the artist's studio as part of the art system (Buren 1). The museum or gallery would eventually become a space of production. Buren briefly addresses "those curators who conceive of the museum as a permanent studio" (3). He presents the studio as a "place of multiple activities: production, storage, and distribution" (Buren 3). The gallery is presented as a place of promotion and consumption. The objects need to be portable to move between the two. Buren mourns:

The loss of the object, the idea that the context of the work



corrupts the interest that the work provokes, as if some energy essential to its existence escapes as it passes through the studio door, occupied all my thoughts. [...] In the studio we generally find finished work, work in progress, abandoned work, sketches – a collection of visible evidence viewed simultaneously that allows an understanding of process; it is this aspect of the work that is extinguished by the museum's desire to 'install' (6).

When we consider Franklin Evans' environments in the context of Buren's post-studio essay, they seem to be an effort to combat this loss of truth through the inclusion of many of the components of his studio – his visible evidence – and presenting them as part of the gallery installation, as part of the work. For Evans, even the works in progress, the sketches and his various collections go out the studio door and land in the gallery space where they are rearranged in new and different configurations. Nicholas Bourriaud's 2002 statement that "the exhibition is no longer the end result of a process, it's 'happy ending,' but a place of production" seems to ring true in regards to Evans' site-specific environments (69). Once in situ, Evans spends days in the gallery working and creating additional connections between the elements he has brought in. Although, Franklin Evans' installations are not interactive and socially motivated in a different way as the exhibitions Bourriaud is referring to in this statement, the gallery has indeed become the studio. For Bourriaud: "In our daily lives, the gap that separates production and consumption narrows each day" (39). In Evans' practice this gap is extremely narrow, as he is simultaneously the producer and consumer of the elements that comprise his works.

Central to Evans' practice is the materializing of the immaterial, whether he is using trompe l'oeil effects to create the illusion of a photograph taped to his canvas or is printing out images by other artists included in the exhibition as part of his own work. These so-called feedback loops create a disorienting effect. According to Alexander Galloway and Eugene

Thacker in *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks*: "In the cybernetic feedback loop, in the communications channel of information theory, and in the organic whole of systems theory there exists a dual view of information as both immaterial and materializing, abstract and concrete, an act and a thing" (57). Evans' process of making the abstract concrete, his looping or conceptual doubling and mirroring of information into various states of mediatization is where his work functions as a site of convergence between traditional artistic practices and internet cultures. But how exactly do these feedback loops relate to the culture or structure of a network? Are his installations a visualization of a network; do they simply provide a metaphor for network? Or, as is my argument, do they constitute a network?

### **Artwork = Network**

The concept of 'network' is rapidly becoming the dominant cultural mode. The term network originally was employed in the 16th century to represent the weaving together of sets of material strands (metal, fabric leather, etc.).<sup>4</sup> In the 21st century, 'network' is a way to see and frame everything around us. For example our communications and transportation systems, our social networks, both physical and virtual, even the natural world can be considered examples of networks. Network now also stands for a non-centered, decentered, distributed, multiplicitous, on-linear system of nodes or plateaus that are endlessly connected to each other and inform much of what we see around us. According to cultural theorist and architect Kazys Varnelis, network culture is defined as a broadly historical phenomenon and that the network has become the dominant cultural logic of our times. He argues, "Although other ages have had their networks, ours is the first in the modern age in which the network is the dominant organizational paradigm, supplanting centralized hierarchies" (Varnelis 147). The cultural framework of network has become the way to understand and organize our complex global world.

Connectivity, flexibility, changeability, and mobility are the key concepts of our times and are also key identifiers for a network. We are experiencing

a culture of sharing, of data transfer and instant communication. It is all about the relationships between 'things.' Furthermore, the collision and disintegration of binary realms – high: low, digital: tactile, real: imaginary, private: public – is a signature element of network culture. Networks are in motion, growing, shrinking, but never ending. Varnelis remarks: "In contrast to digital culture, under network culture information is less the product of discrete processing units than of the outcome of the networked relations between them, of links between people, between machines, and between machines and people." (146). He argues that network culture succeeds postmodernism and describes network culture as delivering "remix, shuffling together the diverse elements of present-day culture, blithely conflating high and low [...] while poaching it as found contents from the world" (Varnelis 151). Evans' work is precisely an installation concerned with the space between things, (i.e. objects, people, images, materials, ideas) and it is clear that his practice is closely related to this larger cultural phenomenon of networked connectivity.

For Varnelis, the contemporary subject – unlike its predecessors in the autonomous modernist subject and the fragmented postmodern subject – is "constituted within the network" and has become the networked subject (152). He states that "the subject is increasingly less sure of where the self begins and ends, the question of what should be private and shouldn't fades" (Varnelis 154). For the networked subject, boundaries between self and other, private and public, real and virtual are increasingly blurred. So too in the art world, as it is increasingly less sure where an artwork begins and ends, the question of what should be considered art and what shouldn't fades. Artists with practices as diverse as multi media artists Sarah Sze, Zsuzsanna Szegedi and Kate Gilmore are redefining their artistic practices with notions of artwork as network.

The work of art is now distributed across multiple sites, multiple nodes of content. According to Galloway and Thacker, the notion of connectivity, "is so highly privileged today that it is becoming more and more difficult



to locate places or objects that don't in some way fit into a networked rubric" (26). The relational element is that 'something' which exists between two or more things. They further stated, "a network in a sense is something that holds a tension within its own form – grouping of differences that is unified" (Galloway and Thacker 61). This is a phenomenon I recognize in today's art world and in the work of Franklin Evans' in particular.

This notion, however, is not without historical precedence. In September of 1968, the seminal article *Systems Aesthetics* by Jack Burnham was published in *Art Forum*. In it he discusses a new art world phenomenon he terms Systems Art. What Burnham means with systems art is really an expansion of the work of art from an autonomous, singular object to a system. He stated, "we are now in transition from an object oriented culture to a systems oriented culture" (Burnham 31). And he follows this with: "Art does not reside in material entities, but in relations between people and people and the components in their environment" (Burnham 31). An example Burnham provides is the exhibition *Art by Telephone* held at the museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago where "the recorded conversation between artist and manufacturer was to become part of the displayed work of art" (32). He brings up Robert Morris at the 1966 68th American Show at the Chicago Art Institute, who had a piece recreated via instructions rather than shipped from NY: "In the context of a systems aesthetic, possession of a privately fabricated work is no longer important. Accurate information takes priority over history and geographical location" (Burnham 32). Burnham introduced the concept of the distributed work of art, a concept central to the understanding of an artwork as a network.

### **Aesthetics of Networks**

How do aesthetics and networks interact? What does a network look like? There are at present a few dominant modes of visual representation when using the term network. The three primary modes are centralized, decentralized and distributed. It is worth establishing an understanding of these terms. First created by network pioneer Paul Baran while he worked

for the RAND Corporation in the 1960s where he was trying to build a new system of communication using computers. At the time the first two notions of network, centralized and decentralized were already in place. In the process of his research, Baran developed a third model, the distributed network where all the nodes were connected to several neighboring nodes and able to communicate with each other directly without going through a centralized hub first. Each node would have several routes to and from which to receive and send data.

Media theorist Anna Munster in her essay *The Image in the Network* (2007) argues that “there can be no coherent, global ‘aesthetics of the network’, and yet there are collective and shared experiences – aesthesias – of networks” (6).<sup>5</sup> She further declared that the vectorial diagram “has come to function as a dominant image of and for networks” (Munster 6). Munster describes the representational dilemma of the diagram as image of the Internet as follows:

The diagram is therefore not a set of instructions – a blueprint – for mapping or building relations between objects. It is instead a representational mode that hooks one class of objects – perhaps links and nodes – to another class, potentially peoples, cultures and their processual relations within networks. This, of course, is why the network diagram is so thrilling – its spatiality and vagueness harnesses the potential to make it work as a representation of something it is not. [...] In other words, if we really believe that the network diagram provides us with an accurate depiction of networks, then we are forgetting the very relationality of both diagram and network (13).

Additionally, the vector diagram is limited in that it chooses to represent something that is multi-dimensional, ever changing, and relational as a fixed two-dimensional image.

In general, and by nature, visualizations of networks are reductive and questions of their topology are notoriously problematic. For instance, the Internet is usually diagrammatically presented as a distributed network that looks like a decentralized network. Perhaps works of art are better suited to accurately representing networks? Is it useful to think of Evans' work as a three-dimensional depiction of a network? If so, what type of network? Are the large canvas paintings hubs from which all other are connected and thus form a decentralized network? Or is their organization more rhizomatic and emblematic of a distributed network? Perhaps Munster's theme of relationality offers an interesting way to open up this discussion in relation to Franklin Evans' practice. Her statement: "This is why the network diagram is so thrilling – its spatiality and vagueness harnesses the potential to make it work as a representation of something it is not," (13) makes me realize that Evans work is not a diagram (an abstract representation or deduction) of a network, or a visualization or image of it, it is in fact a network, or perhaps more accurately a collection of networks both decentralized and distributed that intersect, interconnect and disconnect at various points.

According to Galloway and Thacker, "In networks the individuation of all the nodes and edges that constitute the system, for while the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, it is nevertheless the parts (or the localized action of the parts) that in turn constitute the possibility for the individuation of 'a' network as a whole. The individuation of the network as a whole is different from the individuation of the network components. However, both concern themselves with the topology of the network" (59). Although some elements can be extracted, most of Evans' installation materials comprise a network of connected parts that only function as a work of art when presented as part of a system of objects. For example, think of the strips of painters' tape or the Internet printouts. Like a network though Evans' installation does not present an autonomous whole, but rather a temporary, networked system.

## **Conclusion**

If we compare common images of the American Internet to one of Evans'



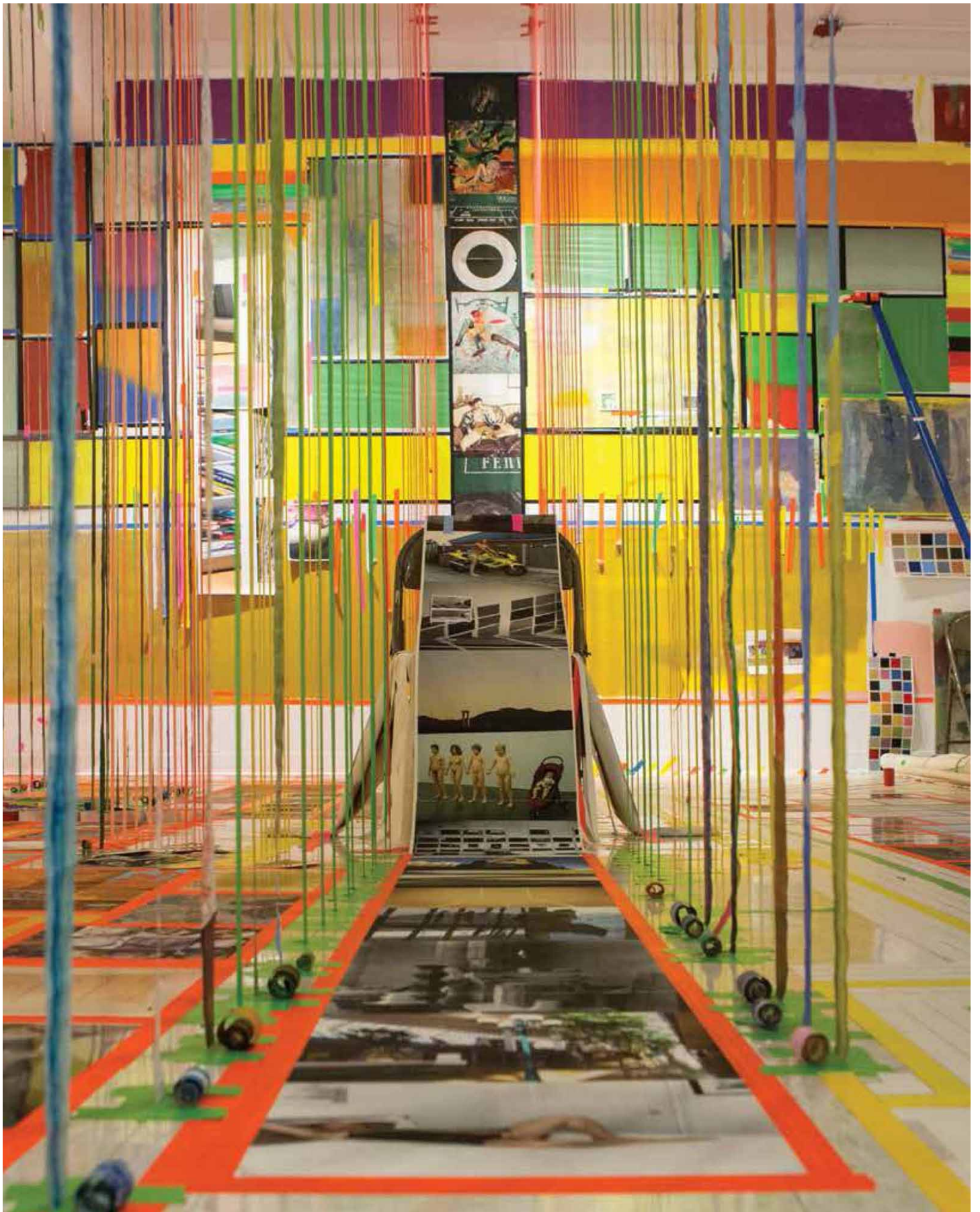
installations, there are indeed some similarities in terms of the webbing or creation of pathways. The most obvious difference is that Evans' installation is three-dimensional whereas diagrams are all two-dimensional renderings of something that is in reality multi-dimensional, spatial and temporal. The diagram closes off the temporal, rhythm of movement across and collapses it into a two dimensional spatial abstraction. Networking 'things' move at different speeds, says art historian and network theorist Philip Armstrong: "the network is the spacing of time and the temporality of space."<sup>6</sup> How do Franklin Evans' environments engage with different modes of spatiality and temporality?

The artist addresses space, for example, in multiple modes: symbolic or narrative space, the two-dimensional pictorial or visual space, and the three-dimensional physical or architectural space. In terms of time there are also multiple frameworks to consider: virtual, historic (both personal and art historic) and the present, and the tension between issues of permanence and temporality that Evans' practice brings to the fore. There is a compression of time that happens once the artist gets into the gallery space and begins the installation process. The usual pace of studio of seemingly limitless time is compressed into a limited production window of time within the gallery. Once completed as a work of art, there is evident a refusal of linear temporality in the presentation of hybrid, multiple sections or networks of objects and segments of information whether sound, text or image.

As is immediately evident there are multiple spatialities and temporalities at play within *juddrules*, some of them contradictory. The installation is nomadic, temporary, conglomeration of objects and ideas, auditory and visual ephemera. The way the viewer interacts with the piece is also a multipath, multi-sensory and self-selecting experience. Wandering and meandering, both your eye and feet drift through the installation as if a 21st century flâneur, having exchanged the dense streets of Paris for the text and image filled forest of *juddrules*. Another example is provided on the wall to the right when entering the gallery where large sheets of painted paper are

the residue of paintings made in the past year. The artist tapes the paper onto the floor of the studio and uses it to clean brushes as a result abstract builds up over time. Sometimes this occurs systematically (discrete color areas) at other times they are more accidental. These particular pieces of paper were shown similarly along the hall at Ameringer McEnery Yohe gallery installation in New York. According to Evans, "They become both a measurement of time and a transposition of time and space (AMcY hall) to new site (Montserrat)"<sup>7</sup>

Evans' installations embody the dissolution of boundaries between different media, dimensionalities temporal, spatial, and the virtual. They refuse to be singular. Each installation, once installed, is in a temporary state of suspension of its fluidity. They refuse everlastingness as they are merely waiting to be dismantled, disconnected, disassembled and return to the studio to be reconfigured, recycled back into a new network of relations. The installations are, to borrow network theorist Mark Taylor's term, "moments of complexity" and can be described as the embodiment of an onto-topology meaning a system of convergence, connection, and confluence.<sup>8</sup> They are multiplicities, networks, networked, they are collections of objects that are networking mash-ups of the present and the past, the historic and the personal, the provisional and the permanent, time and space. These contradictions, or tensions within the work do not function however, as a series of binaries as listed above, but rather exist within the work as a complex web of interconnectedness, overlapping, conflicting, doubling, continuously looping into a conglomeration of networked networks.





## NOTES

1. Franklin Evans, lecture at deCordova Museum, Lincoln MA 3/23/13.
2. Congealance refers to transformation of a liquid from a fluid to a fixed state.
3. Mashup is a term originally used within the music industry where it signifies the practice of mixing multiple songs together into a new song without one song dominating. Within web culture the term refers to data mashups that use open application programming interfaces that integrate information from multiple sources to create new web services.
4. The use of the term as a synonym for a set of interrelated people, by contrast, is a recent invention. The verb "to network," meaning to introduce and be introduced to other people outside of one's immediate social circle, made its first appearance in the 1970s after the deployment of ARPAnet, the precursor to the Internet. See Warren Sack, "From Networked Publics to Object Oriented Democracies," in *Networked Culture*, institute etc. 18.
5. Aesthesia: "The normal ability to experience sensation, perception or sensitivity."
6. Philip Armstrong, Assistant Professor of Comparative Studies at Ohio State University, in phone conversation with the author, March 21, 2013
7. Artist correspondence 11/9/2014
8. Term is used as defined by Leslie Kavanagh in *The Architectonic of Philosophy: Plato, Aristotle, Leibniz*, Amsterdam University Press, 2007, 278.

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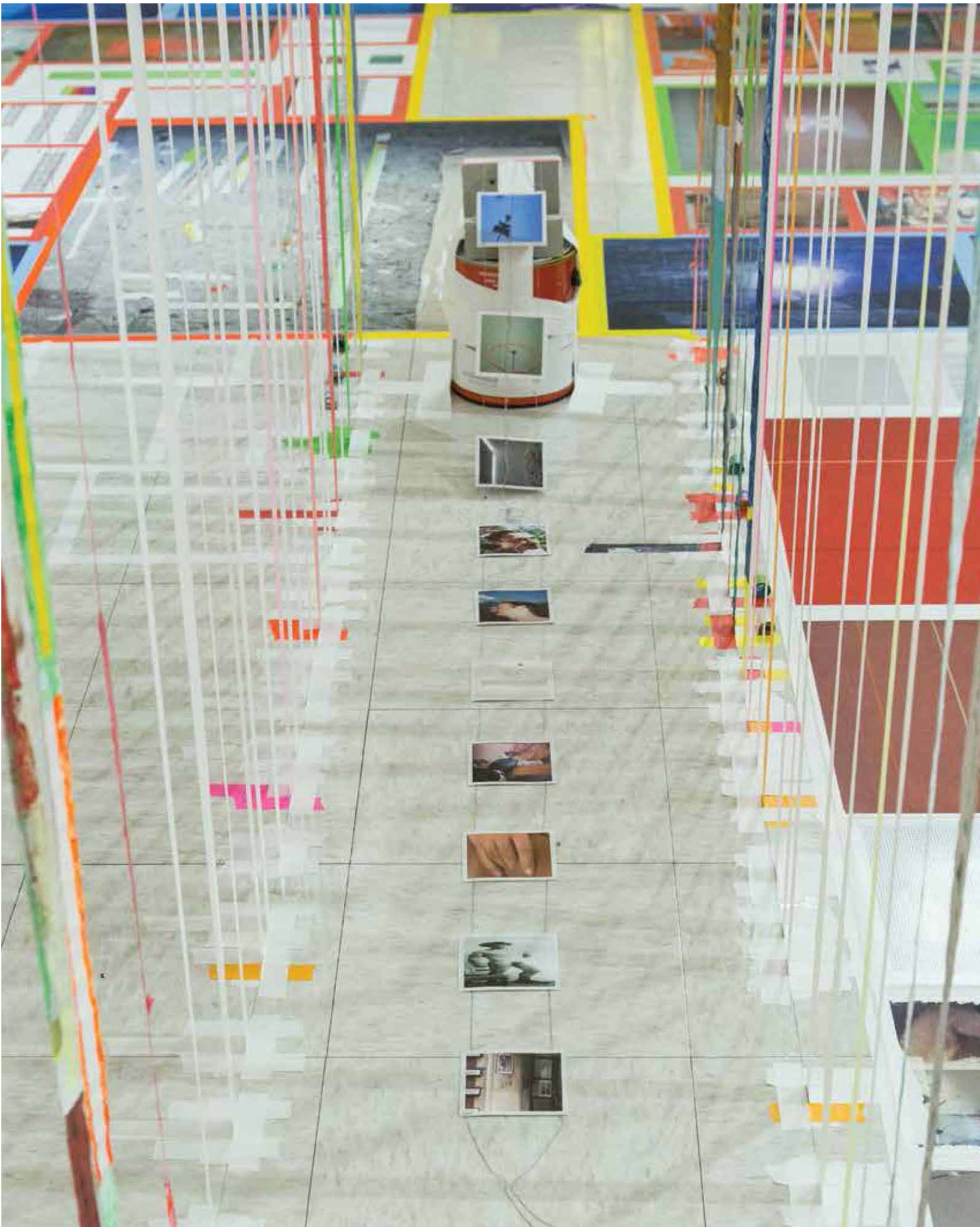
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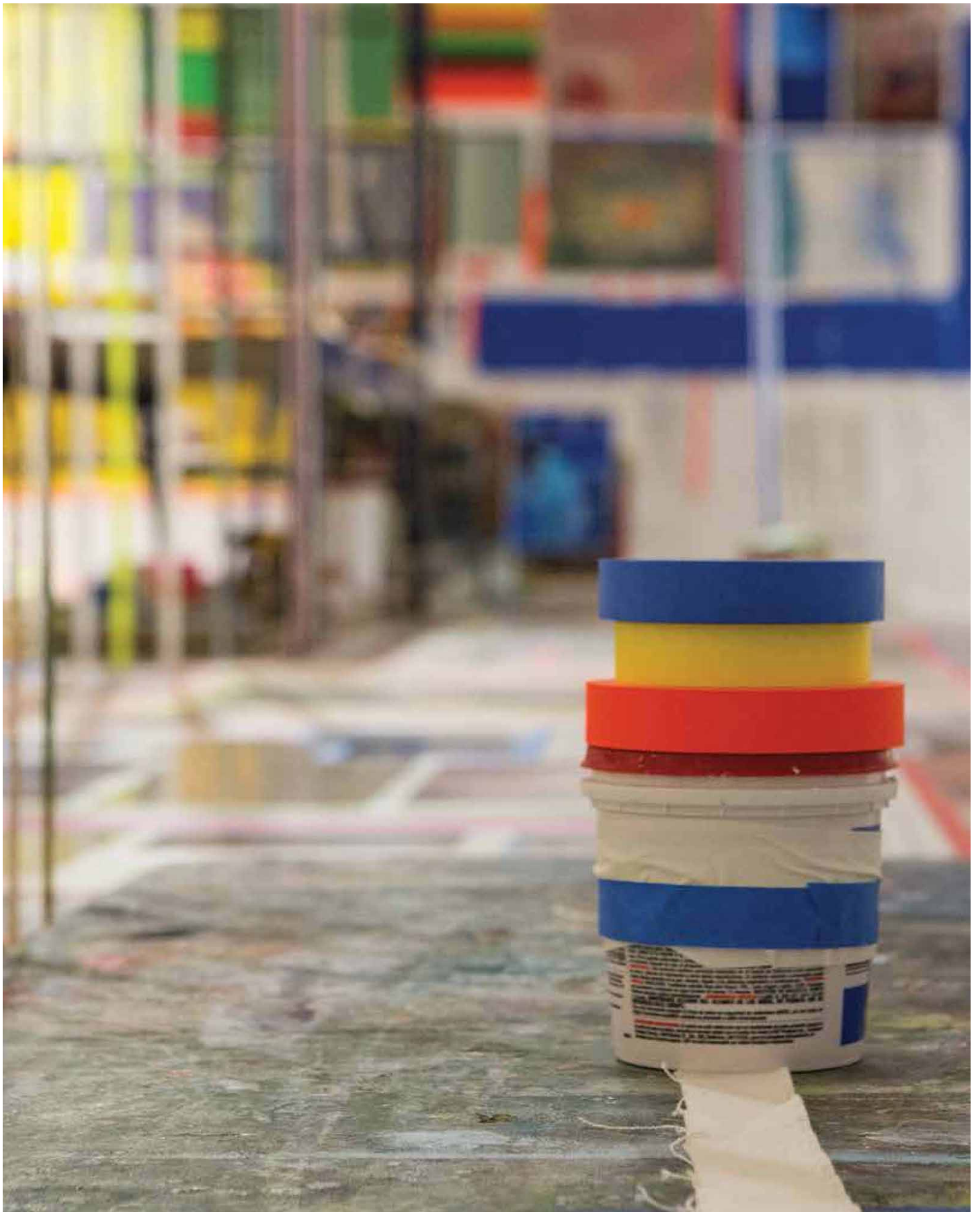
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Massachusetts Cultural Council



## Spotlight

# Franklin Evans (Edition #62)

On time, space, Stella, and tape with the New York painter

by Evan J. Garza

## New American Paintings

2011

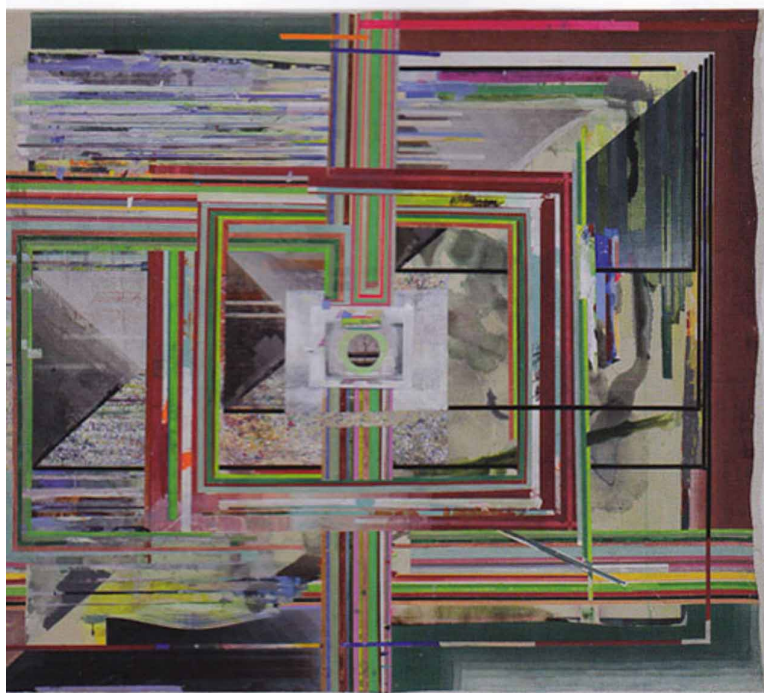
There is a subjectivity inherently built into the understanding of artwork that we all fundamentally accept. You see something, I see something, and collectively we accept the basic, objective characteristics of the object in front of us—what it's made out of,

to find them. The paintings and installations of Nevada native Franklin Evans not only address this idea of subjective perception in a compositional sense, but in terms of its spatial implications as well.

In bringing their own personal experiences to the experience of standing in front of an artwork, a viewer carries with them an individual narrative that is imparted onto the work as a means of trying to understand it. Evans' recent work poetically and rigorously examines this concept of perspective in both its subjective and formal understandings—as both a way of seeing and a vantage point.

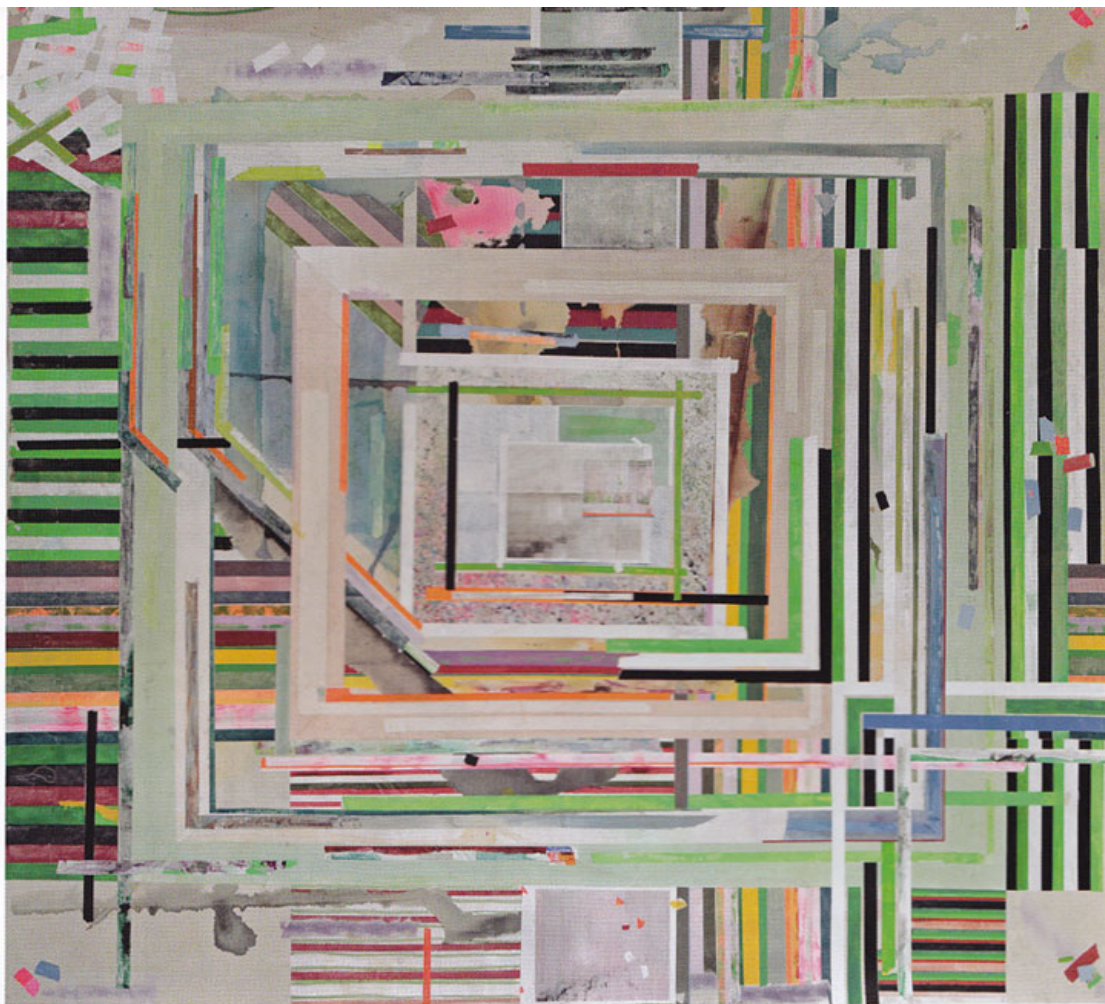
His recent installations for *Greater New York* at MoMA PS1 and Sue Scott Gallery in New York lined entire rooms with chromatically intense bars of acrylic paint on industrial tape, with Evans quite literally taking paint applied on a flat surface and suspending it within the physical space of the gallery. Bands of hot pink, neon yellow, and green tape, covered with layers of multicolored paint, stretch from floor to ceiling, foregrounding themselves in front of the viewer against a backdrop of similarly striped wall space, creating both a disparity and unity between the two. It's a strange and colorful test of depth perception, echoing the likes of Josef Albers and Frank Stella, with the end result being optically charged, spatially engaged, and deeply fresh.

The floor space in Evans' installations is also often activated—with a trail of laminated exhibition media releases, drawings, and studies in the case of his installation at PS1—grounding the physical structure of the paintings against the gallery walls. This exercise



how it's displayed, and anything we can infer from a wall label. Then we each respectively run with it from there. In a sense, a work of art has just as many points of entry as there are viewers





<  
*treeandtape*  
2011  
acrylic on canvas  
72 x 84 inches  
courtesy Sue Scott  
Gallery, New York, NY

>  
*moonscapestacks*  
2011  
acrylic on canvas  
72 x 78 inches  
courtesy Sue Scott  
Gallery, New York, NY

recalls the use of the stretcher within the history and practice of painting, where materials are applied to a flat plane adjoined to a larger architectural frame. It's a subtle gesture, and a straightforward one at that, with incredible implications for the understanding of Evans' work and how we perceive the spatial function of paint.

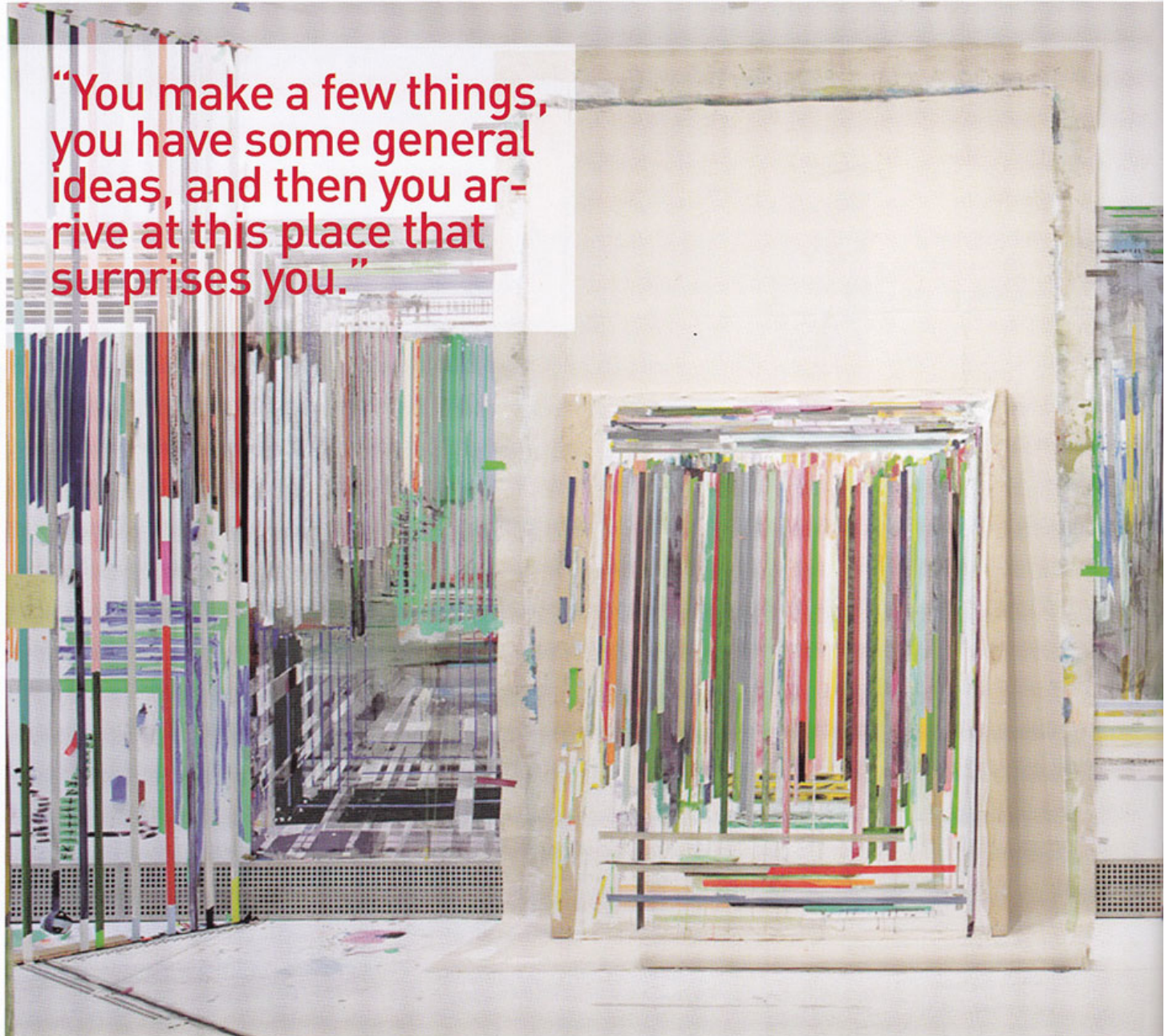
The lines of tape in his installations form a series of three-dimensional brushstrokes the viewer can walk around, bringing a renewed and rigorous—even experiential—approach to the physical implications of landscape. That relationship to space is evident in the scenery of his native Reno and his early engagement with watercolors.

"[The early watercolors] are still so linked to how I make work," Evans tells me in the salon of his Lower East Side loft, which he's kept for the last twelve years. "They were a simple arrangement and repetition of these bands of color along an edge, very linked to Frank Stella's Black Paintings without even thinking about it; a traced form on the edge, then copied multiple times in several colors, moving things in front of and behind it," he says.

"In doing simple painting exercises, I start seeing forms and space... not trying to depict either one initially, but either creating something slightly more voluminous or a bigger window into space. And [in the early watercolors] there was a link to landscape, those sparse



"You make a few things,  
you have some general  
ideas, and then you ar-  
rive at this place that  
surprises you."









landscapes of the desert West. Not literal depictions, but somehow recalling that space," he explains.

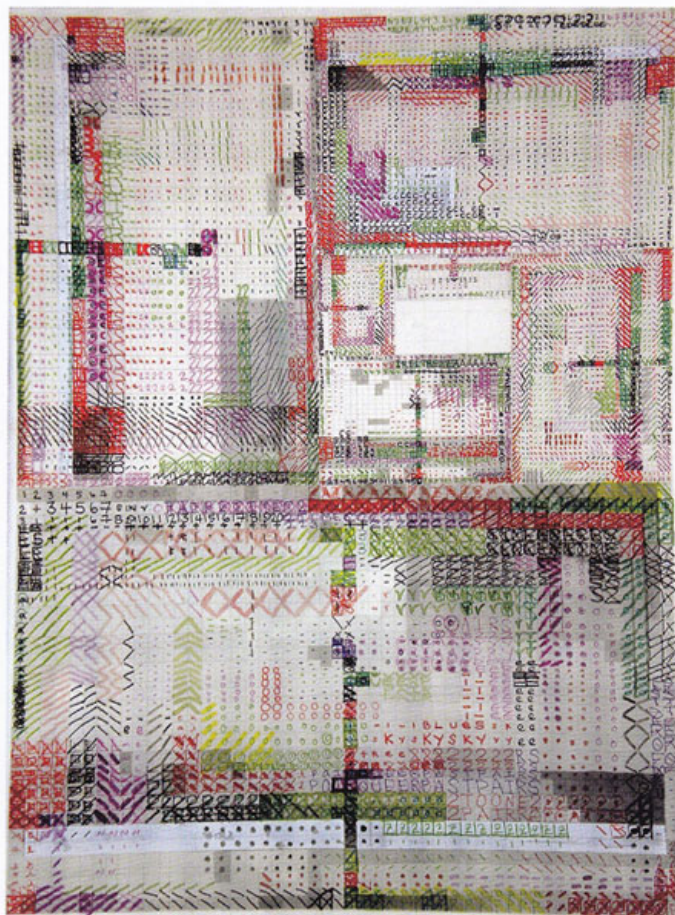
Out of high school, Evans quickly left Reno for Stanford University, where he excelled at math and pursued drawing. His graduate work was in painting at the University of Iowa, where his studio began to expand mate-

which time he worked for a derivatives firm, attended the Executive MBA Program at Columbia Business School, and held temping jobs at night.

His solid return to the studio in 2001 saw the injection of narrative into his work and the use of watercolors in new and previously unexplored ways. His interest in the spatial implications of the medium became quickly evident in his new work, which featured painted subjects appearing and disappearing from behind tightly wound strokes of watercolor.

Not long afterwards, Evans began using tape to block out paint in his watercolor works, and the residual painted tape later became active in the work itself in 2003, and several of his more recent works were originally conceived and created in the process of washing paintbrushes. This creative submission to the unplanned is not only indicative of the mathematical problem solving Evans was previously familiar with but has become fundamental influence in his art-making practice.

While his works collapse inward and expand outward with visual and spatial cues, it's the referential entry points that are the most profound. His installation for Greater New York at PS1, *timecompressionmachine*, 2010, was the product of a near year-long residency in The Space Program of the Marie Walsh Sharpe Foundation in DUMBO, Brooklyn, siphoned into a line that passes through multiple planes in a spatial environment. Like Evans' instal-



rially, experimenting with translucency and resins. His subsequent move to New York would leave him without a bona fide studio practice for a roughly five years, during

installation view,  
*2008/2009 < 2009/2010*,  
Sue Scott Gallery,  
New York, NY

*times2atten*  
2011  
watercolor and ink  
on paper  
14 x 15 inches

installation view,  
*timecompressionmachine*  
at Greater New York,  
MoMA PS1, Long Island  
City, NY





lation, time is linear and therefore a kind of formal element that is wielded in his practice as much as the tape that lines the gallery itself.

As for the future and linear narrative of his practice, the use of photographs continue to make their way into the artist's work in more present and focal ways. Evans' most common figurative subject in recent years has been the frequent, hand-drawn pixelation of a photo of a naked tree in a field, culled from a newspaper. When a fragment of the photo was accidentally torn away, Evans kept it as is and reflected the cut shape in his renderings of the image, imbuing the grid fields

of his paintings and works on paper with narrative, landscape, and his own subjective experience.

"You can't quite plan for things," Evans tells me, looking at the floor, where a linear series of colorless cut tape pieces have been formed into a makeshift ruler for spacing the lines of his paintings and installations. "You make a few things, you have some general ideas, and then you arrive at this place that surprises you." ■

# New Models, Strange Tools

By Raphael Rubinstein

As I sit down to begin this essay I am recalling details from my studio visits to the four artists in this show. At a certain point in Lydia Dona's studio—a clean, quiet space in an anonymous commercial building in midtown Manhattan to which Dona recently moved after many decades in a much grittier downtown studio—the artist dimmed the lights so that different aspects of the paintings could emerge. It was startling to me that as the studio turned dark, certain lines and areas of the canvases began to glow and pulsate, as if the paintings had suddenly become not objects against a wall, but animate, mutating beings. During my visit to Fabian Marcaccio's studio, only a few blocks away from Dona's but very different in style (more like the headquarters of some quirky start-up) I noticed how, as we sat looking at his recent work, a 3-D printer across the studio ran ceaselessly, producing an element that would probably find its way into one of the artist's materially unruly paintings. As Marcaccio explained to me the importance of weaving and knotting the ropes that are the main supports of his paintings, his computer-driven machine obediently pursued its task, suggesting another level of interweaving: the machinemade and the handmade.

At Franklin Evans' studio, in a funky building on the Lower East Side that has seen its share of recent art history (John Currin and Sean Landers worked there early in their careers), I found myself having to take off my shoes so that I could, with the artist's permission, walk over the canvases-in-progress lying on the floor. More paintings covered the walls from floor to ceiling, each of them packed with dozens or maybe hundreds of individual images; my visual receptors were momentarily overwhelmed, not knowing where to start, but then a single small detail, an image I knew from Matisse but had never dreamt of encountering like this, solicited my attention and gave me an entry point into Evans' multifarious array. To arrive at Pedro Barbeito's Brooklyn studio involved a walk from the nearest subway through a bleak mixed-use neighborhood no doubt soon to be snatched up by real estate developers. In the studio, a big aluminum structure, which at first I took for some temporary architectural fixture, nearly blocked off access to one end of the space; it was, I learned, part of the work that Barbeito was making for "Dynamic Pictorial Models." As the artist spoke to me about his work and process, about his interest in particle physics and cosmology, about developing new methods of making paintings, he dropped a reference to something called "strange tools," a concept he'd found in the writings of American philosopher Alva Noë. The phrase stayed with me and I think it might be helpful in approaching not only Barbeito's work but the exhibition as a whole.



Technology is one of Noë's central concerns. Defining it very broadly (the book opens with an account of how breast-feeding can be considered as a technology), Noë describes any "organized activity" as a technology, including such basic functions as speaking, dancing, singing and thinking. At a higher level, he argues, these activities are "put on display," which then allows them to "loop back" and "reorganize" the primary activity. Thus, choreography reorganizes dancing, visual art reorganizes picture making, philosophy reorganizes thinking and so forth. It is these practices, identified in the book as artistic practices, that Noë calls "strange tools." As he explains:

"Art is interested in removing tools (in my extended sense) from their settings and thus making them strange and, in making them strange, bringing out the ways and textures of the embedding that has been taken for granted. A work of art is a strange tool, an alien implement. We make strange tools to investigate ourselves."<sup>i</sup>

In Barbeito's work, there is a great deal of removing things from their original contexts, especially from the realm of science. The large circular element in *Collision Chamber RT* (2015-2016) was inspired by the satellite dishes used in radio astronomy; it can also be seen, the artist explains, as a cross section of a particle collider such as the Hadron collider at CERN in Switzerland. This is also the source for the black sculptural element, created with a 3-D printer, visible through the apertures in the white disk, which is, in fact, canvas stretched on a circular wood support. Arrayed across the surface of this shaped painting are relief images from these and other Big Science marvels, both ancient and modern. Many of the finely detailed motifs visible in Barbeito's work are created with an unusual "pen" invented by the artist (speaking of strange tools) that he uses to extrude paint in precisely controlled lines.

It isn't only science that inspires Barbeito: his work also grapples with the legacy of radical postwar art, including Lucio Fontana's revelation that the space between the surface of the painting and the wall it hangs must also be the territory of painting, and Robert Rauschenberg's vision of the artist as a sci-fi fantasist and cosmic cartographer. By inserting an openwork, and subtly crystalline, aluminum structure between the canvas and the wall (it is inspired by the kinds of scaffolding and support structures found in science labs, radio telescopes and airports), Barbeito dramatically expands the interstitial zone pioneered by Fontana. As we engage with Barbeito's work, our attention has to constantly toggle between binary pairings: the micro and the macro, subatomic particles and distant stars, painting and sculpture, the visible and the invisible. Then, at a certain point, all these oppositions are subsumed into his, and our own, larger project: the visual embodiment of knowledge.

Baroque, entropic, riddled with images of violence and eroticism, throbbing with high-key, artificial color—at first glance the work of Fabian Marcaccio seems impossibly distant from Barbeito’s architectonic, neatly executed, perfectly calibrated, white-on-white constructions. What these two artists share, however, is significant. Like Barbeito, Marcaccio has over the decades ceaselessly incorporated new technology into his work, inventing his own set of strange tools and diverting existing devices to his equally strange ends. I would also argue that both artists have a strong relationship to Fontana, evident, chez Marcaccio, in the constant breaking-up of the support and the resulting activation of the real space behind it. On the subject of postwar Italian art, Marcaccio is, it seems to me, one of the contemporary artists who has engaged most directly and most radically with the legacy not only of Fontana but also of Alberto Burri. In Marcaccio’s paintings—these tense, gnarly webs of ropes and bungee cords bristling with glistening globs of paint and 3-D printed pseudo artifacts—it’s as if Burri’s burlap bags have been subjected to a regime of steroids and human growth hormone. But, importantly, Marcaccio does not stop at abstract materiality: his paintings are thoroughly (and literally) enmeshed in the realm of images, especially images that the mainstream media finds hard to tolerate. Sometimes explicitly foregrounded, sometimes slow to emerge, bodies and figures, nearly always charged with socio-political content, are ever-present in his work. In *Scientologists* (2016), for instance, we see the spectacle of actor and Scientology follower Tom Cruise receiving a medal from one of his co-religionists (both figures rendered as disintegrating waxwork effigies). More than any other contemporary painter, Marcaccio relies on paradox, a cascade of conceptual reversals and physical contradictions. Simultaneously pre-digital and post-digital, Marcaccio’s “paintants” imply that the medium has undergone a major genetic mutation, as indeed it has.

Confronted with one of Franklin Evans’ wall-floor-ceiling installations, or with a single painting such as the recent *artamodel* (2016), even casual viewers will notice how the artist has seeded his work with references to other artists. For the last couple of years, Evans has been largely focused on works by Matisse (especially *The Romanian Blouse*, 1939-1940), though additional escapees from art history are beginning to infiltrate his work (he seems to be scrambling the rhythmic grids of Mondrian’s New York City paintings). Defying those who believe that self-referential, critique-driven art should remain at a safe remove from any kind of visual hedonism, Evans offers explosive fields of color, line and shape at the same time as he engages in deep conceptual conversations.

In recent works, which continue to employ proliferating grids that reside somewhere between the vernacular tradition of quilting and a computer screen taken over by a virus that keeps opening an infinity of new windows, Evans engages canonical texts by Barbara Rose, Thomas Lawson, Yve-Alain Bois and others (including the present author) by painting into his own work images of paintings referenced by those critics. An equal-opportunity appropriator, Evans frequently cannibalizes his own work, reusing parts of previous installations (which here includes painting onto recycled fragments of his 2013 installation at Ameringer McEnergy Yohe Gallery). Recontextualizing the hetero-erotic stance of Matisse with an array of boldly homoerotic images, Evans, for all his evident love of art history, does not respect the authority of the masterpiece. When, in 2013, New York's Museum of Modern Art mounted an exhibition titled "Inventing Abstraction: 1910-1925," many observers accused the museum of arrogance and ethnocentrism for its apparent disregard of widespread nonwestern traditions of abstract art that flourished for many millennia before 1910. One of the strongest critiques came from poet Charles Bernstein in an essay titled "Disfiguring Abstraction." Rereading Bernstein's text the other day, I was struck by a passage that seems to perfectly crystallize the mood of liberty and permission pervading Evans' work: "No one owns art history: not the artist, not viewers, not scholars, not critics, not museums. Not even art." ii

A deep engagement with art history has long been central to the work of Lydia Dona, yet she is also an artist who is keenly alert to the actual world around her, especially to the volatile nexus of technology, biology and politics. Since the early 1990s, Dona has been crucial to the development of a philosophically-grounded project (she was one of the first painters to draw on the writings of Gilles Deleuze) to redefine painting as a medium of open discourse rather than as, say, formalist exercise, nostalgic recuperation or conceptual illustration. But while her paintings deploy tropes and techniques lifted from specific historical moments (the soaked/stained ground of Color Field painting, the drip of Abstract Expressionism, the strict geometry of Constructivism and Minimalism, the Bachelor Machines of Duchamp), she never falls into stylistic eclecticism, or superficial quotation. Clearly, her painterly abilities help protect her from indulging in artistic clichés, but of equal, or perhaps greater importance, is the fact that her art seeks to confront the conflict-riven contemporary world that all of us inhabit. The linear shapes that drift across her canvases are not simply signs of "the hand," or exercises in biomorphic drawing, but precise images torn from the technical schematics that determine so much of our existence, often invisibly.



This is stuff from the real world of factories, laboratories, hospitals and urban infrastructures, the world where the membrane between human and machine is becoming everyday more porous. In the context of this show, Dona is the only of the four artists who has chosen to work within the conventions of the stretched canvas, but her work is hardly retrospective. In a painting such as *Bodies of Multiple Dwellings* (2016), the polyphonic spatial and retinal effects force the viewer to conceive new ways of looking at abstraction. The artist's distinctive combination of paint types (oil, acrylic, sign paint and a variety of powdered pigments) contributes to the sense of the unforeseen, as does the delicate violence with which she builds up her surfaces and images. The results are paintings where systems seem to be simultaneously collapsing and emerging, a condition that is true of all the work in this exhibition.

It was 30 years ago that Yve-Alain Bois published his influential essay "Painting as Model" in which he points out that "abstract models" do not precede the artwork but that "the work produces them by itself for anyone who takes the trouble to notice."<sup>iii</sup> This is very much the situation we find with Pedro Barbeito, Lydia Dona, Franklin Evans and Fabian Marcaccio, whose art offers four distinct and deeply interrelated models for thinking, and also supplies us with brilliantly fashioned tools to help turn the direction of that thinking, in all its pictorial dynamics, toward ourselves—which is where it was always heading in the first place.

<sup>i</sup> Alva Noë, *Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature*, Hill and Wang, New York, 2015, p. 30

<sup>ii</sup> Charles Bernstein, "Disfiguring Abstraction," *Critical Inquiry*, Spring 2013, p. 497

<sup>iii</sup> Yve-Alain Bois, "Painting as Model," *October*, Summer 1986, p. 126. Bois credits art historian Hubert Damisch for this insight, citing an essay where Damisch reproaches Jacques Lacan for trying to impose his theories upon French artist François Rouan.

