



## FRANKLIN EVANS

Conversation with Greg Lindquist  
The Brooklyn Rail, 5 November 2013

In a series of conversations held over the past summer months and into a fall museum installation, artist Franklin Evans spoke with artist and Art Books in Review editor Greg Lindquist. The two discussed the relationships of Evans's process-based painting installations to Internet media, digital technologies, and the related phenomena of discontinuous focus. Evans's solo exhibition *timepaths* opened at the Nevada Museum of Art on October 5, 2013 and will remain on view until April 20, 2014.

**Greg Linquist (Rail):** Looking at your studio, with paintings in process on the walls and floor, I am interested in how your work evolves. How do ideas and paintings change over time?

**Franklin Evans:** Take, for example, this six-foot square painting on this wall [pointing toward a long wall with several large paintings in progress]. It is a smaller canvas in the center, surrounded by several vertical digital prints, each an enlarged documentation of the painting on canvas at the center of the piece. This piece started with the small canvas as the palette on which I mixed paint for other paintings. I then painted on top of the accumulated ground *trompe l'oeil* elements such as [faux Polaroid, faux lamination of documentation of my past watercolors, and the illusion of tape hovering above the surface]. This piece started as a palette, became a painting, and expanded to an installation while simultaneously embracing an independent system as a painting-collage from which I am now making the fully-painted version. I hope to present both side-by-side in the future.

**Rail:** This notion of mirror image-like copies call to mind Robert Rauschenberg's "Factum" paintings, which inspired two consecutive exhibitions you have recently done. Rauschenberg and also Jasper Johns appear to be important touchstones for your work, though perhaps less obvious ones.

**Evans:** Yes, earlier they were faux Polaroid. Now the increase in scale and size of what I'm printing is taking over, inkjet prints at 17 at 22 inches or larger. It's amazing what these printers can do. And then to use that as a source for observation to incorporate into the actual painting or the painted painting.

**Rail:** Rauschenberg was obviously using ephemera and the printing processes of his time in the 1950s. With your work, the nature of the materiality is different and captured in various manners that suggest the ether of virtual, intangible communications. The virtual field of computer screens is important to your work. Translating the multiple windows stacked on top of one another from the inside of a screen into an expanded physical space, in the most non-literal way possible, seems a goal. What is the nature of thinking in this virtual, decentered world? Is it about the way that we often lose focus in this world? Every component is competing for our attention in your installations, which speaks to ways in which we mediate our external worlds, now more than ever.

**Evans:** Yes, I am interested in the speed that decenters and destabilizes focus. I think that Ryan Trecartin, in the context of the mid-2000s, got close to the speed of how discontinuous focus happens. Although this year in Venice his piece may have been new, it felt surprisingly slow relative to the present. The pacing within his videos remains remarkably fast, but the installation felt relatively static.

**Rail:** Even though your work incorporates the process and the manner in which we now look at visual images through the mediation of technology, it's not the predominant medium you choose.

**Evans:** No, but I would love to use more technology in my work. Another artist who gets close to what I would love to do or see is Jon Kessler, but that also feels slow, and not like my experience on the computer. I work with multiple screens as we have laptops, desktops, and maybe a second laptop, and it's all going at once. I think somebody's going to build an environment that's completely surrounded and multiviewed. I don't think I've seen an installation like Yayoi Kusama's "Fireflies on the Water" (2002), where she warps installation space. It's physical, yet not just a single place. It suggests expansion in its use of wall, floor, and ceiling. And through the use of mirrors it also suggests the reflective computer screen, which parallels the virtual realms we now also occupy. I would like to see the compression of Kusama paired with Trecartin's speedy video as medium. It may require a waiver for claim of injury due to dislocation. You could get hurt! Somebody will do this work I am envisioning, and I hope it's far beyond a Disney spectacle. Who knows who's going to do it?

**Rail:** So why do you continue to emphasize paint as your medium rather than a technological media?

**Evans:** With my work, I am interested in the materiality of painting. I like those kinds of beautiful painting marks that can be stretched and reinterpreted by digital media. So I combine inkjet printing in front of the other painted things. The materialness of painting with the digitally printed matter is so important to how my work evolves.

**Rail:** You are hybridizing painting and inkjet prints of a photograph of a painting –

**Evans:** Over a canvas, that then becomes the source for the completion of the object because I couldn't have envisioned what that would be like without the materiality of the pigment

print. I couldn't have painted that from looking at a reflective, shiny screen. I need to see the scale of it printed. I need to see a blocking of already-painted information alongside its digitally-altered documentation. It has become more about using these devices to make paintings that are incorporated into an environment. I could not have envisioned paintings and environments without materiality.

**Rail:** You need the physical tactility and the immersive, phenomenological experience of your body in a space, walking around an object, as well as the objectness of the space itself.

**Evans:** Yes, it's the scale of the body to the environment. I think that brings us back to our previous conversations about Daniel Buren, in a way. I can't make these paintings without considering where they're going to be. I can make them in a studio, but they will look very different in other environments. If I know in advance that I will be doing a show at a particular space, it is necessary to consider the light of the space and also its architectural specificity.

**Rail:** The specific architectural aspects of an exhibition space are an integral component in your work.

**Evans:** When I think of site specifically, the specific location is considered. For example, in the PS1 *Greater New York* (2010) exhibition, I was given a room that I didn't know the precedent of – that it once enclosed Gordon Matta-Clark's "Doors, Floors, Doors" (1967). Colby Chamberlain alluded to that in his review, which I've since absorbed. Matta-Clark's collapse and expansion of space preceded my parallel consideration in my PS1 "timecompressionmachine" (2010). My ignorance of the room's history allowed me to explore the rich content of time again.

I also engage with architectural challenges such as a column blocking a view or my 2014 New York exhibition [forthcoming Ameringer McEnery Yohe] in a space with a beautiful window. I'm thinking about how I could travel out to the sidewalk without breaking the window, and how I'd tunnel the light in and possibly negate the immediate seduction of the window.

**Rail:** So, the site acts upon your process?

**Evans:** I've been in my studio for 15 years, but I loved moving to the Marie Walsh Sharpe studios for a year. I didn't choose that space, but that space allowed and forced me to think

about new ways of working. Maybe it's from the architecture of it. After my year at Marie Walsh Sharpe, I recognized my unconscious capacity to absorb and copy. Similarly, without knowing Rauschenberg and John that well, I've absorbed several of their interests and approaches. Specifically at Marie Walsh Sharpe, I did many crossing compositions, and my studio view was of Manhattan Bridge entering at a diagonal, intersecting a more frontal rooftop to create a crossing. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was impacted by my view and what I was around. I think the site acts upon me a lot.

But I also act upon it, getting rid of, creating, or using a column, for example, in a different way to create a new architectural pathway. Last year I made an installation at Lehman College for the exhibition *Space Invaders* that referred to Robert Irwin's 1975 Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago column/room. Through the gesture of tape around the floor of the room and through the removal of all the art in the room, Irwin highlighted the column in a room that contained no columns. My columns were constructed of printouts of installation history and of the other installation artists in the Lehman College exhibition.

We have also talked about the *DECENTER* (2013) exhibition at the Abrons Art Center – the 100-year anniversary of the Armory Show. My contribution “bluenudedissent” (2013) was a piece that was driven by the premise of the show. Making a piece about artists now and then, 100 years after the 1913 Armory show.

**Rail:** Do you think people appreciate it differently because there was a theme you had to incorporate?

**Evans:** Yes, I used images from art history that I would mostly not have explored at that time. I wouldn't have looked up all those artists to make an artwork; I wouldn't have looked up the legacy of the Armory. It was almost like an assignment [*laughs*] and this sounds really stupid – an assignment that I carried out – but the piece ended up being really interesting. It is something I need to think about more and I have yet to build upon. For *DECENTER*, I received an architectural gift of installing in and around a somewhat awkward wraparound staircase with a central vitrine. The location and function of the stairs ended up being amazing – the center of the show.

**Rail:** The center of the decentered show? [*Laughter.*]

**Evans:** Exactly! And you had to walk around it to experience it physically and texturally.

**Rail:** Well, discussing site-specificity brings to mind not only Daniel Buren but also Robert Smithson, who has been a formative influence on you. Can you say something about how he influenced your thinking and work?

**Evans:** Smithson has had a link to a lot of us – think about videos of him cagily discussing ideas and images of him walking on “Spiral Jetty” (1970). The library piece I built – the *trompe l’oeil* library “felibrary2012to1967” (2012) – was born out of finding the index of Smithson’s library.

**Rail:** From the 2005 Robert Smithson retrospective catalog?

**Evans:** Yes. I also did a Smithson version by trying to find the highest resolution image of the cover of each book on the Internet, attempting to use the appropriate edition. But sometimes I couldn’t find the appropriate edition and my library was born out of that lack.

**Rail:** But it wasn’t only his library of books; it was also his record collection, containing an array of influences from Black Sabbath to Waylon Jennings. Some of Jennings’s songs were used in a video finished by Nancy Holt in 2004 from their 1968 trip to Mono Lake.

**Evans:** Yes, this amazing collection raises a lot of issues about what that means. Is it a curated project? There’s a link to the idea of things ending through entropy, and a desire to preserve and extend an idea about Smithson. With his great work “Spiral Jetty” (1970), it is my understanding that there was no intent to conserve it and we have, as a culture, a desire to immortalize it.

These contradictions are sexy ideas. How do we set up a situation in our own work that can explore these ideas? With the limitations of mostly being a studio artist presenting studio as a subject, I try not to treat the studio preciously. I let paintings live on the floor and erode, I take pictures of them, and start again. Some of the other stuff I wish I could do is experiment more with external elements, things that are built outside, and let time happen to them.

There is an entropic aspect of having paintings live on the floor, as well as tiled press releases of shows you’ve seen. That reminds me of Dorothea Rockburne piece discussed in the *High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting, 1967-1975* exhibition catalog (Independent Curators International/D.A.P., 2007). David Reed interviewed Dorothea Rockburne about this piece that was installed on the Bykert Gallery’s parquet floor. In this exhibition, Rockburne painted the entire floor white to match the walls, thus extending the wall and the ceiling to

the floor. Throughout the exhibition, visitors created a painting with the scuffs of their footprints, which accumulated over time.

**Evans:** To reveal the parquet again?

**Rail:** I don't know if it went that far. But those marks made by the gallery traffic were an incredibly entropic act if you assume that an exhibition should remain pristine. This act evokes our discussion about the processes of the press releases on the floor falling apart during the course of your exhibitions.

I'm curious how the floor functions in your work. A painting begins in the studio on the floor and then is moved to the wall, and then maybe back to the floor. Is this another part of the process of dismantling the picture frame?

**Evans:** Using press releases to expose the extent to which I explored NYC exhibitions started as an expansion of the frame. At that time I hadn't engaged with the floor other than as a student when I worked on my dorm studio floor. I covered the floor with acrylic paintings. It was functional the, but I stopped when I got a studio with walls [*laughs*]. The press releases were a simple expansion of the frame – the frame of thought and also the visual frame onto the floor and into the installation space.

**Rail:** After you complete an installation, do you consider it one whole piece or multiple pieces that will then be broken apart and distributed?

**Evans:** At some point, I would love for it all to be one thing some place, not stripped apart. It'd be really great. Mostly now the parts become isolated into private collections as paintings or sculptures, or reassembled later with new explorations into the next installations.

**Rail:** How does the system function as a whole? Is this system porous, and fluid, and flexible, and permeable, or is it fixed like a singular photographic image?

**Evans:** It's more fluid, but there's some part that wants fixedness. Even though most everything about what I do and what I've been doing is not very fixed. But we're adaptable! [*Laughs.*] When I look at this wall in my studio right now, maybe in two weeks it'll be different.

**Rail:** What will happen with your installation at the end of the *timepaths* exhibition at the Nevada Museum of Art? Can you talk about how you have approached the massive scale and size of this museum space?

**Evans:** The installation is at a significantly larger scale than I have ever worked, particularly because several walls are around 30 feet tall. One wall is 39 feet wide by 28 feet tall. As a part of the installation, this wall becomes my largest painting to date. I usually do scale studies for exhibitions on the computer, with the likely layouts of the elements I collage and build into the space. For this particular wall, I started with the largest painting on canvas from the studio 144 by 72 inches. I pasted a jpeg of this painting onto my scale study in Photoshop and immediately recognized how small it was relative to the wall. It forced me to consider much larger elements: shapes of painted color and forms embedded in the paintings and also extending from the dislocating architecture of the room (walls that tilted out). I added four, 5 by 20 feet canvas pigment prints of distorted documentation images of my library piece, “felibrary2012to1967” (2012). These effectively expanded the visual field to meet the scale of the room and walls. I am nearing the finish of the installation and it is remarkable how much the scale study and the photograph of this large wall painting match up!

I have gained a remarkable material insight into making such large-scale work. *Timepaths* ends April 20, 2014, but its future began before its installation. Ideas had already begun to be explored in my New York studio prior to my travel to Nevada for installation. Six new paintings began in the later summer, which are not part of this show. With the knowledge gained from the process of this installation, I will return to my New York studio to engage with a past – ready to be altered – for my future projects.

[www.brooklynrail.org](http://www.brooklynrail.org)



# BOMB

## Greater New York Roundtable: Franklin Evans and Sam Moyer by Richard J. Goldstein

*BOMB's Richard J. Goldstein talks generational differences, scale, and what it means to be a New York Artist with Greater New York artists Sam Moyer and Franklin Evans in this cyber-roundtable.*

Sep 7, 2010



Franklin Evans, TIMECOMPRESSIONMACHINE, 2010, mixed medium, dimensions variable. Greater New York 2010 installation shot at P.S.1. Courtesy of Sue Scott Gallery.



Sam Moyer, Greater New York 2010 installation shot at P.S.1. Courtesy of the artist.

In just 10 years, MoMA P.S.1 has invited some 376 artists to participate in its Greater New York exhibitions, and that's just with three shows between 2000 and 2010. With a little more time between shows than the biennial, this quinquennial offers a chance for new artists, approaches, and attitudes in all media to transpire. Looking back at the shows over the decade, one can see these changes within the New York art community. Though, one thing remains constant and that is the energy and level of inquiry the artists ground their work upon—installed throughout this one-time school, a sense of science fair enthusiasm echoes down the halls. Franklin Evans and Sam Moyer, two participating artists in the 2010 group, both agreed to participate in an ongoing email dialogue about the exhibition. The contrasts between their work couldn't be more striking—Evans's colorful and cumulative installations exploding with texture and Moyer's black and bleached prints on panels with all texture relegated to the surface—but the casual elegance of both their works has the ability to totally absorb the viewer. They relate their involvement with an exhibition of this scale and give insight into the position of the often mythologized New York artist today.

**Richard Goldstein** What did you think of the show?

**Franklin Evans** I was impressed by the space that the curators generally allotted to each of the artists and by their curatorial decisions to emphasize process/performance-oriented work in this exhibition. Clearly like in any survey exhibition, many vibrant voices are somewhat ignored (painting), but I absolutely respect the choices of the curators not to dilute their idea by presenting an all-inclusive sampling of all media. Moreover, I like the idea of bringing in other voices via the rotating gallery exhibitions in the drawing gallery, which can allow for alternative ideas regarding what is most relevant and interesting now. Finally, there were several delights for me to discover in my initial and return visits to the show.

**Sam Moyer** The show mimics/mirrors a sense of the experience of New York, the living breathing thing for me. There are parts that are dark and fun, hidden behaviors, interruptive and interactive noise, things I want to avoid (but I'm glad I know they are there), spots I want to return to again and visual moments that stick with me. I am speaking generally, but there is an experiential blanketing effect that works for me. When I walk people through there for the first time they have a "what just happened..." mind set, but over time it wears off and they start to list particular things that struck them. Most "out of towners" are *fascinated*. That seems successful to me.

**RG** How did you go about making the selections for the show?

**FE** Klaus [Biesenbach], Connie [Butler], and Neville [Wakefield] offered me time to develop a new installation in a single room. They recognized that time was one of the subjects in the painting/installation language that I have been exploring over the past couple of years, and they suggested that I consider an installation in the spirit of this process-oriented exploration. I was excited to have a contained space (single room) in which to develop and reinvestigate processes that were both familiar and unfamiliar.

**SM** Well, that was hard for me. Nothing in particular was asked of me other than hearing through the grape vine that Connie would like some drawings in there. So, I made a little proposal...and then waited...

So in waiting I just started working and ended up with a smaller version of the piece I originally proposed, two drawings and a 36-foot sculpture that I kind of sprung on the curators. It all felt very up in the air until it was in the room, and then all of a sudden was very deliberate.

**RG** What do the pieces say about your practice as a whole?

**FE** *Timecompressionmachine* embodies my two year investigation that allows for a democratization of object and process. It has a relationship with many past practices, but aligned with the privileging of the individual, it is both my discarded material and my object investigation. It is the fullest installation I have done to date in contrast to recent past exhibitions whereby the processes were more discrete and less consciously intertwined.

**SM** The installation is a sampling of the different materials and systems I work with, but the goal was to show the crossover of themes and visual language that they share.

The objects I produce can appear very physically disparate but are always approached with the same set of concerns and motives. A large part of my practice is returning some power to the materials, defying their natural or intended use, highlighting their actual nature. Taking away a little control of the hand in the hand made. The list of themes goes on and on, but I feel like I was allowed a nice platform to show a body of work that represents my practice as a whole with pieces that are germane to each other.

**RG** Scale has always been an important subject of art. What does the exhibition say about the scale of our generation and of our generation's work?

**FE** I am not sure what you are getting at with this question...Are we the Make It Bigger Generation? I think we are past that (possibly linked to recent economic decline). GNY gave each artist essentially a single room (as did the Whitney) and yet in both cases, most of the work did not seem to be about making it big or small. Nothing felt like Richard Serra's *Torqued Ellipses*, Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*, or even the maquette for Jeff Koons' *LACMA Train*. The recent economic past may be a harbinger of what's to come (slow decline of economic hubris and transition to more moderate lifestyles) and in ways it may be seen in some of the

GNY work. Matt Hoyt's strange work wonderfully relates (and more than just this) to what I suggest as the current social attitude digesting the socioeconomic decline of America.

**SM** The scale of our generation...as in the amount of people? This question is tricky for me. It makes me think about scale in a sense of importance for some reason. How important is our generation's work? How many people does it reach? Do we make big things or small things? I think that scale is played with in very interesting ways throughout the show. There are sound pieces that take up huge amounts of space, and video pieces when looped take up infinite amounts of time. Mariah Robertson's photo on an entire roll of paper is defined by scale, a lot of the work is, including my own. I think the show is visually well balanced. I agree with Franklin that some of the smaller pieces take up the most space.

**RG** In terms of scale, I guess I wasn't as specific as I could be with that one...But I was thinking in terms of numbers, like there are so many artists today whereas in the '50s it was noted that the New York art scene was very small, just a handful. Though, there probably were plenty more people making work off the radar toiling away—perhaps the critics' definition of the scene was very narrow and exclusive then. Maybe today the scale of the scene is a lot bigger and less elite. The Internet increases the scale, everyone's in the pool and that's something specific to this time I guess. And that changes looking; where to look? Things may be less competitive now because there are more opportunities for artists, more galleries, and more alternative ways to get the work out there.

**SM** I think there is a generation of artists right ahead of me—I'm 27, so let's say 34–45-ish—that were able to saddle up on this incredible boom in the art market. It came in stride for a lot of them, and some just grazed the tail end, but they really showed that it was possible to make a life out of this. It's hard and competitive, but possible. Then once the market crashed all the kids that were waiting around for their turn didn't just give up. They started amazing DIY things, like Apartment Show. Of course the Internet and accessibility and the rejection of the idealized “artist” has broadened the field immensely. Anything goes. In the '50s, photography was barely considered art.

Plus, there is a slower maturation in a lot of ways now. We might know more and be more worldly than our parents were, but we don't have the same get married, get a mortgage, have a baby pressure that they did. We get to stay flexible longer, and that combined with being raised on ideas of being anything we want to be is a recipe for a lot of people doing what they want. Which fills the artist quota pretty fast. There are companies like the 3rd Ward in Bushwick that basically created a "how to be a NY artist" kit, that includes laptops, bikes, studio space, and lessons on how to build a loft. There is an infrastructure laid out that makes the whole thing more approachable and fathomable.

**RG** Sam mentioned a "blanketing effect" in one of her responses. A similar feeling came over me at the Armory show, but here there is a strong curatorial undercurrent. Is this blanketing something unique to our time? How does this shape work being made now?

**FE** I don't have the same blanketing experience with GNY, certainly not to the extent that I recently had in watching Chantal Akerman's *La Chambre* where the camera is in repeated 360 degree rotation of a room. On the first pass, I was unclear of the specificity of visual and structural arrangement. My initial experience with GNY (which was a rather cursory view of the show) led to an immediate understanding of what I was seeing and a clear impression of what I wanted specifically to explore further. I was later pleasantly surprised that some of what I had dismissed was far more rewarding than my quick dismissal had allowed for. I don't think that what I understand Sam describing as "blanketing" to be specific to this show or to our time. It could and does happen now (Sam) and at other times (my experience with 1970s Akerman).

**SM** I didn't intend for the "blanketing effect" to sound like a suggestion of doldrum-ness, more of an overarching understanding. Even though the works are all very different there is an overall thread that links everything, making the show feel connected. I also finished that statement by saying that after the overwhelming feelings of having seen so many different things at once passes, specifics start to pop up. It is the kind of exhibition I need to go back to a couple of times. As far as "blanketing effects" in general, the thing I was getting at is that you don't want to fall into the trend and be pigeonholed or disregarded as another little fish in whatever movement is being defined. You don't want to get *stuck* under the blanket.

Art fairs are not museum shows, they are not trying to do anything as a uniformed group other than have a successful art fair. The “blanketing effect” there, for me, is just seeing cubicle after cubicle of people trying to build the same house with a different set of tools.

**RG** The New York artist is often championed and maligned, ironic and sincere, naive and clever—an urban legend, that has evolved over time. What kind of picture does the show make of a New York artist now?

**FE** NY Artist Now: Championed and Maligned—YES; Ironic and Sincere—YES; an Urban Legend still evolving—YES; AND more (ambitious, obsessive, multi-media focused, interested in conceptual reconsideration of the past, process-oriented, mostly reaching outside the exclusivity of the studio, professional and career attentive).

**SM** I hope it shows that we are hard workers. That’s what defines a New York artist for me. You have to work harder here than you would anywhere else. But that’s what makes it good.

**RG** What makes GNY different than other contemporary youth-centric exhibitions like the Whitney Biennial and the New Museum’s *Younger than Jesus*?

**FE** GNY is more geographically focused, slightly less youth-centric than the age-specific 33 of *Younger than Jesus*, but since it is about emerging art, it too is youngish. Whitney seems to have much less interest in age than in defining what the selected curator champions from the recent past nationally and sometimes beyond. GNY allows for a wider period in which to assess emerging work or work of import (past five years), but it still feels weighted toward the more recent past (past year or two) similar to a Whitney Biennial.

**SM** The community factor is the separation for me. The specificity of place creating the playing field. I like that New York plays a neutral and aggressive role in the creation of the show. We all have that in common. I guess being under 33 is something to have in common...but age is sly, a location is fact.

**RG** Emerging isn’t really the word that best locates your careers, perhaps rising...If GNY marks your career at a beginning, what is the destination for you?

**FE** It seems like the horizon interminably pushes further into the distance as we pass markers that used to define that horizon. I plan/hope to be in New York for many years to come.

**SM** To work until I can't work anymore. (cross fingers, knock on wood) I'm too superstitious to say.

*At 5:00 pm September 11, 16, and 23, 2010, several performances, on which Franklin Evans collaborated, will occur at P.S.1.*

*Richard J. Goldstein is a Brooklyn-based painter and writer.*