

***THE FOREVER NOW: CONTEMPORARY PAINTING IN AN ATEMPORAL WORLD*
BRINGS TOGETHER RECENT WORK BY 17 ARTISTS TO EXPLORE THE IDEA OF
"TIMELESSNESS" IN CONTEMPORARY PAINTING**

The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World

December 14, 2014–April 5, 2015

The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art Gallery, sixth floor

Press Preview: Monday, December 8, 2014, 9:30-11:30 a.m.

NEW YORK, November 24, 2014—Paintings by 17 artists working today are the focus of ***The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World*** at The Museum of Modern Art from December 14, 2014, through April 5, 2015. These works are united by a singular approach that characterizes a cultural moment in the early years of this millennium: they paradoxically do not represent—either through style, content, or medium—the time in which they are made. This “atemporality,” or timelessness—also present in contemporary literature, fashion, and popular music—is manifested in painting through the reanimating of historical styles or by recreating a contemporary version of them, sampling motifs from across the timeline of 20th-century art in a single painting or across an oeuvre, or by radically paring down an artistic language to its most basic, archetypal form. *The Forever Now* is organized by Laura Hoptman, Curator, with Margaret Ewing, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture, MoMA.

The Forever Now includes nearly 90 stylistically disparate, and often visually dazzling, paintings made within the last several years by Richard Aldrich, Joe Bradley, Kerstin Brätsch, Matt Connors, Michaela Eichwald, Nicole Eisenman, Mark Grotjahn, Charline von Heyl, Rashid Johnson, Julie Mehretu, Dianna Molzan, Oscar Murillo, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman, Josh Smith, Mary Weatherford, and Michael Williams. Several artists—including Connors, Eisenman, and Owens—are producing new work for the exhibition.

The featured artists utilize a wide variety of styles and impulses, but all use the painted surface as a platform, map, or screen on which genres intermingle, morph, and collide. Their work represents an engagement with traditional painting, yet each artist tests those traditions in such a way that they reshape the various languages of abstraction, redefine strategies like appropriation and bricolage, and reframe more metaphysical, high-stakes questions that surround notions of originality, subjectivity, and spiritual transcendence.

Contemporary painters working atemporally choose to reanimate, reenact, or sample from the history of art to liberate forms, gestures, monochromatic surfaces, and glyphs from the chronological conveyor belt of progress. But instead of emphasizing the pastness of these styles, or for that matter their future significances, they challenge them to be relevant again in the forever, digital now.

Reanimation

In contemporary painting, “reanimation” exists on the level of form, on the level of ideas, or a mixture of both. *The Forever Now* includes reanimators of form such as Michaela Eichwald, Julie Mehretu, Mary Weatherford, Charline von Heyl, and Amy Sillman, who create painterly languages that resemble in method and manner that of their precursors, but often have different meanings.

Berlin-based artist Michaela Eichwald’s gestural abstractions channel the explosive power of Abstract Expressionism but incorporate materials like newspaper clippings, pleather and bed sheets. The effect is that, even at a large scale, Eichwald’s paintings seem anecdotal—maps of a local cosmos rather than universal one.

Julie Mehretu’s best-known works marry cartographic structure with improvisatory gesture, exhibiting many different graphic languages inspired by Renaissance architectural drawing, modernist grids, and Chinese calligraphy among other sources. In her most recent compositions (included in the exhibition) her focus has switched from external mapping to an internal one. Mehretu has spoken about these new paintings in terms of automatic writing, and while they seem to channel mid-century calligraphic abstractions, the results she achieves are as distinct from a work by Henri Michaux or Cy Twombly as one person’s signature is from another’s.

Mary Weatherford is a reanimator of ideas rather than formal gestures. Brightly colored neon rods on the surface of her abstract landscapes create a glowing, colored atmosphere. These works reanimate concepts found in American Color Field paintings by Mark Rothko or Clyfford Still, but as their titles suggest, her paintings are rooted in observable phenomena—early evenings in the desert, for example, or neon-flecked nights in New York or Bakersfield, California.

Charline von Heyl creates complex, multiplane compositions in which abstract, representational, and onomatopoeic forms like zigzags coalesce and disaggregate. She takes inspiration from a diverse range of traditions, but rather than appropriating her references entirely, she incorporates elements of them into an intricately woven tapestry of juxtaposed and overlaid images.

Works by Amy Sillman may contain a hundred other paintings layered atop another to create an archaeology of styles and techniques. Sillman’s recent “still lifes,” on view in *The Forever Now*, clearly reference Cubism but are informed as much by digital animation as by early modernism.

Reenactment

The crucial element of “reenactment” is performative, aiming to be close to the iteration on which it is based but not identical to it. Artist reenactors are as much fans as they are scholars of the styles they choose, at once precise in the details of their re-performance, and conscious of the fact that the context in which they reenact irrevocably makes the reenactment something other. The exhibition explores artist reenactors through the work of Rashid Johnson, Dianna Molzan, Matt Connors, and Kerstin Brätsch.

Collectively titled *Cosmic Slop*, Rashid Johnson’s gestural abstractions are created by scoring into thick surfaces made from a mixture of African black soap and wax. These works are abstractions

in the vein of precursors like Jackson Pollock and Sam Gilliam, however Johnson's use of this culturally specific and charged material as a medium deliberately separates his reenactment from mere copying, and catapults these works into a 21st-century context.

Matt Connors engages with the fraught ancestry of utopian modernism, from Kasimir Malevich to Ad Reinhardt, with a sense of optimism and fresh experimentation. With canvases suffused in atmospheres of color, ripped by a vertical "zip" or invaded by a floating square, he retraces abstraction's routes of discovery with an invigorating sense of making the journey for the first time.

This zest for rediscovery is shared by Dianna Molzan, who has described the surface of a painting as "a platform for a collision of styles." Reiterating the definition of painting as pigment, surface, and support, her paintings test the limits of these three elemental painterly ingredients, reinvigorating the fundamental but often-asked question, "What is a painting?"

While Kerstin Brätsch works with abstract forms that conjure operative existential themes central to Abstract Expressionism, she is conflicted about the relationship of her work to art history. Her work acknowledges predecessors such as Sigmar Polke and Martin Kippenberger, but the imaginative ways in which she exhibits her paintings—none of which include framing them on a wall—may be a conscious choice to distance herself from historic references.

Sampling

The remix, mash-up, and sample may have their origins in popular music, but, since the turn of the millennium, these strategies have spread to the visual arts. Here they have bred a generation of self-identified cultural assemblers who aggressively juxtapose various styles and motifs on an individual canvas or across an oeuvre.

While Richard Aldrich values history, he does not feel beholden to it, sampling styles and motifs from a diverse array of sources. Fragmenting historical and contemporary cultural references—a snippet of color from a Pierre Bonnard painting, a calligraphic gesture from a Franz Kline—Aldrich has developed a pictorial equivalent to sound sampling, with results that can resist stylistic description as well as chronological ones.

Laura Owens's newest large-scale paintings are also examples of the aesthetic of sampling. She has said that the possibility of using many styles, techniques, and motifs simultaneously "gives you more chance to level these hierarchies and talk about heterogeneity." Her combination of hand-drawn or painted lines with photo silkscreen and collage bring together on a single canvas a veritable community of motifs and languages from a wide variety of sources.

Similarly, Josh Smith's paintings over the past decade have run the gamut from expressionist abstractions to landscapes, monochromes, and more conceptual works featuring his name. Often painted on canvases of the same size to emphasize their equivalence with one another, they present a nonhierarchical panoply of artistic motifs and languages.

Simultaneous understanding of information is a central tenet of Michael Williams's work. Using digital printing processes to transfer motifs directly onto the canvas, along with airbrush and more

traditional applications of paint using a brush, Williams creates the illusion of a series of transparent planes in which his figures, glyphs, and symbols seem to be suspended. He gathers forms that may or may not relate to each other but that create their own narrative, and suggest their own time.

Oscar Murillo will often make one painting out of the remains of several others, either sewing together bits of painted or drawn-on canvas, or imprinting motifs from one surface to another. This kind of self-cannibalism creates an intentionally closed system that refutes notions of first and last, beginning and end, material and product.

The Archetype

The exhibition examines the work of three very different painters—Joe Bradley, Nicole Eisenman, and Mark Grotjahn—whose work is atemporal in a similar way: it is based on archetypal, symbolic forms that are by definition undatable, existing outside any specific time period.

Joe Bradley is represented in the exhibition through his simultaneously primitive and contemporary Schmagoo paintings, a notorious series begun in 2008. The exhibition will feature all the works from the first, highly controversial exhibition of Schmagoos. The raw canvases each feature a single rudimentary form boldly drawn with black grease pencil. These forms—ranging from a cross to a slightly curved horizontal line that can be read as a smile—are universally recognizable glyphs that balance between the ancient definition of the term and the contemporary digital one. Brutally primitivist but also brutally contemporary, the Schmagoos are a kind of first and last word of painterly communication.

“When you can’t think of what to draw, draw a head,” Nicole Eisenman commented recently. In her newest series of paintings of totemic, mask-like compositions featured in the exhibition, Eisenman returns to this primary impulse, only updating her primitivistic heads with utterly contemporary expressions of doubt, self-satisfaction, fear, and determination.

In Mark Grotjahn’s newest series of paintings, also composed around the form of a mask, he combines so-called “primitive” subject matter with an optically dazzling palette and inventive method of paint application to rethink the mask archetype through the chromatic pyrotechnics of a range of modernists, from Pablo Picasso to Richard Pousette-Dart.

SPONSORSHIP:

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PUBLICATION:

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue featuring an essay by curator Laura Hoptman and work by the international roster of artists represented in the exhibition: Richard Aldrich, Joe Bradley, Kerstin Brätsch, Matt Connors, Michaela Eichwald, Nicole Eisenman, Mark Grotjahn,

Charline von Heyl, Rashid Johnson, Julie Mehretu, Dianna Molzan, Oscar Murillo, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman, Josh Smith, Mary Weatherford, and Michael Williams. 9.5"w x 12"h; 176 pages; 118 illustrations. Hardcover, \$50. ISBN: 978-0-87070-949-4. Published by The Museum of Modern Art and available at the MoMA Stores and online at MoMAstore.org. Distributed to the trade through ARTBOOK|D.A.P. in the United States and Canada, and Thames & Hudson outside the United States and Canada.

AUDIO TOUR:

The audio tour accompanying the exhibition features an introduction by exhibition curator Laura Hoptman and commentaries by artists Kerstin Brätsch, Rashid Johnson, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman, Josh Smith, and Matt Connors.

MoMA Audio+ is available free of charge at the Museum and is also available for streaming and download on MoMA's free app on iTunes, MoMA.org/m, and MoMA.org. MoMA Audio+ is supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies.

PUBLIC PROGRAM:

Painting Plenary

March 6, 2015, time and location to be announced

Organized in conjunction with the exhibition *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World*, this program will include scholars, critics, artists, and members of the public in a lively exploration of the most pressing questions concerning the state of contemporary painting.

WEBSITE:

Select highlights from the exhibition will be featured in a slide show on MoMA's website at MoMA.org/forevernow.

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For downloadable high-resolution images, register at MoMA.org/press.

Public Information:

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019, (212) 708-9400, MoMA.org. Hours: Saturday through Thursday, 10:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Friday, 10:30 a.m.–8:00 p.m. Museum Admission: \$25 adults; \$18 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$14 full-time students with current I.D. Free, members and children 16 and under. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). Free admission during Uniqlo Free Friday Nights: Fridays, 4:00 p.m.–8:00 p.m. MoMA.org: No service charge for tickets ordered on MoMA.org. Tickets purchased online may be printed out and presented at the Museum without waiting in line. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). Film and After Hours Program Admission: \$12 adults; \$10 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$8 full-time students with current I.D. The price of an After Hours Program Admission ticket may be applied toward the price of a Museum admission ticket or MoMA Membership within 30 days.