

New American Paintings

16 Artists to Watch in 2016 (+ 2)

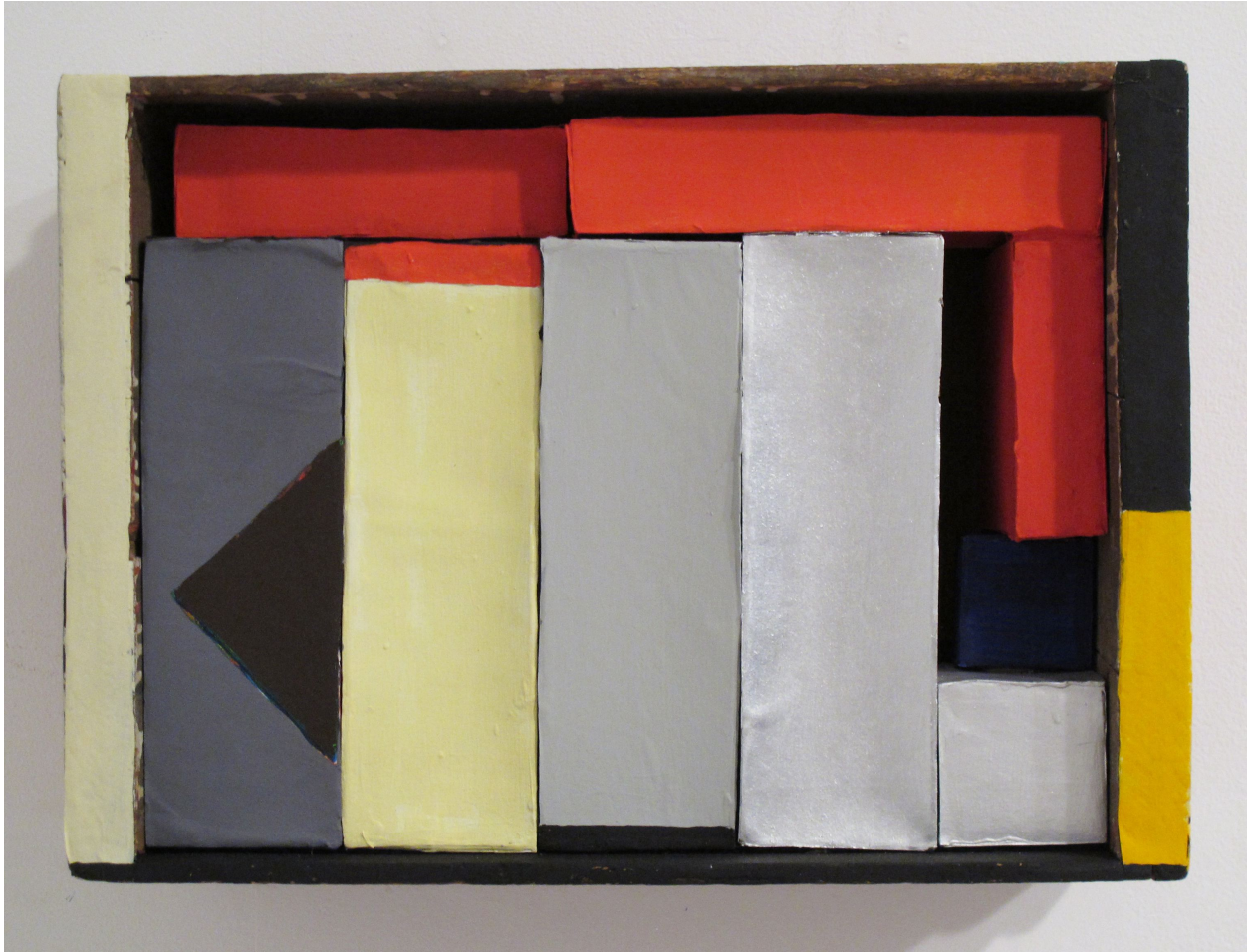
The needs and priorities of artists are in constant flux. Art historians have attempted to document this flux by identifying a series of seismic shifts in aesthetics and attaching to each its defining characteristics. This practice has provided us with a litany of isms that stretch back centuries. Art history will continue to roll on, but it very well may be that the age of the ism is behind us. That's not to say that there are not, and will not continue to be, clusters of like-minded artists whose combined efforts can generate an aesthetic critical mass that historians are able to delineate. But with instant global communication, the time in which new ideas are disseminated, assimilated, and ultimately disregarded is so compressed that the enterprise has been, at best, reduced to trend spotting.

The medium of painting, in particular, has always been prone to noticeable trends. For the better part of a decade, the trend of note has been the overwhelming amount of abstraction that has circulated, in particular that of the provisional, or de-skilled ilk. While there are some talented artists working in this vein—Richard Aldrich and Joe Bradley, to name two—much of the stuff is so hopelessly bland and devoid of meaningful content that it has garnered the moniker “zombie formalism.” In the past two years, however, the winds have shifted. Abstraction is out, and the figure is in; flatness is out, as artists begin to embrace a space that lies somewhere between reality and a digital simulacrum of it.

Both of these trends were widely visible in 2015. As I wandered through the various art fairs that make up Miami's art week in early December I was overwhelmed by the amount of figurative painting on view... much of it at galleries that have rarely, if ever, exhibited such work. The figure is everywhere, and being addressed with all manner of stylistic intonation. Even more conspicuous was the number of artists who, whatever their subject matter, are conjuring a kind of space that seems teasingly “real,” yet clearly relies on life as experienced through the computer screen more than the living room window. Perhaps this is not a surprise, given that a generation of artists weaned on the Internet is now coming of age.

Before getting in to this year's list of Artists to Watch, I want to say how pleased I am to see the success of all of the artists featured on last year's list. Sadie Benning had a knockout show at Susanne Vielmetter in Los Angeles that was critically acclaimed. Katherine Bernhardt took it to the next level with her outing at Venus Over Manhattan. Daniel Heidkamp, who just gets better and better, was heavily in demand. Eddie Martinez, whose current show at Mitchell-Innes & Nash is his best to date, is now firmly on the radar of serious international collectors. Most exciting to me is the attention given to mature painter,

Katherine Bradford. Bradford has been making her quirky, extraordinary paintings for years and, finally, the world has caught up. Her work looked completely of-the-moment at NADA Miami, and her subsequent one-woman show at CANADA in New York City was a huge commercial and critical success. – Steven Zevitas, Editor/Publisher



Nancy Shaver. Courtesy of Derek Eller Gallery, New York

NANCY SHAVER

I was introduced Shaver's work by the great Hudson at Feature Inc. more than a decade ago. (I truly miss Hudson. He was a generous soul with an unflinching vision. He was in the art world for all of the right reasons.) Shaver has been making mature work and exhibiting for more than four decades. Like Katherine Bradford, and many others, she is way overdue for wider recognition. Shaver is an absolute master of redeeming materials that are aesthetically intractable. Look for an upcoming solo at Derek Eller's soon-to-open new Lower East Side space.