



# HYPERALLERGIC

ART • WEEKEND

## Hair and Mushrooms, Gnarly Paint and Smooth Pours

Two artist couples that are good friends have an exhibition and show together for the first time. That seems to me as good a reason as any to have a show.

John Yau | 2 days ago

I don't recall ever thinking about Cousin Itt, the hairy creature that appeared in the TV show, *The Addams Family*, while looking at work in an art gallery. What prompted me to dig up a pleasantly absurd memory from my absurdly unpleasant adolescence was a bronze sculpture aptly titled "It" (2004), by Carl D'Alvia. "It" is included in the exhibition, *CarlJackieSteveMichelle*, at Helena Anrather (June 29 - August 5, 2017). The fact that you are reminded of a TV show popular more than half a century ago, after ascending the stairs of a building without an elevator on a hot summer day, speaks to the surrealism of everyday life as a way of addressing the waves of disenchantment constantly washing over us.

The premise of the show: two artist couples that are good friends have an exhibition and show together for the first time. That seems to me as good a reason as any to have a show. The artist couples are Carl D'Alvia and Jackie Saccoccio, and Michelle Segre and Steve DiBenedetto. D'Alvia and Segre are sculptors and Saccoccio and DiBenedetto are painters, giving the show a nice symmetry. What makes the symmetry even nicer is that it is quickly apparent that all four artists have gone their own way. They share neither the same subject nor the same techniques and materials.

D'Alvia's other sculptures come across as an amalgam of modernist forms by Tony Smith and Clement Meadmore covered over by hair the width of spaghetti or feathers. They look as if they are in the process of becoming animate things. "Worm" (2014) is made of two right angles, which form a line, until it rises from the floor (another right angle), ending with its snub head thrust forward. Think of a Sol LeWitt "Incomplete Open Cube" covered by tufts of thick hair. It is funny and weird. D'Alvia's unified, sealed objects are made of steel, resin, and bronze: you may want to rub or maybe even kiss them, like the Blarney Stone.



Michelle Segre, installation view (courtesy the artist, Helena Anrather Gallery, and Derek Eller Gallery)

Segre's works look like objects you might find on a table in a den of hashish smokers, if they included Charles Baudelaire, Thomas De Quincey, and Jane Bowles, and were being filmed by Kenneth Anger or Hong-jin Na. I am thinking of his amazing film *The Wailing* (2016).

"Driftloaf (Blue with Red Wire and Half Brick)" (2016) is a piece of bread that is painted bright blue mounted on a red wire that rises up from black plaster capping a brick. While blue recalls Yves Klein, and the bread evokes his paint-soaked sponges, the sculpture exceeds those allusions. Segre's blue bread is sacramental without being preachy. Someone who survived an apocalypse could have made it.

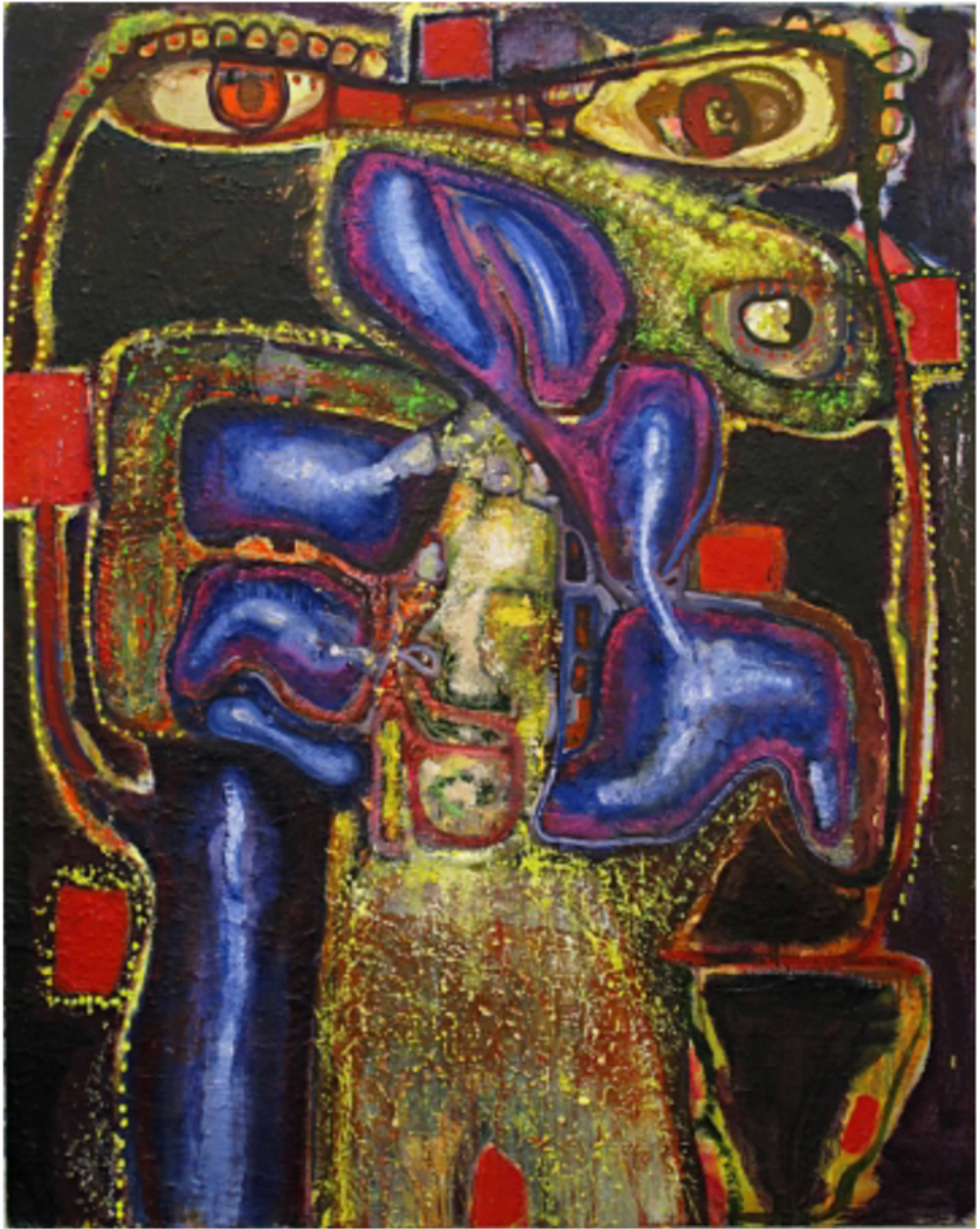
Jackie Saccoccio's painting "Portrait (SdB Lobster)" (2017) refers to Steve Di Benedetto and, as I was told by the gallerist Helen Anrather, a lobster dinner they were at. While the painting is abstract, and combines directed pours of paint (which become a lattice of drips in places) with brushwork, the red pigment in the painting brought to mind boiled lobster. You can also see a rounded form embedded in the pours, suggestive of a profile. One of things about Saccoccio's painting is that she has enlivened techniques, such as pouring, which many felt had been exhausted by the late 1970s, so that the delight is in the looking and the various ways the paint appears on the surface, from pours and drips to crackling and brushwork. The fact that she calls her paintings "portraits" raises questions how we see and remember someone, the portrait we make of an individual in our mind's eye.

Steve DiBenedetto's painting, "Amnesiaphilia" (2017), could also be read as an abstract portrait, with its eyes up near the painting's top edge, and what we might read as the top of the creature's head. Is it a mutant or a mutation that we are looking at? Do we need to give it a name because that would make us feel more comfortable?

DiBenedetto has three paintings of varying sizes in the exhibition. While it is obvious that the same person painted them, what is more striking is how different DiBenedetto's paintings are from each other. None have the same subject or palette. In "Indications are such..." (2013-15), he writes words across the surface. In "Pink Italy" (2017), he fragments the space into discrete but connected areas.

While the world inches toward the abyss with increasing speed, artists and art seem to be thriving. That is the takeaway from this exhibition of four midcareer artists. Each of them does something distinctive. Their works can be funny, disquieting, quirky, sweet, meticulous, improvisational, and hallucinatory. None of them fits a mold. Isn't it time that we stop focusing on megastars and dependable producers of inflated works, and begin seeing all the interesting and challenging stuff that is being quietly made?

CarlJackieSteveMichelle continues at *Helena Anrather* (28 Elizabeth Street, lower East Side, Manhattan) through August 5.



Steve Dibenedetto, "Amnesiaphilia" (2017), oil on Linen (courtesy the artist, Helena Anrather Gallery, and Derek Eller Gallery)