MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY
523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 matthewmarks.com

Jacqueline Humphries

Press Packet

Foye, Raymond, and Jacqueline Humphries. "Jacqueline Humphries with Raymond Foye." *The Brookyln Rail,* February 2025, pp. cover, 12–17.

Grabner, Michelle. "Artcrush Honoree: Jacqueline Humphries." *Aspen Art Museum,* Summer 2024, pp. cover, 36–37.

Halperin, Julia. "Artist Jacqueline Humphries: 'They Told Me I Had to Stop Painting.'" *Financial Times,* May 31, 2023.

McDonough, Tom. "To Serve Painting: Tom McDonough on Jacqueline Humphries at Greene Naftali, New York." *Texte zur Kunst,* February 10, 2023.

Kan-Sperling, Olivia. "Venice Dispatch: from the Biennale." *The Paris Review,* April 29, 2022.

Wise, Lloyd. "Feelings Aren't Facts." *Artforum* 57, no. 10, Summer 2019.

Farago, Jason. "Jacqueline Humphries's Digital Paintings, Aglow in the Dark." *The New York Times,* September 5, 2019.

Bernstein, Felix, and Jacqueline Humphries. "A Romantic and Sublime Threshold State: Jacqueline Humphries." *Mousse Magazine,* May 30, 2019.

Schwendener, Martha. "What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week: Jacqueline Humphries." *The New York Times,* November 29, 2017.

Humphries, Jacqueline, and David Ryan. "Painting as Event: An Interview with Jacqueline Humphries." *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 4, Issue 1, April 2018, pp. 45–58.

Schjeldahl, Peter. "Jacqueline Humphries." *The New Yorker,* November 13, 2017.

Levy, Matthew L. "Reviews: 'Jacqueline Humphries', Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 11 June–5 October 2015." *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 2, Issue 2, October 2016, pp. 322–26.

Russeth, Andrew. "'The Thrilling Feeling of Creating Leigh': Jacqueline Humphries on Her Recent Work." *ARTnews,* October 7, 2015.

Lehmann, Claire. "Jacqueline Humphries." *Artforum,* June 5, 2015.

Godfrey, Mark. "Statements of Intent: Mark Godfrey on the Art of Jacqueline Humphries, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman, and Charline von Heyl." *Artforum* 52, no. 9, May 2014, pp. 294–302, 344.

Humphries, Jacqueline, and Paul Soto. "Painting in Silver and Noir: Q+A with Jacqueline Humphries." *Art in America,* April 27, 2012.

Brown, Cecily, Jacqueline Humphries, and Nick Stillman. "Jacqueline Humphries by Cecily Brown." *BOMB,* April 1, 2009.

Foye, Raymond, and Jacqueline Humphries. "Jacqueline Humphries with Raymond Foye." *The Brookyln Rail*, February 2025, pp. cover, 12–17.

Portrait of Jacqueline Humphries, pencil on paper by Phong H. Bui.

Foye, Raymond, and Jacqueline Humphries. "Jacqueline Humphries with Raymond Foye." *The Brookyln Rail*, February 2025, pp. cover, 12–17.

JACQUELINE HUMPHRIES with Raymond Foye

Like her paintings, Jacqueline Humphries has established a subliminal presence in the artworld, composed of intrigue and integrity. Since the 1980s she has played out brilliant variations on endgame theory in painting—while time and again turning the dark end into an inspired beginning. Hers has been an ontological dialogue with the medium and its history, unstable and complex, while staring down the constant shadow of nihilism.

Jacqueline Humphries
Matthew Marks
February 19–April 5, 2025
Los Angeles

One of our most requested subjects for an interview over the years, her innate sense of privacy always returned a polite "no." Finally we met in a large brilliant white studio in Red Hook, Brooklyn, where the paintings loomed over us—cathedral-like machines of light and energy. Our conversation veered obliquely around topics small and large, and Humphries asks as many questions as she answers.

Raymond Foye (RAIL): These new paintings have an interesting vocabulary of marks—random, and yet very determined.

Jacqueline Humphries (J.H.): Some of these are taken from forensic crime sites, where they are analyzing blood splatter patterns from murder scenes. It's another idea I've been working on with the horror paintings—drippy letters like in The *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, kind of cheesy horror movie tropes.

RAIL Do you watch a lot of those?

J.H. I sort of think horror is the genre of our time. I do like a lot of those.

RAIL It doesn't bother you to have violent images in your head?

J.H. Well, a line can be crossed and then I can find things disturbing and I don't watch, but usually it's so fake and obvious.

RAIL It's choreographed, yeah. Is there a gambler's instinct operative where you're pushing the painting further and further, and you might be afraid of losing something that you have, but you still want to carry it somewhere else?

J.H. Yes, that's always a hard thing—you have something, but you want more from it. Am I just being selfish? One ruins paintings that way. I've sort of trained myself to wait and watch, just keep looking. I'm in a dialogue with the painting. I have an idea for it, I might have more than one idea for it. If I have more than one idea, I do nothing.

RAIL What would be the percentage of looking to making, if you could express that in an equation?

J.H. Oh, that's a good question. It depends, because I work in phases. I have an experimental phase where I'm going pretty slowly. Maybe I'll be working on one painting for a long time, as well as working on other things, with new ideas creeping in all the time. I'm pondering things or just trying things out. And then I get tired of that, I start to get bored and I just put all that aside. I retain what I need to remember and forget the rest. Then I start to work with more intent, going very fast.

RAIL Intuitively...

J.H. Intuitively but also counterintuitively. Maybe you see something in the painting, then go against that. But you're making decisions in a very rapid way. "Okay, I've done the thinking, I'm just going to act now, let it rip," you know? Mobilize all the things I'm doing, suspend that slower, calm, critical judgment, and just start *doing*.

RAIL That's improvisation, isn't it?

J.H. Yeah, it's like gathering up this set of things that you know, like notes or tunes in an improvisational context. Learning them, becoming familiar with them, and then forgetting all of that and just doing it. Gathering up experience and then just releasing it while giving in to impulse. At that stage in the painting everything takes place in a much more compressed time frame.

RAIL I don't think there's any relation between the amount of time it takes to make a painting and whether the painting is any good or not.

Foye, Raymond, and Jacqueline Humphries. "Jacqueline Humphries with Raymond Foye." *The Brooklyn Rail*, February 2025, pp. cover, 12–17.

Jacqueline Humphries, *JH12309HJ*, 2023. Oil on linen, 96 x 90 inches. Courtesy the artist; Greene Naftali, New York; Modern Art, London; and Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne. Photo: Ron Amstutz.

J.H. No, and so much of the difficulty is training yourself to be highly attuned to the thing you're looking for, regardless of how much time you spent on the painting, or conversely, how easy it was for you. Not overinvesting your own labor in the specific object, but also not looking a gift horse in the mouth, in terms of accepting something as right even though it might have seemed too easy. Who is looking and who is making? Does a viewer in a sense make or remake what's presented in the painting?

RAIL There's a synergy there, no doubt. Is it about self-knowledge? Or self-interrogation?

J.H. I don't think about the self, or *myself*, so much. It's more about the subject: who is the subject? I've worked and played a lot with personas. I used to make persona paintings. This is who the painter is, and then that persona would make the paintings. I guess that's a more oblique way of getting at selfhood, subjecthood—for people to look at, for me to look at.

RAIL I guess these ideas about identity are at the intersection of a lot of things that are current now—in a practical sense with social media—where we have all these ways in which to identify ourselves.

J.H. It has something to do with self, or the way in which self is expressed, yet without conscious self-presentation, so to speak. "I'm a woman starting a painting"—that would be the last thing I would think of. Am I myself when I'm making a painting? No, not really.

RAIL It's easy to mistake the art for the artist. Sometimes you're just visiting a place. It's not necessarily who you are.

J.H. Right, yeah, I don't think about myself at all when I'm here in the studio. What is the self, anyway?

RAIL An obstacle. It must be difficult as you go on as an artist when you've made a lot of things and suddenly you have an identity that starts getting in the way. I've been visiting the Robert Frank show at the MoMA: he's really working intently against his reputation—against what people think of him. Does that get in the way for you?

J.H. It can. I think you have to objectify that as much as anything else, distance yourself from it. There are always things that get in the way and that's just one. When I come in the studio I want to lose myself as much as possible. I have to leave a lot at the door. The studio is a place where I can do that—must do that.

RAIL I want to ask about the scale of your paintings. They really have a presence that one can enter into, and it seems to have a kind of a rightness. The scale reminds me of late de Kooning paintings—ratio, proportion, and measure all seem to be in accord to an uncanny degree. How did you come upon these sizes?

J.H. Years of working and trying different sizes. I painted on only squares for many years. I make very large and very small paintings and everything in between. I work in all sizes.

RAIL Is that the reason for a 60 by 68 inch? Something that is close to a square, but not quite.

J.H. Right, because it compensates for bilateral vision. A square canvas over a certain size doesn't feel square anymore. It tends to collapse inward on the vertical axis. So

Foye, Raymond, and Jacqueline Humphries. "Jacqueline Humphries with Raymond Foye." *The Brooklyn Rail*, February 2025, pp. cover, 12–17.

Jacqueline Humphries, *JH753.JH753.JI*, 2023. Oil on linen, 96 x 90 inches. Courtesy the artist; Greene Naftali, New York; Modern Art, London; and Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne. Photo: Simon Vogel.

it has to be wider to have that feeling of squareness. And then if you turn that canvas forty-five degrees, it loses that feeling of square and becomes much more vertical than expected—almost a new size despite having the same dimensions. It was just this shift that happened almost accidentally that got me out of a certain set of habits.

RAIL Does that relate to reach?

J.H. It relates to reach and also to the viewer. A small canvas can be like the face and you can see it all at once. Six feet is more human size that you relate to with a body. Then much larger where the painting becomes more like a field or a billboard: epic space.

RAIL How do you deal with the top part?

J.H. Big ladders, a shelf.

RAIL Do you work on the floor at the beginning?

J.H. In the beginning they go on the floor. I'm throwing paint, I'm pushing paint around with big brooms. Really what I'm thinking about is how to mobilize the paint, how to get the stuff on there. And that's the fun part—the how. What I'm really going for in the end is the kind of ecstatic space that feels like it's happening right in front of you.

RAIL I wanted to ask you about ambient music—white noise—this genre which has now become so popular.

J.H Maybe it's getting away from popular music, where every space becomes the melody.

RAIL It's another aspect of composition by field. You become more aware of the microtonal nuances that are taking place. I find it does away with a lot of the mind/body dualism.

J.H. It's a whole different form of attention. It's like inattentive attention, where you can float and free-associate, unlike most things today that are screaming for your attention. A kind of oblivion with simultaneous hyper-attention. I like things that focus your attention but free the mind at the same time, like driving.

RAIL In your paintings you're utilizing all these elements of vision that we don't usually use, things that are peripheral or incidental. Oftentimes what captures our attention in life is not the most important thing, so we end up looking at things that are not very interesting. I find looking at paintings a very good way to counteract that.

J.H. I wonder. I think of my own thing as being not visual, really. It doesn't mean they're not to be looked at, it means more that there are so many other things going on—like the materiality of the object, and the kind of pressure that it exerts on the room, and how space is more than what is perceived by the eye. Take a photograph of a painting. If the painting were a purely visual thing, the photograph would be equal to the painting, right? But we know that isn't the case, so we have to think about this a little more broadly than what is understood as a "visual" culture.

RAIL It's a disembodied image flow?

J.H. Our realities now are our screens, and our screens only relate to other screens. So a big question for me became, "What kind of image will you commit to painting?" I wanted to restate the object as a material fact, while evoking a sense of impermanence. I was trying to make paintings that evoke a constant shifting or morphing of one thing into another. More about the

Foye, Raymond, and Jacqueline Humphries. "Jacqueline Humphries with Raymond Foye." *The Brooklyn Rail*, February 2025, pp. cover, 12–17.

frame of the thing, where the structure becomes the object. Or just a reality, rather than an image which is about reality. It's hard to state. These things can only be addressed abstractly.

RAIL Do you believe in presence and aura in the work of art?

J.H. I would not use those words, necessarily. They seem to belong to an earlier era.

RAIL They reek of spirituality?

J.H. I don't like that word either. That's not how I would explain it, no. But then in a sense, perhaps that's what I'm getting at: something that seems to occupy the space and just sort of … remains interesting. Something that speaks. I suppose that links it to the idea of presence, which is usually about some kind of living being, right? Some kind of illusion within those troublesome boundaries, where something *else* is going on. This brings us back to the idea of attention. But it's a mystery to me. I've no formula for it, you know?

RAIL For me, abstraction is more about a state of being, rather than ideas or theories.

J.H. I always want to try new things to see if I can make that quality I'm looking for emerge: a sense of what I want a painting to be, which I cannot articulate any other way, other than making a painting.

RAIL One image I always think about in relation to your work are those photographs of Andy Warhol's Silver Factory. There's a photograph where the police have just arrived, and the Factory is filled with people and it's painted silver and there are Disaster paintings leaning all over the place, and in the corner the Velvet Underground are playing. What an incredible thing. It's a total environment, total aesthetic. I think about how much has come out of that moment.

Jacqueline Humphries, *4946HJ*, 2022. Oil on linen, 111 x 100 inches. Courtesy the artist and Greene Naftali, New York. Photo: Ron Amstutz.

J.H. A lot. Warhol did things in such a big way. Just in terms of setting something in motion, rolling out a new way of looking—at everything, not just objects. I choose to see him as a painter more than anything, but really expanding on this idea of painting. I think a lot of my students tended not to see him as a painter, like that was just one thing he did—or his assistants did—which is absurd, because his touch is in every single one of them. Warhol was really restoring the primacy of painting. He was constantly diverting your attention from what's important in order to have it enter the mind in a new way. Always playing with presentations and interpretations. How he wanted you to think that he wasn't really working. These diversions also created a kind of erotic allure to everything that he did, a sense of secrecy or of something hidden. But when I arrived in New York in the 1980s, Andy Warhol was despised and hated.

RAIL Oh I remember.

J.H. But then I started meeting young artists in art school who revered him, like Meyer Vaisman, who was at Parsons when I was there. There was the beginnings of a neo-Warhol fan club emerging in the art world. Then in the 1990s it kind of exploded into this general reverence.

RAIL Yes, that was his second life.

J.H. But once you accept Warhol fundamentally as a painter, Pop art and Conceptual art and all the various things that he touched

Foye, Raymond, and Jacqueline Humphries. "Jacqueline Humphries with Raymond Foye." *The Brookyln Rail*, February 2025, pp. cover, 12–17.

upon—everything that signified the end of painting—were from the beginning really about an expanded notion of painting and its place in the world, with grandeur. These are the ancient markers of ambitious artistic enterprise.

RAIL One time I went to the Factory with Henry Geldzahler because Andy had done Henry's portrait, and he asked if I wanted to go see the paintings. So we go there and Andy had done four portraits from an SX-70 photograph, and they were lined up against the wall. Henry's looking at them and Andy says, "You can have any one you want." And Henry says, "I don't want one." And Andy says, "Why not?" Henry said, "You left something out." Andy said, "What?" and Henry said, "The art." And Andy said, "I knew I forgot something!" So Andy redid them, and they're often singled out as being among the very best of all the portraits.

J.H. So Henry was saying, "This is just not good enough."

RAIL Exactly. You've got to put more into this. Henry wasn't afraid to say things like that. They really were quite lackluster, and then Andy went back to work and found a way of really upping it.

J.H. Well see, this is the importance of the critic—which is something that is disappearing now, or seems to be, or it's in remission. Everything we do here doesn't make much sense without the critic, right?

RAIL No.

J.H. Like, we need that, you know?

RAIL Well, that's my problem with a lot of reviews: they're too soft. Like, when are you going to really take somebody apart? If everything is good then nothing is good. It's almost as if the philistines today are the people who say they understand your work.

J.H. Yeah, like, where's the critique? It's how we used to gain respect for people. If they disagreed with us or were critical of something, that was the means of engagement.

RAIL What do you remember about bad reviews of your own work?

J.H. Of my own work?

RAIL How did that make you feel?

J.H. Better than indifference.

RAIL It didn't hurt you personally?

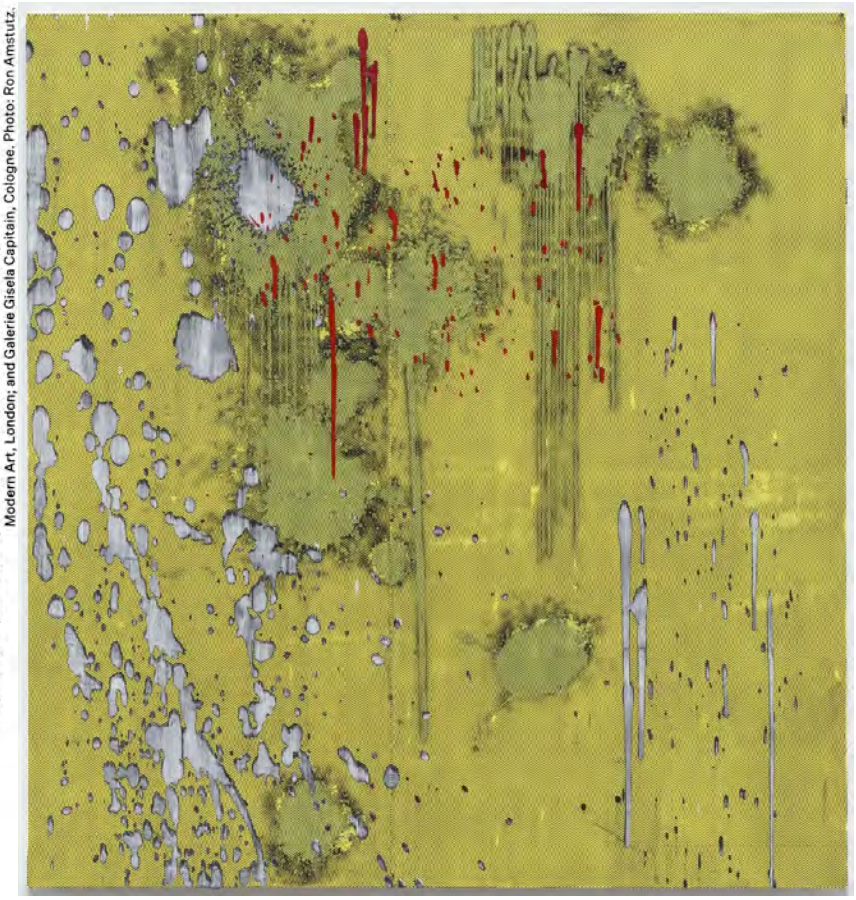
J.H. Of course it does.

RAIL The thing that a lot of people don't understand is that if you are an artist, everything someone says about your work is highly personal.

J.H. Well, I think that used to be very well understood. It takes courage to launch a personal attack on someone about something as personal as their art. But then for that very reason, that's what constitutes art making as a courageous act: that you're exposing yourself to that, you know?

RAIL Then does that make art criticism a courageous act?

J.H. Sure, I think so. Because it's laying down certain principles for judgment, and without that we just have the market, and you know what that's like.



Jacqueline Humphries, *JH123*, 2024. Oil on linen, 96 x 90 inches. Courtesy the artist; Greene Naftali, New York; Modern Art, London; and Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne. Photo: Ron Amstutz.

Foye, Raymond, and Jacqueline Humphries. "Jacqueline Humphries with Raymond Foye." *The Brooklyn Rail*, February 2025, pp. cover, 12–17.

RAIL Well, we lost somebody great in Gary Indiana a few weeks ago. I've been with him when artists have come up to him and just laid into him because of what he said about their work. And he laid right back into them. I've seen this.

J.H. Merciless, right? Well, because it fucking matters, you know? We can't all just pretend we're at some nice high school graduation, some collective celebration. This is a battle of ideas, so it should really matter, it should be personal, it should hurt. Well, it's the professionalization of the art world. I don't like it.

RAIL No, I don't like it either. Gary was like a walking wound. Rene Ricard was the same. They both had deep grievances with society which they were playing out in their criticism. But we have to make a place for these people and appreciate them, because one of the interesting things about the art world has been how it's always been this varied ecosystem.

J.H. And the critic was always part of that, laying down stakes, saying, "This is the conversation that's worth having." It's not much fun penetrating the difficult spaces of becoming Gary Indiana's friend. But earning his respect meant something.

RAIL Who else is fierce in that way, if you think of art critics?

J.H. David Rimanelli, for example. It takes courage to make more than an adulatory statement. And what is more fun than reading a critic really skewering something? I'm not saying it was always laudable, or that there were never personal or political motives— scoring points off an artist, or just being cavalier. But there has to be some risk involved, and one of those risks is ridicule. Those are the stakes of this thing we call culture. Something has to be achieved to deserve attention. Now it's the market that dictates that: "This painting is worth two million dollars." Oh great, let's go see two million dollars.

RAIL Or those hilarious descriptions of artworks in auction catalogues that Leo Steinberg used to read with a deadpan face in his lectures, and the audience would be laughing hysterically. Did you see Christopher Wool's show last year in that trashed office building?

J.H. Several times, yeah. I thought it was great. Especially the sculptures. It was a very personal show.

RAIL I thought Christopher was reaching for a space that was somewhere between the studio and the gallery, something very new and fresh.

J.H. I think there was a desire to see things in a way more like how you see them in your studio. And can they still work in the dirty scruffy world. With that show, I feel Christopher memorialized this period in New York that's now largely plowed under and disappeared, which is "downtown" New York. It felt like what we were living in, that was our environment. And so he's done a hugely important service there, on top of everything else that his work is.

RAIL I think everyone's reference is very much about when one enters the game. That's always going to be the golden moment, that's always going to be your perspective. This is what I have to remind myself when I'm dealing with young artists and writers. My reference point is not their reference point.

J.H. That is one of the strange things about getting older: the world that I know is disappearing and me with it. As you get older, you kind of become invisible to younger people, if you remember being that age and how old people were invisible to you—unless maybe they were Andy Warhol. It's just strange when you realize all your feelings were impermanent or unstable. Or just, you know, I'm not real.

RAIL And it gets more unreal, particularly as one's body begins to fall apart, which I'm just beginning to experience, and it really has a mythic dimension to it. But I'm much more content now. When I was young I was really unhappy.

J.H. At a certain point I realized that struggling in your studio can be a choice. I gave a lecture at RISD years ago, showing paintings that I had worked on arduously. I had photographed the paintings in various stages of development. They changed a lot while I was working on them and there was a lot of struggle. It was a very long lecture, and at the end I found myself saying, "I think I just wanted to suffer." So that's a choice, right? Periods of struggle are inevitable, but it doesn't always have to be like that. Sometimes you just know what to do and how to do it.

RAIL One thing you realize about New York when you go somewhere else and come back is: smart people. They're here.

J.H. New York is self-selected, most everyone is from somewhere else.

RAIL We all left somewhere to be here.

J.H. To come here and do something. We were socialized misfits. An island of broken toys.

Foye, Raymond, and Jacqueline Humphries. "Jacqueline Humphries with Raymond Foye." *The Brookyln Rail*, February 2025, pp. cover, 12–17.

RAIL On the subject of art history, what are some of your favorite books?

J.H. Michael Fried's *Manet's Modernism. The Painting of Modern Life* by T. J. Clark, and all his books. Painting as Model by Yve-Alain Bois, he's very important. Hubert Damisch's *The Origin of Perspective* is a hugely important book for me. Before that, Meyer Schapiro and Leo Steinberg. When I was at Bennington, they were teaching a lot of the French post-structuralists before it became such a big part of the curriculum in the American university system, so it felt very avant-garde at the time. I love Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's book *What Is Philosophy?*—the way they describe philosophy in almost physical terms, as this plane of imminence. It helped me envision something that I needed to happen in my own painting.

RAIL Frank Stella said there are only two questions. What is a painting and how do you make one?

J.H. The "what" and the "how": that's the whole thing, from an artist's perspective. The "what" is harder—I think I'm paraphrasing Richter there.

RAIL I think the invention of the JPEG made images much more homogeneous.

J.H. And always being ready to be displaced by another image that it doesn't relate to in any way whatsoever, to the point where images become meaningless. It's a very new reality, and only there for the second that it takes for another image to displace it.

RAIL What do you do for socializing these days, if you want to go out?

J.H. See some friends. I've been going to Film Forum a lot. I'm rediscovering going to the movies—everything that is. Recently I saw a restored copy of Robert Bresson's film *Lancelot du Lac* and I thought, "Oh my God, I forgot that those colors can exist." All the sense memory returned.

RAIL Yes, film is a chemical process—it's a soup of molecules, as opposed to a neat packet of zeros and ones: clean, arranged, gridded. I think digital actually cancels out a lot of ethereality. So where do your paintings fit within this dilemma?

J.H. Well, they can't be captured by photography, especially digital photography.

RAIL You found this out pretty quickly, right?

J.H. Yes. So now that has become part of my motive: I deliberately make paintings that can't be photographed. A photograph of a painting is just a photograph. And then I've built that idea into other ways of making paintings, through a process where they become just keyboard characters, sort of like burning all the flesh off the painting. What really matters to me is that the painting is in a room and someone is looking at it. The rest is just everything else.

RAIL Who have been some of the artists through the years that you've had a meaningful dialogue with about art?

J.H. Actual dialogue? My friends, Rachel Harrison, Charline von Heyl, Tony Oursler, who I was married to. I like hanging out with younger artists too, like Felix Bernstein, Gabe Rubin, and Alex Kwartler, who was my student at Cooper Union. I also spend a lot of time with my three studio assistants, Peter Granados, Paul Kopkau, and Francesco Vizzini, who are all artists. We travel a lot together. When I was much younger, I was in dialogue with older artist friends like Lawrence Weiner and Tony Conrad. We used to get together and talk about painting more than we do now. As we get older we all sort of disperse our lives. I think at this later stage you just get more into what you're doing, less focused on what other artists are doing. But certainly my work was formed in that crucible, and it was really fun.

RAIL But one doesn't have to stay there all the time.

J.H. Well, you can't, because then a younger generation comes in and it's their stage, you know?

RAIL You can't be twenty on Sugar Mountain.

J.H. Exactly. I used to tell my students, "Buy into your community. Your opinions about each other's work are more important than mine." In my twenties and thirties I had a lot of friends from CalArts—Blake Rayne, Pieter Schoolwerth. And I had this other group of friends from the semiotics program at Brown University. There was a lot of mixing between artists and writers, and we weren't just talking about art—we were talking about music, we were talking about the novel, we were talking about film, we were talking about everything. I'm not privy any more to the smaller goings-on in the conversations out there, but I know they still exist. They must, otherwise these people wouldn't be here—that's why they still come.

RAIL One thing I really miss from those days is zine culture. It was so fragile and personal. That was something the internet completely wiped out in a matter of about three years. Is that an aesthetic that influenced your work in some way?

J.H. Maybe you've seen some of these recent publications I've

Foye, Raymond, and Jacqueline Humphries. "Jacqueline Humphries with Raymond Foye." *The Brooklyn Rail*, February 2025, pp. cover, 12–17.

made? One is a zine about the Neiman Marcus painting and the other a more glossy mag about what I call "Pre-Vandalized" paintings. Do you know who Sam Lipsyte is? He's a novelist who wrote an essay for this one. These are images I pulled off the internet of climate activists throwing paint in museums.

RAIL To me this is a form of iconoclasm: attacking the holy image. And it's really showing just what power paintings still have.

J.H. Also, these photographs look like a lot of paintings I made in the past, with these pours, and my fascination with destruction and protest and terrorism—all the fantasies about power. They're all coming together in this one act, and it's interesting.

RAIL Even though we're art people, I can't really blame them in a way.

J.H. I have a lot of compassion. Nor do I want them to destroy the Rokeby Venus.

RAIL No, let's not.

J.H. I was fascinated with these actions when they were going on—I don't know if it's still going on. I wanted to bring these actions into a more contemplative space to say, "Let's think about this." There's the protest itself, and it's obviously staged to get maximum views on social media, so there's this viral thing going on. But there's also this other thing of the joy of throwing paint at a famous painting, you know? Let's think about that too. Or the joy of this destructive impulse, mixed with desire. We're protesting the destruction of the world, but we kind of also want to do that: we want to tear it down because the weight of civilization has become too much.

RAIL What is at the root of this impulse?

J.H. It has something to do with power, right?

RAIL Yes, sure.

J.H. That is always running through artistic discourse. Roberto Bolaño wrote about that: unknown poets imagining their power, when of course they have no power over anything. Yet they are having a life or death struggle over this kind of poetry as opposed to that kind of poetry.

RAIL Well, I came out of the small press poetry scene and then got into the art world, and I had to deal with these dilemmas. Ultimately I decided these are issues that can't be resolved. You just have to accept so many conflicts in the culture. I'm sure you've had that experience where capital is involved. Fame, money, power. All of these things are so destructive to the creative spirit.

J.H. And yet this is painting too.

Raymond Foye is a Consulting Editor at the *Brooklyn Rail*.

Foye, Raymond, and Jacqueline Humphries. "Jacqueline Humphries with Raymond Foye." *The Brookyln Rail*, February 2025, pp. cover, 12–17.

ASPEN ART MUSEUM

With: Shigeru Ban, Jacqueline Humphries, Allison Katz, Jason Moran and Audience Plant 2024

SUMMER 2024 EDITION

Grabner, Michelle. "Artcrush Honoree: Jacqueline Humphries." *Aspen Art Museum*, Summer 2024, pp. cover, 36–37.

ARTCRUSH HONOREE: JACQUELINE

Grabner, Michelle. "Artcrush Honoree: Jacqueline Humphries." *Aspen Art Museum*, Summer 2024, pp. cover, 36–37.

ArtCrush

In the catalogue essay for Jacqueline Humphries's 2022 exhibition at Greene Naftali in New York, John Kelsey observed that with Humphries's work, "epic energy is summoned within a sort of aesthetic twilight zone where painting radically doubts its own truth as a medium." This is a pithy synopsis of decades of output by a painter who ceaselessly works through the medium's most beloved clichés, upending its expressionistic virtues, immodestly injecting postmodern strategies into abstraction's modernist grip—and almost always on an ironically heroic scale.

Humphries's long-standing position of doubt is understandable. She was a student in the venerated Whitney Independent Study Program (ISP) in 1986, which has long been characterized by its adverse posture toward painting as well as its gravitas. A painting practice imprinted at the ISP in the 1980s needed a quiver of critical strategy if it was to flourish as a cultural enterprise. And, to a great degree, Humphries was pragmatic when she married abstraction to the postmodern discourse of suspicion. The indeterminate, anti-narrative, ironic, writerly and anti-interpretational: all are invoked by Humphries to ensure painting's semantic instability. The result is an uncompromising and untiring studio engagement directed at painting's ontological edges.

Her dot paintings from the 1980s were an early investigation into indexical mark-making and an opportunity for Humphries to exploit the painterly dab—not as an expressionistic gesture but as a semi-mechanical action that could yield a mark analogous to typewriter keys. Emptying the process of intention and caprice, she distributed crude dots over a wet ground, producing irregular effects due to gravity and the cadence of application. The repetitive scheme of these early works, rife with inconsistencies and organizational flaws, foregrounded Humphries's ongoing enthusiasm for mistakes and glitches. *Out* (1989) furthered the malfunctional qualities manifested in the dot paintings. By carving shallow contours into the ground, the support redirected the artist's subjective touch; applied blotches of thinned, black paint took their shapes over the white surface from gravitational flow and pooling. Instead of relying on spontaneous gesture, the topographical ridges and grooves functioned as a petri dish for developing non-expressionistic systems of abstract mark-making.

The paintings that followed *Out* also employed gravity and repetition to produce multi-directional compositions, each one dynamic, inscrutable and overperforming. *#5 A* (1995) marked a shift into mechanical reproduction: the inkjet print on linen is a mirrored copy of the painting in oil, *#5*, from the same year. The hackneyed vocabulary of abstract expressionism led Humphries to the crafty, low-tech stencil, as she copied, resized and redistributed paint pours and splatters. In *Sunset (Yellow)* (1996), she made red pours over a yellow ground, then hand cut stencils of those pours, using them to add spray-painted black versions. This rudimentary tool for semi-accurate, labor-saving graphic reproduction became Humphries's primary device for mark-making going forward.

The stencil, which has become more sophisticated in its production, provides a critical process that denudes originality and meaningful virtuosity by encoding replication. For example, in the allover white-noise pattern of the diptych *Oo* (2022), the scale and texture achieved by stenciling creates a result similar to industrial printing. Humphries's emoticon paintings and ASCII-code compositions also rely on stencils to achieve the dense utterances, patterns and sociality of superfluous, untrustworthy digital-communication systems. A vast field of upside-down, smiling emoticons stenciled over a washy, blue ground fills *:)* (2015). In *:cat:* (2016), silhouetted emojis are stenciled with impasto potency into a gestural patchwork of overworked grids and green smears. The result is an unevenly pixelated image that could have been culled from a generic and unattributable abstract-expressionist painting.

Humphries's black-light paintings integrate the conditions of viewing into her critical attitude in ways that surpass heroic scale and contrived hanging strategies. Suturing the theatrical effects of sacred spaces with rave culture and populistic carnival experiences, the gimmick value of the spectacular and glowing abstractions is intended to work overly hard to get our attention. *Untitled* (2016) radiates red as a small, black, opaque dab hovers to the left of a ghostly, blue flash. The framing device delineating the inner edge of the painting is an example of how Humphries integrates codes of screen technology into the Greenbergian picture plane. The skillful mediation of painting's authoritative signifiers in other series is crushed by the immediacy of the aesthetic thrill in this series.

Humphries's silver paintings are grave in contrast. Their flickering, metallic surfaces host an excess of excavation. They are slower because they seize on the removal of material while still evoking instability brought on by changing light conditions. *Untitled* (2014) is a frenzy of trace vocabularies that emerge from the action of scraping the surface back to a unified plane with cake knives.

HUMPHRIES

Grabner, Michelle. "Artcrush Honoree: Jacqueline Humphries." *Aspen Art Museum*, Summer 2024, pp. cover, 36–37.

Recent paintings, with overlays of painted blood splatters, equate the super abundance of viscous bodily fluid prevalent in schlock horror films with the clichés of authentic painterly expression. Red and green spurts shower *JH6122* (2023) in a painting that is humorously wretched and uncontrolled. While Humphries's relationship to painting's perennial death is that of disinterest, its demise and resurrection offer her fake gestural vocabularies and unified compositional forms. The horror paintings also underscore a waning assumption that there is urgency in the power to negate and subvert painting's authority.

The artist's analytical endeavors have never been of more consequence than they are now, in light of painting's preoccupation with messaging stories—autobiographical and social—all bereft of communication's tactical competencies. There is no messaging in Humphries's paintings, only varied deployments of codes of communication and their formal and critical potential. Her steadfast engagement in the rhetoric of skepticism ultimately expands the strictures imposed on painting, a position now commonly rejected by post-criticism, while her practice, foregrounded in a critical attitude, has always been insubordinate to painting's authority. The lesson Humphries's work teaches us is that doubt and suspicion seed invention and this can radically change painting's forms.

On August 2, Jacqueline Humphries will be presented with the Aspen Award for Art at the ArtCrush gala.

Michelle Grabner *is an artist, curator and professor in the Department of Painting and Drawing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.*

Below and Opposite
Jacqueline Humphries at her studio in Brooklyn, 2024.

Photography
Adrianna Glaviano

Grabner, Michelle. "Artcrush Honoree: Jacqueline Humphries." *Aspen Art Museum*, Summer 2024, pp. cover, 36–37.

FINANCIAL TIMES

Artist Jacqueline Humphries: 'They told me I had to stop painting'

In the era of photo-dominance, she wants her works to make people look at the world around them

Jacqueline Humphries, photographed for the FT by Erinn Springer © Erinn Springer

Julia Halperin MAY 31 2023

Like many observers who watched footage of climate protesters throwing tomato soup across the glass-covered surface of Vincent van Gogh's "Sunflowers" at London's National Gallery last autumn, painter Jacqueline Humphries was horrified — at first. Then her horror turned to fascination. Before long, she began to feel a certain kinship with the young agitators.

Humphries has dedicated her nearly 40-year career to the question of how painting can remain captivating in an age of perpetual technological distraction. She couldn't help but admire the way the bright orange paint looked as it dripped over Charles Ray's stainless steel "Horse and Rider" (2014) after activists attacked the sculpture in Paris last November. Their marks, she thought, resembled the ones she makes. And people could not look away from them.

Halperin, Julia. "Artist Jacqueline Humphries: 'They Told Me I Had to Stop Painting.'" *Financial Times*, May 31, 2023.

“I don’t want art to be destroyed, but I want art to be engaged with in profound ways,” Humphries says at her airy studio in the industrial neighbourhood of Red Hook, Brooklyn. For a painter so interested in spatters and mess, she looks remarkably tidy in crisp black Prada pants and a matching top. “They are saying art is powerful, and that is a net plus in a world where images are everywhere.”

The protesters’ shock tactics are the inspiration for a new body of work in Humphries’ two-venue solo exhibition at Modern Art on Helmet Row and Bury Street in London (June 3-July 22), which coincides with London Gallery Weekend (June 2-4). It is the latest in a trio of exhibitions Humphries has completed this year, first at Greene Naftali in New York and then at Palazzo Degas in Naples. Greene Naftali and Modern Art are also due to present her work at the Art Basel fair in Switzerland (June 15-18).

Humphries calls these paintings “pre-vandalised”: compositions in hues such as rose, mustard and sage with ghostly black paint oozing down the front. It looks as if an oily black substance was hurled at the canvas and then wiped off, leaving behind a stain. In some pictures, a baby’s tiny hand hovers outstretched at the edge — a nod to the protesters of the future, as well as the current demonstrators’ penchant for gluing themselves to works of art.

Jacqueline Humphries’ ‘JH123091HJ’ (2023)…

… and her ‘JH6491’ (2022)

Halperin, Julia. “Artist Jacqueline Humphries: ‘They Told Me I Had to Stop Painting.’” *Financial Times*, May 31, 2023.

Humphries uses laser cutters to create a stencil with which she applies paint to the canvas © Erinn Springer

"The more I work with it, the more compassion I have," Humphries says. "It made me think about my own destructive impulses."

While Humphries does not reveal the source of those impulses ("You'd have to ask my therapist"), they have been brewing for some time. She shows me a snapshot of her in front of an imposing bank building on a visit to Zurich 20 years ago. It had been vandalised with bold, large splashes of red paint. In the photo, she is leaning against the wall with a slight smirk on her face, clearly delighted that the sparkling clean city had been given an unwelcome jolt of colour.

Humphries grew up in New Orleans, raised by an artist mother and a father who worked at an investment firm by day and played jazz by night. She never felt like she fitted in. But when her mother took her to a museum in Houston, and later when she spent time in Paris

as an exchange student, she finally found a community that she felt connected to: painters such as Manet, Chardin and Cézanne. “By then, I was obsessed,” she recalls.

There was just one problem. She attended art school at a time when painting couldn’t have been less in fashion. In fact, the prevailing conclusion was that painting was dead. In mid-1980s New York City, the most respected artists were Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince and others who employed the visual language of advertising to create photographs, videos and collages that revealed the manufactured nature of images. Abstract painting was dismissed as too tactile, too retro and too earnest.

After Humphries enrolled in the notoriously theory-focused Whitney Independent Study Program in 1985, a group of students staged an intervention. “A bunch of the fellows got together one day and marched into my studio as a group and told me I had to stop painting,” she says. Her reaction must have surprised them. “I thought, ‘Wow, this is great, I’m doing something right! They took the time to pay attention.’” The pushback she received inspired a new series of paintings that got progressively smaller and smaller — a literal interpretation of the pressure she felt as a painter to disappear.

Humphries’ ‘1946HJ’ (2022)

Halperin, Julia. “Artist Jacqueline Humphries: ‘They Told Me I Had to Stop Painting.’” *Financial Times,* May 31, 2023.

Humphries in her Brooklyn studio © Erinn Springer

Since then, Humphries has made it her mission to keep painting vital in our attention-addled digital age. She has used reflective silver paint and fluorescent paint visible only under black light to recreate the glow we experience when we look at an iPhone or computer screen. She has peppered her canvases with the debris of our digital lives, including emoticons, emojis and captchas, those distorted phrases we type to prove to a website that we are not robots. More recently, she began painting tiny dots across her surfaces while they were still wet. The veil effect invites the viewer's eyes to glaze over the composition as one might while scrolling TikTok.

"It's awful, the way social media is designed to keep us addicted to looking at the screen," Humphries says. "But I want the same damn thing: I want someone to be frozen looking at my thing."

Humphries' studio looks like a mash-up of a mad scientist's lair, a Swedish design studio and a forensics lab. As we enter, we pass a 3D printer whose nozzle is whirring back and forth, hard at work. Taped to the wall nearby is a massive sheet of paper labelled "Blood Spatters", with an elaborate menu of daubs and drips taken from forensics websites. Next to it hangs a similar menu for emojis. Humphries uses these menus like a painter's palette, selecting her image of choice and sometimes manipulating it further on the computer. The result is fed into one of the studio's commercial laser cutters to create a stencil that she uses to apply the paint to the canvas.

Halperin, Julia. "Artist Jacqueline Humphries: 'They Told Me I Had to Stop Painting.'" *Financial Times,* May 31, 2023.

Humphries felt strangely encouraged that the climate protesters chose art as the vehicle to raise an alarm about the existential danger facing humanity. She remains dubious, however, about painting's ability to save the world. "It's not defensible what they're doing, but neither is art in the first place," she says. Her work has a more modest aim that is, in fact, quite radical: to prompt people to look at the world around them more carefully.

In a final bid to frustrate the contemporary viewer, Humphries creates works that firmly resist being photographed. Through the phone screen, the layers and textures flatten and the tension between the handmade pours and stencilled marks disappears. The surfaces look surprisingly dull. The artist hopes it will be enough to prompt viewers to look away from their devices and back out at the world.

Halperin, Julia. "Artist Jacqueline Humphries: 'They Told Me I Had to Stop Painting.'" *Financial Times,* May 31, 2023.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY
523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 matthewmarks.com

TEXTE ZUR KUNST

Reviews

TO SERVE PAINTING
TOM MCDONOUGH ON JACQUELINE HUMPHRIES AT GREENE NAFTALI, NEW YORK

Feb. 10, 2023

"Jacqueline Humphries," Greene Naftali, New York, 2022-23, installation view

Despite all claims in the 1980s of painting's alleged "obsolescence," Jacqueline Humphries has for over three decades devoted herself extensively to this medium and to questions around the possibilities of painterly abstraction. Expanding on the impasto of her earlier works, the artist's recent show featured stenciled motifs of emoticons and emojis, logos, and digitally-enlarged patterns derived from the spatter of an industrial spray gun. Linking her recent exhibition to works presented at last year's Venice Biennale and the artist's seven-year retrospective at the Wexner Center for the Arts in the fall of 2021, Tom McDonough conceives the show at Greene Naftali as an encapsulation of Humphries's method, something he approaches through the ambiguities of the term "serving." For him,

McDonough, Tom. "To Serve Painting: Tom McDonough on Jacqueline Humphries at Greene Naftali, New York." *Texte zur Kunst*, February 10, 2023.

it is not only about the dedication to the medium but also how Humphries concocts painting – be it the self-cannibalizing of previous paintings or translation of her paintings into ASCII code.

The plot of one of the most famous episodes of the old American television series *The Twilight Zone* hinges on the ambiguity of the title of a book brought to Earth by aliens. When a cryptographer finally manages to translate the visitors' mysterious language, humanity is relieved to find that it reads "TO SERVE MAN," which is taken as a guarantee of the aliens' goodwill. Only too late do the earthlings realize, to their horror, that it is in fact a cookbook, instructing these extraterrestrial beings on how to prepare their human hosts for consumption. The fable was brought to my mind when considering Jacqueline Humphries's recent work – some of the strongest of her four-decade-long career – as seen at Greene Naftali this past fall, an exhibition that came in the immediate wake of her inclusion in last spring's 59th Venice Biennale and a seven-year retrospective at the Wexner Center for the Arts, held in fall 2021. All three could be said to have appeared under a similarly ambiguous emblem: TO SERVE PAINTING.

In fact, the phrase is an apt summation of Humphries's broader approach to her medium. One might think, for example, of her embrace of what might be called "pinakophagia," her self-

Jacqueline Humphries, "Neiman Marcus," 2021 and Rachel Harrison, "The Metaverse," 2022

McDonough, Tom. "To Serve Painting: Tom McDonough on Jacqueline Humphries at Greene Naftali, New York." *Texte zur Kunst*, February 10, 2023.

"Jacqueline Humphries," Greene Naftali, New York, 2022-23, installation view

cannibalizing of previous paintings, from early attempts to replicate seemingly spontaneous drips – as in *Untitled (blue)* (1996), included in James Meyer's 2022 exhibition on "The Double: Identity and Difference in Art Since 1900," at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC – to the more recent translation of her paintings into ASCII code and the extensive use of stencils to duplicate motifs from one work to the next. But we might also recall that she first emerged as a painter in the context of an early 1980s New York art world in which the advanced critical consensus had announced the medium's demise, a death internalized within painting itself as a form of endgame: "[Y]ou always try to make the last painting in a way," as Humphries has described it, "the definitive one; one that distills everything that painting was up until that very moment, in a simple and compelling composition. And I like the fact that those 'last paintings' are continuously generating new last paintings." [1]

Both last-ness and self-cannibalization are compelling qualities of the new work that was on display at Greene Naftali's street-level space. The first painting to greet the visitor was a massive, five-panel frieze – eleven-and-a-half meters long – hung on an exposed stud wall and visible only through the windows facing the gallery's exterior courtyard. The implicit collapse of gallery vitrine and department-store window was reinforced by the work's title, *Neiman Marcus* (2021), with its reference to the American luxury chain, and the last-minute addition of a work specially made for the show by Humphries's colleague Rachel Harrison: her *The Metaverse* (2022), a silver mannequin

with a large cardboard box painted purple covering his head, stood in the space between painting and window, his back to the painting, absorbed instead by whatever virtual delights were being proffered through his headset-cum-dunce cap. *Neiman Marcus* itself was composed of all-over white-noise patterns whose density varied from panel to panel, across all five of which could be just be discerned the familiar looped name of the titular retailer. The reference to Jackson Pollock's fields of splatter was unmistakable, the latter's buried figural references now updated to become a hidden corporate logo. Humphries's first *Neiman Marcus* painting dates to fall 2020, the moment of the luxury chain's bankruptcy, and she returns to it on a monumental scale here. We are reminded that "bankruptcy" means not only a literal insolvency, but also, by implication, utter failure or impoverishment (the old Italian root *rotta* signifying "broken, defeated, interrupted"). Of course, a bankrupt business doesn't die, it becomes subject to administration, and Humphries here assumes the mantle of administrator of modern painting's remaining assets.

A similar work, at a similar scale, had crowned the installation of her Wexner retrospective. *JHWx* (2021) is an even larger five-panel painting, which hung at the top of the ramp linking the museum's galleries, suspended in front of a frosted glass curtain wall. It too incorporated white-noise patterning and what curator Mark Godfrey called "a buried or almost secret CAPTCHA image based on the word WEX," referring to one of the museum's founding donors. [2] In Venice,

Jacqueline Humphries, "4946HJ," 2022

too, Humphries had exhibited the four-panel *omega:)* (2022), another dense, white-noise-filled field whose hot-pink "JH", prominently featured on one panel, reiterates a similar black monogram in *JHWx*. Despite its title, however, *omega:)* was not the last word: in the rear gallery at Greene Naftali, as the final painting in her show, Humphries exhibited a two-panel work, *Oo* (2022), which seems to have been based on an unused panel from the Venice painting, whose gestural slashes are subtly replicated, Rorschach-like, on a mirroring canvas. There is an echo of Jasper Johns's doublings here – much in evidence at "Jasper Johns: Mind/Mirror," his 2021 retrospective held simultaneously at the Whitney and the Philadelphia Museum of Art – but also of a self-cannibalization, of an artwork that eats itself, head swallowing tail, from alpha to omega and back again, that is peculiar to Humphries.

Between *Neiman Marcus* and *Oo*, nine large paintings occupy the main room of the gallery, each stunning in its individual formal complexity while engaged in an ongoing dialogue with its neighbors. Although these are discrete works, they demand attentive viewers keep the whole in mind, as best they can, in order to tease out the repetitions and differences registered on each canvas. These paintings continue Humphries's use of the digital language of emoticons and emojis, but they are now generally subordinated to stenciled patterns based on random marks from an industrial spray gun or drips from a faulty printer. We trace them from canvas to canvas, identical stencils appearing across multiple works, sometimes rotated by 180 degrees; an entire painting might be duplicated, with only a slight shift of its motifs by a few centimeters and some chromatic alterations, as in *JH179* and *JH179* 😐 (both 2022). A new addition to her lexicon, as those titles hint, are inventory numbers that have been traced in varying scales onto the surface of the works; confoundingly, the same number might appear on more than one painting. (These are not the actual numbers assigned by the gallery.) There is one further innovation present in this gallery: the oil-on-linen *4946HJ* is accompanied by a small "ghost" version, the drastically simplified *Untitled* (both 2022), which has been 3D printed in thermoplastic polyester from a scan of the painting, painted in white enamel, and adhered directly to the wall.

The stencil, the emoji, the raster pattern of white noise, the logo, the inventory number, the use of mirroring – all of them are so many means to "serve painting." In that phrase, we might understand not so much the death of painting, but the demise of a certain bourgeois subject for whom painting had served as a model and a mirror of its aesthetic formation, its *Bildung*. Of course, this subject has been expiring for some time and painting has been registering its slow death for just as long – at least since Charles Baudelaire remarked to Édouard Manet that "you are but the first in the decrepitude of your art." [3] At Greene Naftali, this bankrupt subject was rendered metaphorically present with Harrison's *Metaverse*, a dummy rendered blind by his immersion in the virtual. Humphries's paintings similarly reflect on the erosion of capacities for viewing that painting had presupposed through their reference to the screen – whether that of Hollywood, a mirror that sutured our desires into filmic narrative, or that of the digital present, a mirror that even more directly fascinates our serotonin receptors. Her most recent works, in their refusal of sensuous immediacy, in their recourse to the fragment, to synecdoche, to repetition, mediation, and what David Joselit has called a painterly "transitivity," offer perhaps the most compelling response to this condition. [4]

McDonough, Tom. "To Serve Painting: Tom McDonough on Jacqueline Humphries at Greene Naftali, New York." *Texte zur Kunst*, February 10, 2023.

"Jacqueline Humphries," Greene Naftali, New York, November 4, 2022–January 14, 2023

Tom McDonough is a critic, art historian, and professor at Binghamton University in upstate New York. He is currently writing *Sowing the Wind*, a history of the Situationist International.

Image credit: Courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali, New York; photos: Ron Amstutz

NOTES

[1] Jacqueline Humphries, quoted in "Jacqueline Humphries: 'I Am Painting Last Paintings All the Time,'" interview by Dominikus Müller, Museum Brandhorst website.

[2] Mark Godfrey, quoted in Jacqueline Humphries and Mark Godfrey, "A Guided Walkthrough of jHΩ1:)," in *Jacqueline Humphries: jHΩ1:)*, exh. cat. (Columbus, OH: Wexner Center for the Arts, 2021), 23.

[3] Charles Baudelaire, quoted in T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Life of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 82.

[4] See David Joselit, "Painting Beside Itself," October no. 130 (Fall 2009): 125–134.

McDonough, Tom. "To Serve Painting: Tom McDonough on Jacqueline Humphries at Greene Naftali, New York." *Texte zur Kunst*, February 10, 2023.

THE PARIS REVIEW

Venice Dispatch: from the Biennale

By Olivia Kan-Sperling April 29, 2022

THE REVIEW'S REVIEW

JACQUELINE HUMPHRIES, *OMEGA:)*, 2022 (DETAIL). COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND GREENE NAFTALI, NEW YORK. PHOTOGRAPH BY RON AMSTUTZ.

My mother is a Renaissance historian who specializes in Venice and paintings of breastfeeding; her books and articles have subtitles like "Queer Lactations in Early Modern Visual Culture" and "Squeezing, Squirting, Spilling Milk." I have an early memory of her taking me to a Venetian church to see Tintoretto's *Presentation of the Virgin*, a depiction of a three-year-old Mary being brought before the priest at the Temple of Jerusalem. The child Mary is shockingly small. Dwarfed by a stone obelisk carved with faint hieroglyphs, she ascends a set of huge, circular steps inlaid with abstract golden swirls. Onlookers crowd around, including three sets of fleshy women with

children who dominate the scene and who, my mother explained to me, are likely wet-nurses. Breastfeeding women are often allegories of *caritas*: Christian care. This vision of femininity—as carnal, and as both literally and figuratively nurturing—reappears, centuries later, virtually unchanged, as the central conceit of Cecilia Alemani's 2022 Venice Biennale, "The Milk of Dreams." In her selections, the woman's body once again serves as a breeding-ground for personal and political metaphors, and the artist's relation to her own embodiment as cornerstone of her creative practice.

Alemani's show, which includes an unprecedented eighty percent women artists from the highest number of nations in the Biennale's history, was wide-ranging, surprising, and often exciting. But the corporeal interpretive framework that "Milk of Dreams" insists on was disappointing in its failure to *imagine* (imagination being another theme of the show) a new future for feminine forms of expression. The description for every single subcategory of the main exhibition references "hybrid bodies," "*corps* orbite," "*somatic* complexity," et cetera. Even the work described to me as "abstract" was mostly vaguely suggestive of womblike figures. There was a *lot* of fan art dedicated to Donna Haraway, whose "Cyborg Manifesto" once offered a revolutionary vision of embodiment—but was published nearly forty years ago. If the work wasn't thematically body-related, it likely involved a textile, a well-known medium for women (often worn on bodies). And though many of the "leaves, gourds, shells, nets, bags, slings, sacks, bottles, pots, boxes, containers" (this is the actual title of one of these sub-exhibitions) were really quite cool, it's frustrating to be told to relate to oneself solely as some version of a clay pot, even a subverted one.

Among the artworks less mired in the biomorphic, I liked: Jessie Homer French's paintings of climate disaster transposed into flat, Wes Andersonian landscapes, including one in which pixel-like stealth bombers glide over desert shrubs and windmills; Monira Al Qadiri's shimmering, slowly rotating, jewel-toned sculptures inspired by the Gulf region's "petro-culture," which resemble rococo drill bits hypertrophied into palaces; a sensorial maze by Delcy Morelos, made out of dense cubes of soil, cacao, and spices, which was somehow both comforting and uncanny; and Jamian Juliano Villani's painting of a traffic light submerged in a whirlpool of foliage. Her goat

MONIRA AL QADIRI, ***ORBITAL***, 2022. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST. PHOTOGRAPHS BY TONY ELIEH.

Kan-Sperling, Olivia. "Venice Dispatch: from the Biennale." *The Paris Review*, April 29, 2022.

JACQUELINE HUMPHRIES, *OMEGA:)*, 2022. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND GREENE NAFTALI, NEW YORK. PHOTOGRAPH BY RON AMSTUTZ.

wearing UGGs was great, too, and perhaps the only nod towards the *girly* in the show. There's a video by the Chinese artist Shuang Li, which seems to be narrated by human (?) manifestations of digital images or pixels, in a series of surreal statements formulated with the narrative simplicity of religious or mythological texts. The strangest sequence features a chubby white girl illuminated by a fluorescent ring light eating chicken fingers (perhaps our Mary at the temple), whose moving image simultaneously tunnels into and spirals out of itself, until the ring light appears to be the entrance to a psychedelic well, or a black hole (of YouTube).

Easily most impressive, though, was Jacqueline Humphries's massive four-panel abstract painting *omega:)*. From afar, it gives an impression of colors moving very quickly, like a glitch radiating for one second across a torrented video. But up close, it's painstakingly precise, composed of many shapes, similar yet irregular, somewhere between the rectilinear patterns on QR codes and the organic mottle of army camo. They're intensely black, and tactile, with multiple layers of red, green, yellow, and blue paint underneath them that contribute to the vaguely migrainous feeling I had of hallucinating colors into a black-and-white image. (There were also two smaller paintings by Humphries, composed of small black *X*s and dashes, like ASCII characters, to similarly hypnotic effect.) Stepping back and forth between the two scales gave me a more genuinely "dream"-like sensation of three-dimensionality, movement, and digitality than any sculpture or video in the show. Several people told me that they liked these paintings but that they were clearly out of place in the exhibition, given Alemani's theme, which, in addition to the orgy of bodies, focused on surrealism—highly literal figurations of the content of dreams. Humphries's paintings, instead, stimulate or simulate the feeling of unreality by playing at the edges of perception itself, through masterful manipulations of form. And her gesture towards femininity is pleasurably abstract, too: *omega:)*'s focal point is a set of gloopy, sparkly letters, bright pink, in the rounded style favored by middle school girls—her own initials, JH.

On my last day in Italy, I saw Giotto's Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, a cycle of frescoes dating to the early fourteenth century, and a masterpiece which doesn't need a review from me. But it's worth describing the drama of technology and timing through which the experience was staged. Upon arriving in the verdant park surrounding the chapel, you are first led into a glass cube affixed to the small stone church. You sit, on transparent plastic chairs, in this "Corpo Tecnologico Atrezzato"

for more than fifteen minutes, during which time your body humidity is lowered and cleansed of smog particles, so that your visit will not harm the fragile paint in the chapel; this is explained in one of two videos shown to you on a small flat-screen. The second video, melodramatically inflected by the Italian narrator and underscored by stirring music, is a moving gloss on the stories in the paintings. Once purified in body and spirit, you are allowed to exit this space station and, for twenty minutes, enter the chapel itself, which feels, by then, like a time-travel machine. In the chapel, surrounded by the white-noise sound of ventilation technologies, you can feel the compression of hundreds of years of human history—and the future, too.

In addition to that of Christ, Giotto's frescoes depict of the life of Mary. Motherhood and care are all very well; "the body" is certainly important. But there's also the Virgin, who is certainly a vessel, but actually far less corporeal than her bleeding, perspiring, emotional-labor-performing, dying son. Even as the breastfeeding *Madonna Lactans*, she usually looks detached, almost plasticene, more like a meditative Renaissance Barbie than a mother. One likes to imagine her preoccupied with the heavens, with her ideas. In Giotto's Annunciation, as in most, she is reading alone in her room. (Mary is understood to have been studious.) And, in an amazing final trick of circumventing her body, rather than die, she simply ascends.

Olivia Kan-Sperling is assistant editor at The Paris Review.

Kan-Sperling, Olivia. "Venice Dispatch: from the Biennale." *The Paris Review*, April 29, 2022.

ARTFORUM

FEELINGS AREN'T FACTS

Lloyd Wise on the art of Jacqueline Humphries

By Lloyd Wise

Jacqueline Humphries, *:)green,* 2017, oil on linen, 100 × 111″.

THANKS TO THE PERVERSE incentive structures of platform capitalism, we have witnessed the weaponization and proliferation of the rhetorical technique of decadent insincerity. On our screens, every emotive utterance drips with the air of pseudo-truth: performative outrage, virtue signaling, disingenuous smarm. Even the most heartfelt cris de coeur sound empty. One day, Notre-Dame burns. That night, an Instagram post appears in my feed: A picture of the blaze, captioned: "So sad." So sad! Eight hundred years of history—-gone, in a white-hot flame. 😕

Wise, Lloyd. "Feelings Aren't Facts." *Artforum* 57, no. 10, Summer 2019.

These are some of the thoughts brought to mind by Jacqueline Humphries's monumental Emoticon Paintings, **which foreground smiley faces, frowny faces, a number of emoji, and other artifacts of affect, in addition to stenciled fragments from Humphries's previous paintings and "real" brushstrokes. *:)green*, 2017, which debuted two years ago in an exhibition at New York's Greene Naftali gallery, is illustrative: The nearly eight-by-nine-foot canvas features a rough field of turquoise, alternately smooth and streaked. A darker, gestural emerald scrawl careens down the center of the canvas; lower in the composition, and to the right of this brushstroke, a crisply stenciled colon and parenthesis form a smile emoticon. Finally, around the rectangle of the painting's edges, a faint interior frame sets the composition in recessed, screenlike abeyance.**

To the extent that such a work draws on the New York School, it is via a legacy of parody and distance, one rooted in the appropriation-driven critiques of the Pictures era. The composition possesses an elegant, impersonal cool: The brushstroke seems to have glitched itself into being, and the emoticon's grin—slightly hazy behind a wash of pigment—isn't so much cheerful as coldly sociopathic. Yet this is nevertheless a *real painting*. It has depth and power and authority and mass. It holds together as a cohesive visual statement. It commands space. As is true of much of Humphries's thirty-year oeuvre, it is niether a joke nor a sneer but a clear-eyed expression of paintings' possibilities as the medium unfurls through ever-shifting conditions of vision and attention.

Jacqueline Humphries, *Hor. #6*, 1997, oil on linen, 90 × 90″.

Wise, Lloyd. "Feelings Aren't Facts." *Artforum* 57, no. 10, Summer 2019.

HUMPHRIES GRADUATED **from New York's Parsons School of Design in 1985 and a year later entered the Whitney Independent Study Program, where High Theory was reaching its involute peak and photo-based Conceptualism was de rigueur. Humphries, however, was a committed painter, and at the ISP, the medium was thought to be deep in its grave: To paint, she says, was "artistic suicide."**

But painting had her hooked. Early on, she attempted to make paintings that self-consciously thematized her medium's endgame, such as a suite of monochromes that grew progressively smaller in size. But such deadpan statements of the medium's failure were not her style.

Soon, however, the mood changed. With the crash of 1990, the curtain officially closed on the '80s. Works plummeted in value. Dealers went bust and galleries shuttered, vanishing in the glitter-dusted air. A new, uncertain world was there for the making. The '90s! John Elderfield's Matisse retrospective opened to rave reviews at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; interesting news was rolling in from Cologne; and, with its forest of empty warehouses, Chelsea promised a new, post-SoHo era, a field of potential presided over by the zealous, idiosyncratic lodestars of Pat Hearn and Colin de Land, with whom Humphries would become close. One day, Humphries received a studio visit from a young assistant at John Good Gallery named Carol Greene. Greene burst through the door, bought a painting off the wall, and mentioned she was opening a gallery of her own. Humphries was the subject of Greene Naftali's first solo show.

"

The Silver Paintings erupt with a violent, angry shimmer: You can practically hear the coruscating clashing of metal.

The orthodoxies around painting changed, too. If the cynical irony of the '80s was the antithesis of AbEx's heroic authenticity, the dialectic began to resolve itself as those sensibilities merged. As artists such as Charline von Heyl, Jutta Koether, Laura Owens, and Amy Sillman would also find, it was no longer necessary to choose between bloviating Straight White Male sincerity and clinical parody. Now, you could commingle, reimagine, and reinhabit these stances in destabilizing ways.

Still, the historical and neo-avant-gardes continued to anchor those artists' work. One of Humphries's early paintings, *Sunset (Blue)*, 1996, is a riff on Rauschenberg's 1957 *Factum I* and *Factum II*, often understood to be among the first works to "evacuate" AbEx gesture. Humphries's mid-'90s revision of Rauschenberg's famous act of self-copying involved a duplicated set of pours.

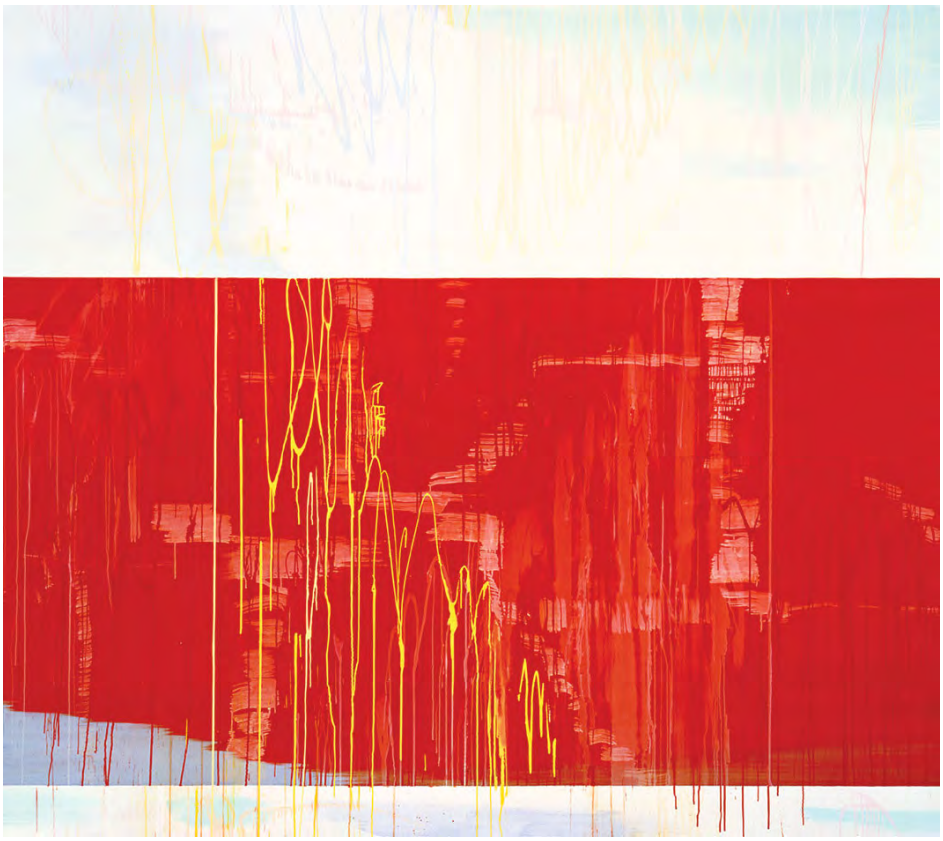
Wise, Lloyd. "Feelings Aren't Facts." *Artforum* 57, no. 10, Summer 2019.

Jacqueline Humphries, *Sunset (Yellow),* 1996, oil and spray paint on linen, 72 × 72″.

Importantly, there is no assemblage or collage in *Sunset (Blue)*—unlike *Factum I* and *II*, it is "straight" painting on canvas, made via a relatively impersonal, "post-painterly" method. For Humphries, it was generative, leading to additional, related works. With *Sunset (Yellow)*, 1996, Humphries added a pseudo-mechanical step, making pours and then creating stencils of them, overlapping the stenciled twins with the original pour along a vertical axis. The result is a heterogeneous admixture filled with subtle self—-mirroring and replication, a zone in which mediation and self-appropriation offer new compositional potentials. In this piece, telling apart real and fake, manufactured and spontaneous, is not only impossible but also thrillingly beside the point.

Jacqueline Humphries, *Sunset (Blue),* 1996, oil on wood, two panels, each 30 × 30″.

Wise, Lloyd. "Feelings Aren't Facts." *Artforum* 57, no. 10, Summer 2019.



Jacqueline Humphries, *High Noon,* 2001, oil on linen, 90 × 102″.

IF THE ’90S OFFERED **artists new freedom to explore the possibilities of paint on canvas, for Humphries, a different, though related, anxiety took hold: Why would anyone want to look at painting in the first place? Transcendent Cold War contemplation, disembodied immersion, the sacred time of looking: These were difficult asks for an audience steeped in the spastic demands of the late-capitalist sensorium. (As Gretchen Bender observed in 1987, “I go into galleries to see shows, to be aware of what is going on and it takes three minutes to see a show. . . . It’s our nervous system—the time we live in—it’s not about reverie.”) Humphries wanted viewers to experience reverie, but she fully understood that to induce this old-school state she had to do some work for them. She had to entertain. So, she began rummaging through the profane history of visual culture, digging up strategies for bringing eyeballs to the canvas. At first, she experimented with one-point perspective and vanishing points, which she deployed in a group of paintings produced in the late ’90s, each bisected by a line of discontinuous brushstrokes. Amid the field of thick purple marks of *Hor. #6*, 1997, for example, a landscape’s inviting horizon brings a comforting sense of Euclidean space to the optical disorientation of allover mark-making. (To 2019 eyes—as it perhaps did to ’90s eyes, too—the effect calls to mind the visual stutter of a computer monitor.)**

Wise, Lloyd. “Feelings Aren’t Facts.” *Artforum* 57, no. 10, Summer 2019.

“By adding the emoticon to her painterly vocabulary, Humphries yoked a wide swath of painting’s history to a contemporary argot, elegantly articulating the parallels between art’s self-negating tendencies and our online vernacular.

Next, Humphries found inspiration in the cinema, producing a series of canvases with black expanses, often streaked with white drips, whose proportions matched those of various filmic aspect ratios. Shown at Greene Naftali in 1999, these sought to reproduce the movie screen’s seductive voids: inky blackness, abyssal space. (A few such works featured broken yellow lines and dashboard-like shapes, recalling the hypnagogic vortex of the film *Lost Highway*, which had premiered two years earlier.) Aspect ratios returned in 2001, this time in Technicolor, for pieces such as *High Noon*, where a movie-screen rectangle glows hot like a toxic sky.

A few years later, a breakthrough arrived, when Humphries began exploring the possibilities of metallic paint, mixing the scintillating pigment with quantities of color. The ensuing Silver Paintings erupt with a violent, angry shimmer: You can practically hear the coruscating clashing

Jacqueline Humphries, *80s-90s*, 2006, oil on linen, 80 × 86″.

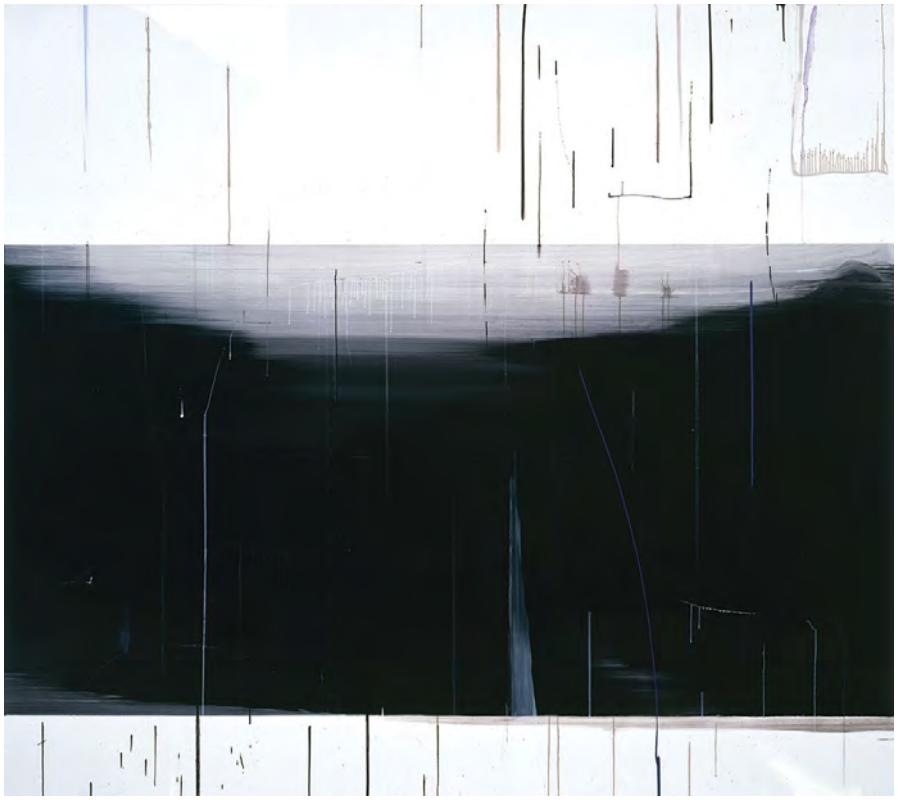
Wise, Lloyd. “Feelings Aren’t Facts.” *Artforum* 57, no. 10, Summer 2019.

of metal—streaked and shrieking. For *80s–90s*, 2006, for instance, she mixed the pigment with black and created crazed circular gestures, a furious, CBGB's-bathroom expressionism that yields delirious optical confusion. *Kat*, 2006, meanwhile, is muted and heaving, almost atmospheric in its iridescence. For *Haymaker*, 2006, Humphries created an abstraction in layers, taping off sections of the painting. The picture plane appears to have been torn and Photoshopped into oblivion, shredding and fragmenting with bright, voluptuous energy. (The suggestion of violence is no accident: "I have to destroy the painting I know to make the one I don't know yet.") Intriguingly, the phenomenology of the movie screen haunts these works; far from static, they unfold continuously in time, shifting and flaring in the unstable gallery light.

Eventually, the initial sensory assault dissipates, and the formidable complexity of the compositions reveals itself: the reflections, correspondences, and continuities among separate planes, the force of the gestural passages. In *Haymaker*, sharp, taped-off edges imply two distinct layers, while also conjuring photographic reproduction. Neither of these layers easily rests in the foreground or background. Rather, they weave together according to a logic that eludes our grasp, a massing and merging compounded (and complicated) by the swirling addition of red-and-silver brushstrokes of varied weight.

Jacqueline Humphries, *Haymaker*, 2006, oil on linen, 80 × 86″.

Wise, Lloyd. "Feelings Aren't Facts." *Artforum* 57, no. 10, Summer 2019.

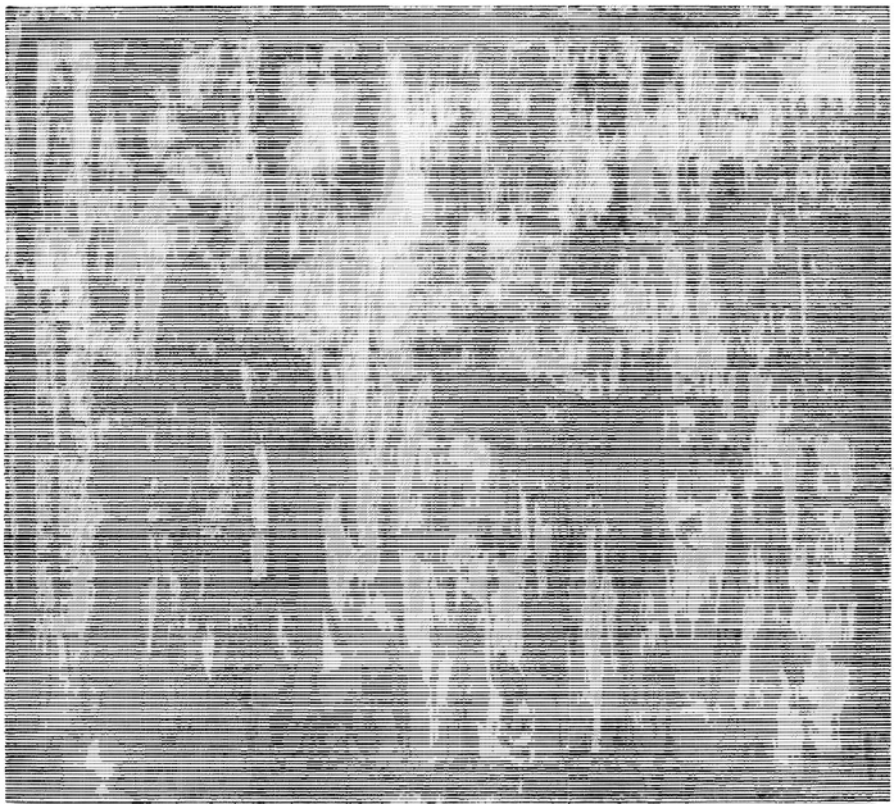


Jacqueline Humphries, ***Black Angel,*** **2000,** oil on linen, 90 × 102″.

LAST YEAR, **Humphries moved to her current Red Hook studio from Sunset Park, where she had maintained a space for five years. The ceilings are nearly airplane-hangar high, and the vast, airy space lets in abundant Eastern light. At first, the studio seemed too clean. Humphries had become increasingly reliant on marks applied with stencils made using an industrial-grade cutting machine, and she felt anxious that her sparkly new environs resembled a streamlined art-production facility; she wanted a painting studio spattered with paint.**

Humphries painted her first Emoticon Paintings in 2014. In addition to featuring the stencils of emoticons and emoji—some large, others tiny and repeated in a Benday-dot-like pattern—this body of work coincided with Humphries's burgeoning interest in incorporating appropriated fragments from her earlier output, creating an autophagic, archival collage of prior painted marks and gestures. In some cases, she accomplished this via the intervention of ascii art. Popular on '90s usenet forums and the '70s Teletype machines familiar from school field trips to nasa, ascii art is a crude technique for creating images from the 128 standard alphanumeric characters. Humphries employs it as a quasi-photographic means of mediation: She takes a digital image of a painting, then feeds it into a piece of software to convert the image into an ascii array (adjusting for parameters such as resolution), then fabricates the array as a stencil. The resulting grid of characters reinforces the work's associations with digital media and emphasizes her understanding of painting as a perceptual interface or screen. It's a process of shrinking something down, then blowing it back up again.

Wise, Lloyd. "Feelings Aren't Facts." *Artforum* 57, no. 10, Summer 2019.



Jacqueline Humphries, *+sssxxxx//:*, 2018, oil on linen, 100 × 111″.

When I visited her studio this past spring, a gargantuan finished canvas, *+sssxxxx//:*, 2019, leaned against the wall, displaying nothing more than an ascii grid: stenciled horizontal sequences of digits and numbers. In the array of characters—applied with thick paint that lifts somewhat unevenly off the surface—no "composition" was immediately legible. Had I not been told, I would never have guessed that these figures resolved to form an image, much less an abstract painting (the streaked and purple *Untitled*, 2013). But after looking for a moment, I began to see individual brushstrokes, as well as the patterned clarity of Humphries's mark-making and the way her compositional choices had cleaved intersecting planes of depth. This was a painting: mediated, reproduced in a crude format, but a painting nonetheless. There was, for lack of a better term, *artistry* in the shifting, almost undulating field of characters. Yet it was only possible to notice this after overcoming the hurdle of the painting's initial optical effect: The thin black lines of ascii code packed a decidedly retinal wallop, with dazzling, headache-inducing rows of characters that strobed and danced.

While *+sssxxxx//:* took a single painting, *Untitled*, as its template, usually Humphries combines ascii-rendered fragments of her previous canvases with other kinds of stenciled marks, including emojis and emoticons. In *Two Cat*, 2016, a stenciled blue blotch lifted from an earlier painting bleeds lushly, like a Cy Twombly blossom. Below it, a smile emoticon floats on the same plane, rotated 90 degrees. Some of the marks lift up from the canvas, impasto-like. Others lie flat. The whole thing is set into a depthless, mediated liminality, inviting strained, cryptographic decoding: Is Humphries smiling? Or is she not-smiling because the face is sideways? What about the upside-down face? Is this painting sad? Can a painting be sad?

Wise, Lloyd. "Feelings Aren't Facts." *Artforum* 57, no. 10, Summer 2019.

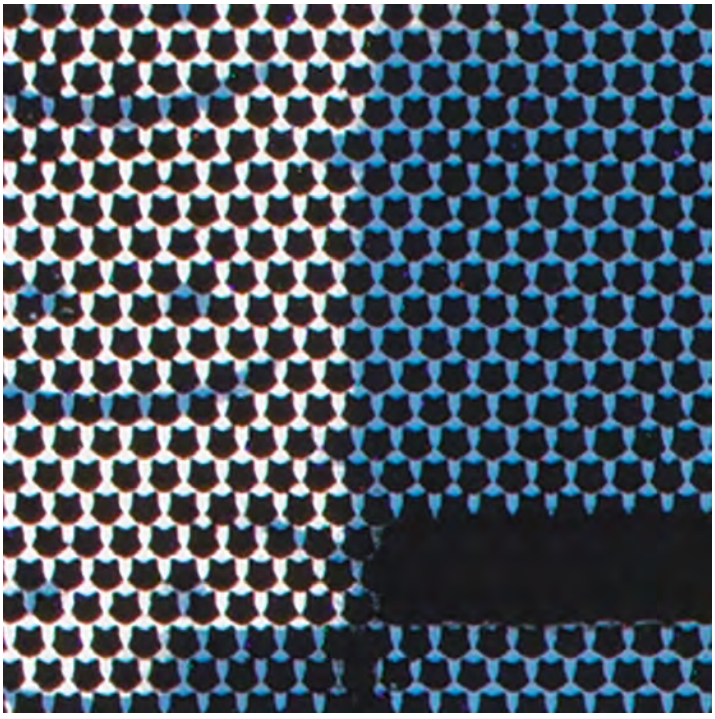
Jacqueline Humphries, *Untitled*, 2013, oil on linen, 100 × 111″.

The “truth” of AbEx was always existential, ostensibly based in the short indexical chain linking canvas to author: The paint spatter is the visual equivalent of the face-to-face cry or shout—a forensic proof of realness. Here, Humphries has visibly elongated that distance, not to void it, but to make manifest the queasy consequences of stretching it via digitally inflected means. Her fields of stencils play an affective game of telephone: As the question marks accumulate, they mimic the delirium of lives spent communicating ceaselessly in ways that leave us vulnerable to a kind of expressionism that purports to be what it can’t possibly be—since you can’t really be gripped by emotion while at the same time tapping out strings of glyphs, can you? Or can you? (What does “Sad!” actually indicate?) Though IRL emotion can be deceptive or manipulative too, it’s hard to deny there’s something extremely *unhealthy* about doing most of your emoting through text. Tellingly, the artist has roughly stenciled the grid of a familiar silhouette across the field: the pointed-ear cat emoji. The feline here feels like a considered choice. Like painting, it can die again and again. And unlike the dog, with its wagging tail, its interior life is opaque. A Cheshire grin may mask hidden malevolence—or nothing at all.

By adding the emoticon to her painterly vocabulary, Humphries has yoked a wide swath of painting’s history to a contemporary argot, elegantly articulating the parallels between the self-negating tendencies of a certain strain of painting and our shared online vernacular. Irony, reproduction, circulation—from Lichtenstein’s cartoon *Brushstroke*, 1965, to Gerhard Richter’s sixty-five-foot-long *Strich (auf rot)* (Stroke [on Red]), 1980; from Christopher Wool’s silk screens of painterly incident to Michael Krebber’s dandyish scrawls—all of them, all of these feints and

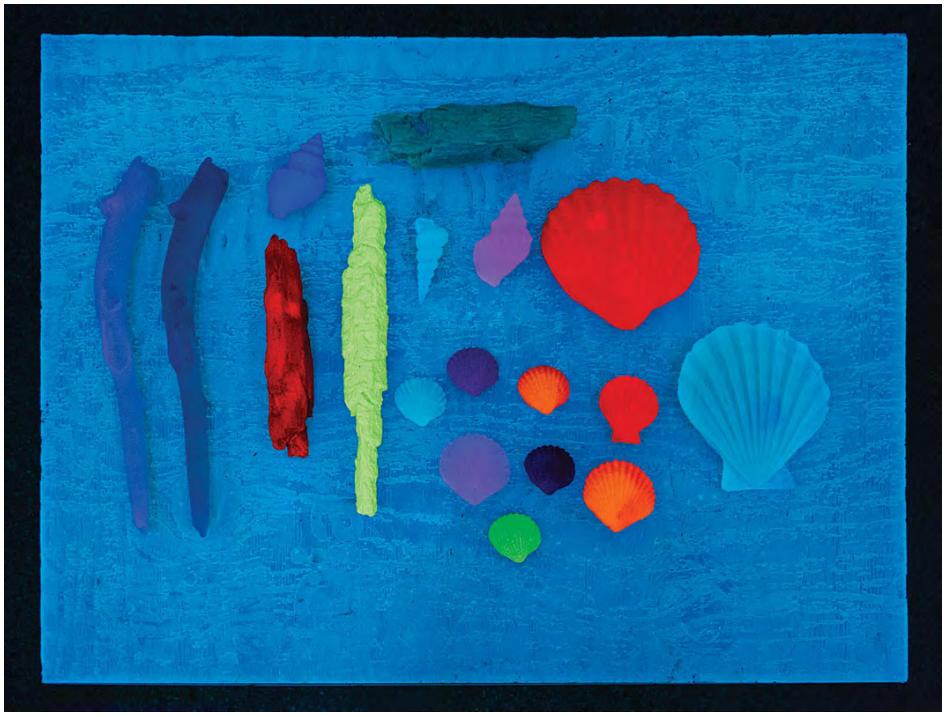
Jacqueline Humphries, *Two Cat*, 2016, oil on linen, 100 × 110″.

satires, anticipate and prefigure and even picture the hollowed-out, joking-but-not-joking, serious-but-not-serious rhetorical modes of the internet: the pearl clutching and trolling and histrionic virtue signaling and the pancaking of irony and sincerity into the transparent membrane of the touchscreen. But perhaps no one has so clearly pointed to the affinities between painting and the emotional conditions of the digital subject as Humphries has. Writing about her Emoticon Paintings in *Artforum*'s December 2015 issue, Tim Griffin noted that these works augur a new register of sincerity: "In the emoticon, a figure of genuine communication, any evacuation of authenticity in gestures is only accompanied by the sense of a new order among them that has come to pass."



Jacqueline Humphries, *Two Cat* (detail), 2016, oil on linen, 100 × 110″

Wise, Lloyd. "Feelings Aren't Facts." *Artforum* 57, no. 10, Summer 2019.



Jacqueline Humphries, *Collection*, 2019, pigmented methane resin, steel, 30 × 39 1/2 × 10 1/2″. Photo: Don Stahl.

SHORTLY AFTER* Humphries began her Silver Paintings in the mid-aughts, she began another body of work. Playing around with fluorescent paint, she created abstractions that glow when displayed under black light—yet another convenient way to *wow* her audience into contemplation.

She first displayed these works at Nyehaus in New York in 2005, exhibiting radioactive canvases streaked with bright clementine orange, acid blue, and slime green. As is true so often of Humphries's work, what seems like a rejection of painting's history is more an elaboration of it. Such outré pigments read as a hyperbolic extension of the tackiness that, as T. J. Clark discerned, was present in AbEx to begin with, in Hans Hofmann's off-key hues, Pollock's enamels, De Kooning's garish lips. Installation views of the show evoke that famous shot in *Spring Breakers* (2013) of a lecture hall dotted with laptop screens, a sea of gleaming rectangles. In fact, the downtown party circuit had served as an important inspiration. Humphries, who used to spend "every night" at Save the Robots and the Pyramid Club, once found herself in the Rothko Chapel in Houston, compulsively imagining the dim space lit up like nightlife.

The second group premiered at Modern Art in London in 2014 and at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Museum of Art in 2015. Here, Humphries mixed her fluorescent tones with black paint. The resulting shifts in color value deepened the drama, conjuring rippling, blanketing darkness. The screenlike associations also became more explicit: The surfaces appeared cracked and spattered, suspended in refulgent collapse, slime oozing with ineffable grace. To make these pieces, Humphries had to apply the fluorescent paint quickly, resulting in a studio scene that merges with a

thousand postapocalyptic images: the artist and two of her assistants in a pitch-black room, wearing Tyvek coveralls and respirators, shooting gallons of glowing paint from an industrial sprayer—painting flaring up gorgeously in the moment of its dreamlike death.

> **“The point isn’t to know which is real and which is fake. The point is to invite a state of sustained not-knowing.**

For all the associations with screens in Humphries’s various works, it’s noteworthy how stridently they resist screen-based circulation. It’s a long-standing cliché to warn that you shouldn’t judge an artwork based on how it looks in reproduction, and this refrain has only grown louder—and, for some, suspiciously nostalgic—as the art world reconstitutes itself around Instagram’s decentralized arteries. For the past fifteen years, Humphries’s paintings have established themselves as a powerful argument in favor of IRL. The violent shimmer of her Silver Paintings simply cannot be reproduced in a photograph. Nor can the radiance of the Black-Light Paintings. And her Emoticon Paintings are completely different depending on whether you’re up close or far away: No one picture can simultaneously capture the tactile details of the stenciled emoticons and ascii code and the gestalt of the entire composition. The multifariousness and mutability of these objects, the dazzling ways

View of “Jacqueline Humphries,” 2015, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.

Wise, Lloyd. “Feelings Aren’t Facts.” *Artforum* 57, no. 10, Summer 2019.

in which they shift and change, reaffirm IRL experience—and place painting on par not with the solitary mindsuck of the iPhone, but with the sacred, rapturous twentieth-century environments of the nightclub and the cinema.

This summer, Humphries will present a new body of work at the Dan Flavin Art Institute, a former firehouse in Bridgehampton, New York. The Dia Art Foundation established the site in 1983 for the permanent installation of nine of Flavin's works and opened a gallery space for rotating exhibitions. To preview the exhibition, she led me into a windowless space in her Red Hook studio—a short walk from the room with the Emoticon Paintings. After calling out to an assistant, she turned on black lights hanging from the ceiling, activating the fluorescent pigment.

Jacqueline Humphries, *Sign*, 2019, pigmented epoxy resin, 32 1/4 × 12 × 1 1/2″. Photo: Jason Mandela.

Wise, Lloyd. "Feelings Aren't Facts." *Artforum* 57, no. 10, Summer 2019.

What appeared was an array of weirdly glowing objects—an bioluminescent installation of Minimalist sculpture. A panel hanging on the wall, another leaning against a rack. There was a seashell sitting on another panel sitting on the floor.

To make these objects, Humphries coated molds with dry fluorescent pigment, then made casts from resin tinted with more fluorescent paint. Seen under black light, their low lambency flamboyantly fucks with your calibrated sense of what's real and not. My favorite among the objects was based on a cast of a piece of plywood. Humphries engraved the cast object with a blown-up *image* of plywood, magnifying the grain and knots by a factor of roughly ten. The mind strains to make sense of this alien object (to see the "thread which is not there," to quote Ernst Gombrich). At first it reads as a projection—but not quite. The engraving isn't an illusion. Rather, the etching or "image" is internal to the object itself, very much of its substance, as is its eerie effulgence.

Taking a cue from the Flavin Foundation's "out east" location, Humphries also had the idea to play around with nautical motifs. She was first drawn to hunks of driftwood—that winsome, Waspy mainstay of beach-cottage decoration. But she didn't have any pieces of the stuff on hand and wouldn't be visiting the site for a few weeks. So she went online, downloaded a 3-D model for driftwood, and printed it out. Next, she made a cast of the 3-D printing, then juxtaposed the ersatz-driftwood cast with a cast of real driftwood. Is the difference between the driftwoods obvious to the viewer? Sort of. But as with the juxtaposition of an emoticon and a brushstroke, that question is both a red herring and the meat of the matter. The point isn't to know which is real and which is fake. The point, rather, is to invite a state of sustained not-knowing, and to recognize the stakes of that condition.

Today, the question of representation in art is paramount, and the legacies of the historical and neo-avant-gardes have seemingly grown ever more distant and oblique. To some, in fact, what the past 125 years of art primarily offer today is a repository of ready-to-use styles and forms. While praising the "waning" of the "fetishization" of Duchamp and Warhol, Jerry Saltz, in his review of the 2019 Whitney Biennial, described Modernism's history as a "fabulous scrap heap of visual culture," one that offers young artists materials, tropes, and approaches to discerningly pluck from and fill with subject matter. Humphries's largely subjectless work both insists and demonstrates that, to the contrary, material and form still have things to teach us. They're not just empty vessels. They tell us things. The grim or ecstatic lessons of the avant-garde, the arcane problems internal to the history of painting—its interfaces with technology and perception and affect and meaning—have rarely been more bracing, as our collective attention fragments and mutates, develops addictions and triggers responses, melding compulsively and angrily with an infinity of luminous screens.

"Jacqueline Humphries" opens June 22 at the Dan Flavin Art Institute, Bridgehampton, NY.

Lloyd Wise is a Senior Editor of Artforum.

Wise, Lloyd. "Feelings Aren't Facts." *Artforum* 57, no. 10, Summer 2019.

The New York Times

CRITIC'S PICK

Jacqueline Humphries's Digital Paintings, Aglow in the Dark

A leading figure of art in the digital age takes up 3D printing at a new show in the Hamptons.

By Jason Farago

Published Sept. 5, 2019 Updated Sept. 13, 2019

BRIDGEHAMPTON, N.Y. — There was a moment earlier this decade, during those last, panting moments when we all still revered technology companies, when some Silicon Valley dreamers informed us that they would transform the market for painting. Get ready, they told us, for the rise of nifty 3D printers and the death blow they would deal to artistic creation. Any object could be called up in minutes! New art would come straight out of the extruder! Perfect replicas of masterpieces would become universally accessible; every Van Gogh and Velázquez might soon be worthless.

Jacqueline Humphries's "Sign" (2019) at the Dan Flavin Art Institute in Bridgehampton, N.Y. Jacqueline Humphries and Greene Naftali, New York; Jason Mandella

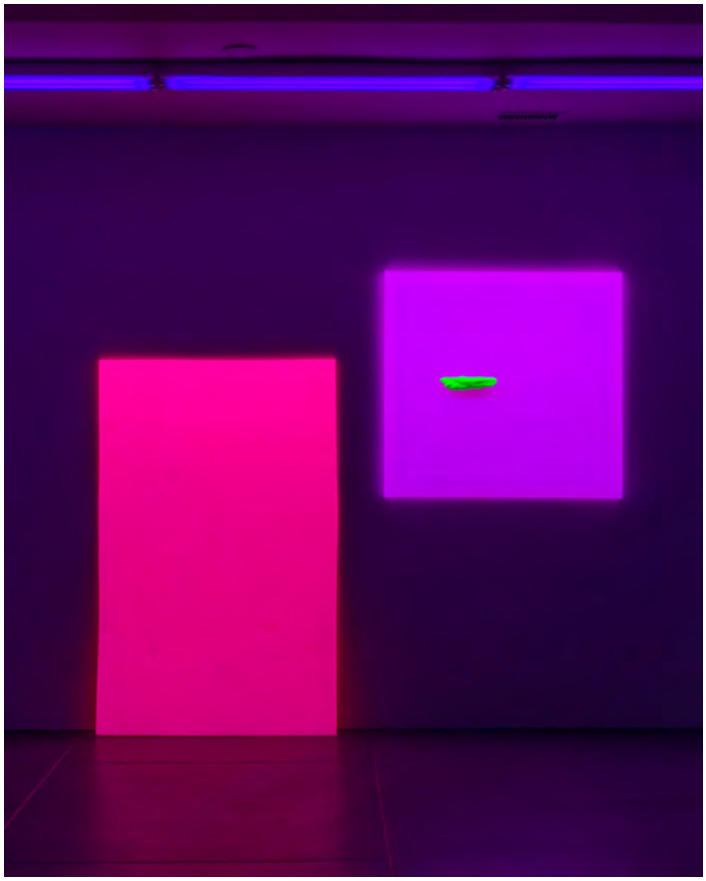
Any artist could have informed them that this was a category error. Painting is an artistic medium, not a technology in itself. And painting, like every artistic medium, acquires meaning, importance, and indeed financial value through a

complex net of perceptions that stretches well past the surface of the canvas.

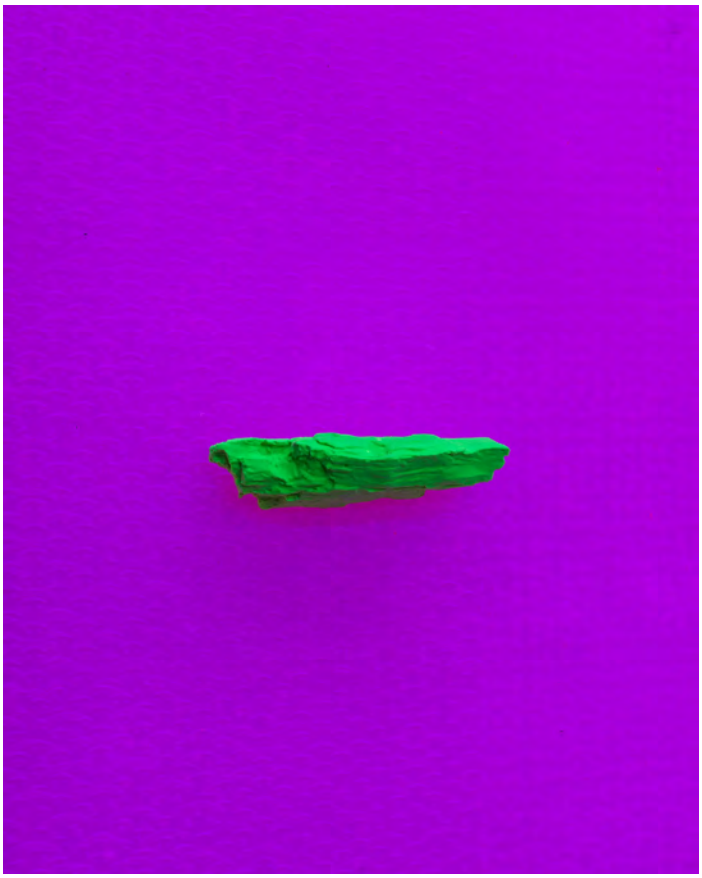
Few painters today engage with the challenges of new technology as persuasively as Jacqueline Humphries, who is presenting an ambitious and formidably intelligent exhibition of fresh work at the Dan Flavin Art Institute — housed in a former church here in the Hamptons, and managed by Dia Art Foundation. Upstairs, Flavin's sculptures of fluorescent tubes cast their light as usual against the institute's white walls. Downstairs, Ms. Humphries is presenting 10 new works that also glow, thanks to fluorescent paint jobs and overhead black lights. (It's O.K. if your white shoes start shining; Labor Day came early this year.)

Though some first appear to be canvases, none are "paintings" as such, or at least not paintings as we usually understand them. Most are in fact resin objects, some made by casting pre-existing paintings with traditional molds, and other produced by — what do you know?! — 3D printing.

Ms. Humphries is best known for shimmering, burbling abstract paintings that agglutinate



Ms. Humphries displays her new works under black lights; they have an otherworldly glow echoing the light works by Dan Flavin upstairs. via Dia Art Foundation; Jason Mandella



Detail of Ms. Humphries's "Painting," 2019. The surface has a textured pattern of emoticon smiley faces, while the object fastened to the surface is a 3D print of driftwood. Jacqueline Humphries and Greene Naftali, New York; Jason Mandella

Farago, Jason. "Jacqueline Humphries's Digital Paintings, Aglow in the Dark." *The New York Times*, September 5, 2019.

stenciled marks, typographical stutters, and deceptive spills and splashes that in fact result from careful composition. Over a decade, she has pushed each canvas to a limit point at which it exceeds the possibilities of photographic reproduction — many produce a moiré distortion when photographed, and take on new forms and inaccurate colors on the screen of a smartphone.

But oil painting is not her sole medium, nor do her artistic efforts end at the edges of the canvas. She has also experimented with custom illumination, particularly with ultraviolet light (or "black light"), which imbues fluorescent-painted canvases with the radiance of computer monitors. This dual engagement with technology and lighting makes Ms. Humphries an ideal (if somewhat naughty) fit for an exhibition at the Flavin Institute — where her use of black lights makes the gallery appear like a through-the-looking-glass reflection of Flavin's art.

A fluorescent purplish-pink artwork here titled "Painting," to take one example, is not precisely a painting, but a urethane resin cast of an earlier work on canvas that Ms. Humphries made in 2016. From a distance it appears nearly monochrome, but get up close and you'll see rivers of dots and half-moons, slightly raised like the treads of a car mat. They are punctuation marks, and, handily for a critic, "Painting" is the rare painting you can quote. Its surface says " :) :) :) :) :) :) :) :) " — although, if you sat in traffic on Route 27 for too long, you may prefer to read these smileys as frownie faces rotated off their axis.

These emoticons — predecessors of emoji, composed purely of typographical elements and not imagistic on their own — were initially produced by applying paint through laser-cut stencils. Human emotion gets standardized into generic, two-character textspeak, but then turns, through Ms. Humphries's lashing of oil paints through the stencil, back into lifelike form.

Here in Bridgehampton they've gone through a further translation, from paint into resin, and Ms. Humphries has added an element to the cast painting's surface: a piece of driftwood attached near the work's midpoint, slathered in glowing chartreuse pigment. Or is it not driftwood? While the typographical smiley faces have taken on tactile, almost organic form, the "driftwood" appears pixelated and glitchy, an unconvincing stand-in for biological reality. This is a cast, too, 3D printed at an intentionally insufficient resolution that reveals its digital source.

Farago, Jason. "Jacqueline Humphries's Digital Paintings, Aglow in the Dark." *The New York Times*, September 5, 2019.

From left, "Full Sheet Green," "Driftwood," and "Full Sheet Violet," all from 2019. via Dia Art Foundation, New York; Jason Mandella

So "Painting" is a crush of deceptions and deflections: a painting that is actually a sculpture, a face that is actually punctuation, a tree that is actually code, a source of light that is actually reflecting light. Several other cast works here use the same bait-and-switch techniques, like "Full Sheet Green" and "Full Sheet Violet," which first appear to be painted plywood but reveal themselves as etched resin blocks, or "Collection," a table of glowing, 3D-printed driftwood and shells.

But Ms. Humphries is not offering these warped works to deflate the possibilities of painting, or to aver that all art is a conceptual put-on. Quite the opposite. The resin casts are elements in a chain of painterly creation, in which the 3D-printed elements — far from putting painting out of business — function like crummy camera-phone shots of absent originals. What you are looking at (and, perhaps, what you photograph on your glowing phone) is a node in a network, linking up with earlier referents by Ms. Humphries, by Flavin, by other artists and in the natural world.

How can art evade both the philistinism of Silicon Valley and the revanchism of technophobes? Ms. Humphries and other digitally minded painters start by acknowledging that new technologies have constantly reshaped painting — from printmaking in the 16th

century to photography in the 19th to social media today. These once-new technologies changed the terms of our perceptions, making one style obsolete and another newly relevant, one image sterile and another persuasive. The task today is to paint the experience of seeing in a world mediated by screens, and these black-lit works continue that exploration, riffing off the Flavin Institute in a minor key.

[Jacqueline Humphries's painterly marks at a 2017 show at Greene Naftali.]

Like so many of the artists beatified at Dia's permanent collection in Beacon, Flavin saw his minimal art as a tool to modify viewers' perception, and privileged bodily and visual experience above all. But Ms. Humphries, along with painters as different as Laura Owens, Wade Guyton and Michael Williams, understands that visual and physical perception are no longer sovereign; even the body and the senses now have been absorbed into digital networks of surveillance and control. Today your retinas get scanned at airport security, and your eyes can activate your credit card when you look at your phone's front screen. Needless to add that when you gaze at an image today, the image is gazing back — in the form of cookies, beacons, tracking pixels and JavaScript tags, all of which log your looking as harmless or malign analytics.

This is the profoundest impact of digital technology on contemporary art: it has taken away the innocence of the senses, and put an entire surveillance system between us and our images. To paint in such circumstances requires a new approach to image-making that exploits the gaps and glitches of digitization to reveal the workings of our eyes and our economy. Ms. Humphries has cleared a path, more deeply every year, by which the conceptual and the gestural challenges of painting can come into registration, and the frustrations of sensory perception resolve into intellectual delight and political disquiet. Or, to put this review in a language appropriate to her art, both :) :) :) :) :) and :(:(:(:(:(.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY
523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 matthewmarks.com

MOUSSE

A Romantic and Sublime Threshold State: Jacqueline Humphries
Jacqueline Humphries in conversation with Felix Bernstein

30.05.2019

(J###H2, 2018
Courtesy: Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London and Greene Naftali, New York

Jacqueline Humphries's show at Modern Art in London (October 2–November 10, 2018) showcased a new body of work that transforms her past pieces into sublimely post-digital moving presences, testaments to the sheer potential of painting. To make them, Humphries first scanned and translated her earlier paintings into ASCII, a character-based image encoding system invented in the 1960s, then stenciled the data onto newly

painted canvases. Thick underpainting and elaborate overpainting create a multilayered experience that obscures the uniformity and legibility of the ASCII. Humphries also integrates newer technological languages such as CAPTCHA, emoticons, *kaomojis*, and emojis, deconstructing not only the visual binaries of figure-ground and relief-intaglio, but also the conceptual binaries of base-superstructure and source-clone. These new paintings prompt a reflexive inquiry into the way subjectivity is increasingly shaped by codes we believe we control. They also make visible the tension between archaic forms and hidden structures, and the conspicuously visible codes that animate contemporary digital media. This June, Humphries will present new iterations of her black-light paintings, a series initiated in 2005, at The Dan Flavin Art Institute in Bridgehampton. Collapsing the concept of luminosity as it exists in psychedelia, contemporary screen culture, and conventions of painting, these works integrate high art and popular culture with deadpan delivery.

FELIX BERNSTEIN

Your new paintings feature the ghostly presence of your own earlier works. For instance,*~?j.h%* (2018) and *3@JQ.~* (2018) show two divergent ASCII remakes of the same source painting, *Untitled* (2012). The earlier painting undergoes a coherent deformation that haunts the newer paintings, as if it were undead. This thematizes the way painting as a singular medium haunts the claims of its alleged obsolescence on social media. Is the proclaimed death of painting something you've always responded to?

JACQUELINE HUMPHRIES

When I came to New York in the early 1980s, everyone was obsessed with the "end of painting." But by the time I arrived at the Whitney ISP program, it was already too late. I was enlightened to the corruption of painting and the idea that real artists don't paint anymore, but I was already in my mind a painter and I wasn't going to violently banish that from my world. So I made little monochromes and narrativized my own experience of being under duress as a painter. I was making disappearing and dying paintings, literally illustrating that with arrangements of paintings which would get progressively smaller. But one can make endless last paintings, right? I'm still facing that.

FELIX

So, already, you were working on paintings in conceptual series.

JACQUELINE

I think of my work in sequence more than in series, because as I work on many canvases at once, the ideas are flowing through all of them, until eventually, like in musical chairs, the ideas find their place in certain objects. The model I adhere to is generative more than serial, so it can be endless: there's no beginning and no end, and things can loop back. I diminished my involvement to very high degree, but that involvement is still there, in a different, maybe even more significant way. It's become more purely intentional. I feel like these paintings are the most personal I've ever made, which is paradoxical given their

mediated and mechanical processes.

FELIX

You remake and magnify earlier drips, which is interesting because drips are thought to be the most spontaneous and immediate marks on a painting, unbound rather than structural, whereas in your work, what seems most structural is actually most lyrical.

JACQUELINE

I selected marks or drips from earlier paintings and turned them into stencils. But even paintings I made many years ago took the drip as a signal of too-busy-to-be-neat artistic abandon and turned it into a very deliberate structuring element. I'm working now from a very arid place. I'm not struggling with the juicy paintbrush. I'm very detached, but I've made a decision to work this way, and it creates a different kind of intimacy.

FELIX

You use a lot of literal question marks, as well as a lot of J's, which resemble upside-down question marks. There is no "decoding," or answering the antinomies your paintings propose: robot or human, original or remake, information or art. You're thrown back onto the structure itself, and the constituent units of the structure—the all-too-familiar keyboard characters.

JACQUELINE

Right, keyboard characters are both familiar and unfamiliar. They leave you suspended on the razor edge between the pure abstraction of language and the possibility of communication. The promise of keyboard characters is to universally communicate, but it comes with all this disappointment and miscommunication. So I have brought that promise and disappointment into the painting alongside this array of visuals that is also reliant upon the very same components—letters smashed together with color and gesture. But I hope it produces a sense of longing for real communication and content. Is that hopelessly romantic?

FELIX

Yes, it's a romantic and sublime threshold state. You see and feel these antinomies, and they stay with you, but instead of getting a new artificial synthesis, you're left suspended.

JACQUELINE

That's what I call a limited case of transcendence, which is more about causing desire than resolving it. So the painting frame remains to keep things bounded, just as dance has a beginning and end, or sculpture has a back and a front.

FELIX

In one painting, you quite strikingly have a flat smiley-face sculpture tacked on outside the frame. It's a 3D-printed yellow disk of a new emoji, but with the neutral face of a classic emoticon, so it's an emoji-emoticon hybrid.

JACQUELINE

I needed to put something outside the frame, hanging off the painting. And when that happened, it energized and made the inside active. It is clearly outside; it's been pushed out. That can be narrativized. I did it for formal reasons, but I can't account for my

unconscious reasons for insisting on that emoji-emoticon face. I would call it a joke, but we all know what jokes are. 😐

FELIX

It's interesting that you were going to originally use a cat-face emoji, since cats are said to have the adaptability to survive any coming apocalypse. We're digitally fascinated by cats because they've been able to survive every new technological change in ways humans can't. Rainer Maria Rilke wrote that the cat isn't ever really looking at you, but rather erasing your existence, waiting for your death.

JACQUELINE

Painting is like the cat. The cat is still a cat; it still has its autonomy, and we can never trap it fully. There's the cat-ness before the word "cat" and after. Painting will still have a life after the last painting is made.

FELIX

Did reusing operations and tropes from your earlier work make you more self-aware of a certain signature style, or has your sense of authorial style become even more incoherent?

JACQUELINE

Things became more incoherent. Whatever mesh was originally holding the paintings together as an image has disappeared, and the interstitial links are gone. I feel I've finished a painting when it opens up and banishes me, puts me outside the process. But there are many winks of self-reference in the work. I use the characters "J. H. $" as a playful gesture that self-mocks the idea of painting as authorial expression. Similarly, with the emoticon outside the frame, the joke is that now there's figurative expression or "stamp of authenticity." And I also paint on CAPTCHA tests. The funny thing about those is I always fail at the CAPTCHA test. So maybe I'm a robot. Certainly, based on the test, I'm not human.

FELIX

A lot of conceptual work generates an interesting and terrifying mathematical sublime from the too-much-information technological overload, but without any beauty. Your work, though, lays bare the interesting alphanumeric code behind experience, which can be alienating but also beautiful.

JACQUELINE

When we scrape everything away, it's a very scary place to be. I'll literally have panic from the work and this sense of detachment, but also deep implication that puts me in a strange place—arid instead of flowing. Suddenly, so much has changed, and I can't just keep making paintings like I did before. That's why I'm against style. I think the medium should be totally adaptable to the possibility that suddenly nothing is as it was, without having to give up the integrity of medium itself. Painting can adapt to anything—it's all about compression. Why should we abandon something so mutable and protean?

at The Dan Flavin Art Institute, Bridgehampton
opens June 22, 2019

Bernstein, Felix, and Jacqueline Humphries. "A Romantic and Sublime Threshold State: Jacqueline Humphries." *Mousse Magazine*, May 30, 2019.

The New York Times

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

Two of Jacqueline Humphries's 2017 works, "(#J^^)," left, and "TQ555," are among the selections at Greene Naftali Gallery. Greene Naftali, New York

Nov. 29, 2017

Jacqueline Humphries

Through Dec. 16. Greene Naftali, 508 West 26th Street, Manhattan; 212-463-7770, greenenaftaligallery.com.

From a short distance, the 10 large-scale paintings in Jacqueline Humphries's latest exhibition at Greene Naftali look like near-monochromes, with passages of spontaneous graffiti and blown-up emojis printed on their surfaces. Step closer, though, and you realize that the surfaces are covered with thousands of tiny, stencil-cut characters, derived from

Schwendener, Martha. "What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week: Jacqueline Humphries." *The New York Times,* November 29, 2017.

typesetting and computer coding, laid out over grounds of somber blue, gray or a sickly industrial teal.

The dotlike stencils aren't dissimilar from the pointillism of Georges Seurat or the digital tricks of contemporary painters like Albert Oehlen and Jeff Elrod. The contrast between emojis and graffiti or other painterly marks also suggests the historical difference between the gestures of Abstract Expressionism and the newer, digital shorthand for human emotion.

Moreover, the difference between viewing the paintings from near and afar suggests that nothing in our visual world is exactly as it seems. What Ms. Humphries reminds us of is how all marks, whether programmed or painted, are forms of cultural code, and all screens, whether canvas or liquid crystal, are places of projection, knowledge, desire and sometimes delusion.

What makes painting vital in a predominantly digital age is its ability to wake us from the illusion that some surfaces are more believable and trustworthy than others. The current bug in an iPhone operating system that autocorrects "i" to "A" and a Unicode symbol is a real-life example of this phenomenon. Ms. Humphries, by comparison, uses painting to make us think about interfaces, artifice and human fallibility, and what we might be overlooking in our visual world and daily lives.

MARTHA SCHWENDENER

Schwendener, Martha. "What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week: Jacqueline Humphries." *The New York Times,* November 29, 2017.

Journal of Contemporary Painting

JCP 4 (1) pp. 45–58 Intellect Limited 2018

Journal of Contemporary Painting
Volume 4 Number 1
 doi: 10.1386/jcp.4.1.45_1

DAVID RYAN
Anglia Ruskin University

Painting as event: An interview with Jacqueline Humphries

Abstract

In this interview, New York-based painter Jacqueline Humphries talks about her recent practice in relation to the condition of time: this includes her own history as a practitioner, the role of gesture, the notion of the event, and contemporaneity. She addresses the appearance of 'emojis' in her recent work, and alludes to both literature and computer games as analogous modes of operation, each illuminating the inner workings of painterly process and its broader context within the contemporary.

Keywords
abstraction
emoticon
studio process
field
screen culture
gestural painting

David Ryan: *Firstly, Jacqueline, I wanted to focus on questions of time in relationship to your practice, but also with some other more specific questions pertaining to your recent work. This question of painting and time – a set of multiple questions actually – is a huge topic, I know; and this might include the time of making a piece, its reception, its siting within historical or chronological concerns, and how it might unfold, trigger or unpack its own temporal conditions as a work, etc. I'll touch on some of these aspects as we go along, but I wanted to begin by thinking around your own history as a painter. I've always felt that during one's*

Humphries, Jacqueline, and David Ryan. "Painting as Event: An Interview with Jacqueline Humphries." *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 4, Issue 1, April 2018, pp. 45–58.

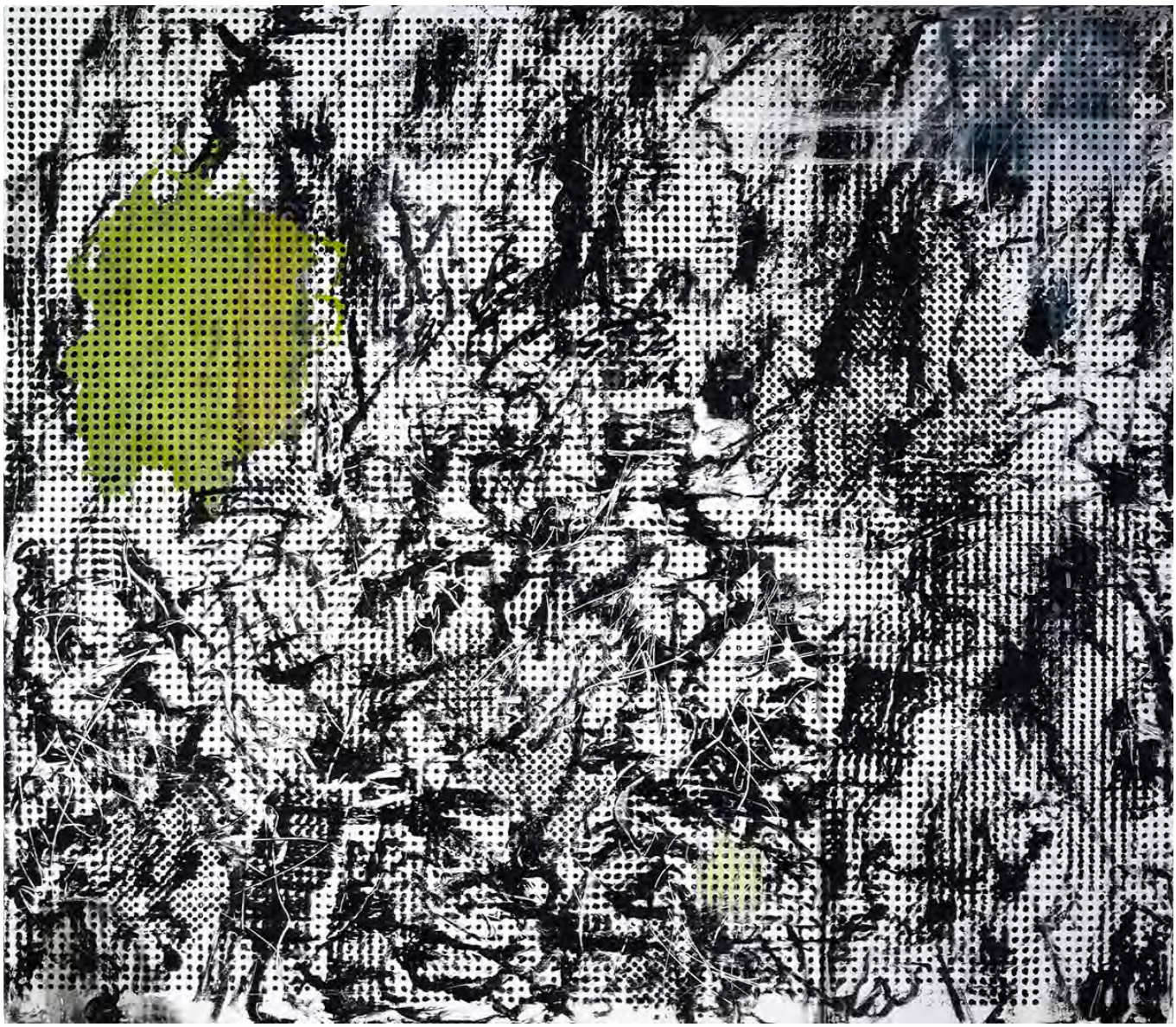


Figure 1: Jacqueline Humphries (2014), Untitled*, oil on linen, 254 × 281.9 cm, courtesy the artist and Greene Naftali, New York, photo: Jason Mandella.*

Humphries, Jacqueline, and David Ryan. "Painting as Event: An Interview with Jacqueline Humphries." *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 4, Issue 1, April 2018, pp. 45–58.

formative years certain constants are put in place, and often – whether we like it or not – there is a pull or reorientation back to these constants. These are often the result of things we have encountered as a student – and I wondered if there were any key events/influences that have been digested by your painting practice over the years but which still inform, or repeatedly resurface within, the work?

Jacqueline Humphries: There was a great deal of dissent from painting by the time I came to New York in the early '80s. There were many disparate arguments around the critique of painting – many camps – but also it seemed of a piece with the very nihilistic tendency in the culture of that time. Painting itself had quite actively participated in this by demonstrating such imaginings of its own end: all the 'last painting' iterations and 'everything has been done', the formal one-upmanship and ever more radical reduction of means. Quite an anxious terrain for a young artist. I think I still carry that with me – painting in an existential mode. That 'air de New York' still pervades my studio, but I'm more settled with the feeling that the end of the world for painting has moved to another location.

DR: *And yet quite early on you were also quickly seen as a part of a new generation of abstract painters. When was this commitment to abstraction first manifest and how and why did it become so urgent for you? For example, in your interview with Cecily Brown some years ago, you describe in your work, 'a complete refusal to depict "real things"' (Brown 2009: np)…*

JH: I had lived in Paris for a year before coming to New York and had spent a lot of time looking at old paintings in a kind of wandering fashion, letting myself gravitate to certain things above others. It was very gradual and took a longtime for me to recognize what I liked. Then later in New York at art school I was getting exposure to a lot of things I hadn't encountered before and really liked the idea that painting could be this absolute thing – that, yes, painting is a kind of meme that is perhaps thoughtlessly passed on through the years, but also that within its interior it's very rich in consciousness, which means by force it changes. You can make it anything you want, it doesn't even have to be well painted or well-liked. With abstraction, a painting can simply be in the world, as a structure among other structures. I have been principally interested in the whole set of new relations that arise from that.

DR: *One thing that's often missed about abstract paintings is that they can refer to things, the life of things, the behaviour of materiality, in a completely oblique way without actually visually naming them or forcing them into conventional narrative sequences or immediate recognition. I've always felt that your paintings deal with this issue of finding the 'event' of the painting, that you discover what the painting is about through its making. Would you see this as important to the work?*

JH: Yes, that the painting itself is an event, that there's a performance aspect to it. 'Performing' painting as opposed to 'crafting' it, per se. Putting myself – 'the painter' – at the centre of that as a

Humphries, Jacqueline, and David Ryan. "Painting as Event: An Interview with Jacqueline Humphries."
Journal of Contemporary Painting 4, Issue 1, April 2018, pp. 45–58.

kind of role-playing almost […] and then having to consider questions that arise from any given approach, that could form a foundation for working. Who is the painter? Where is the painting? Feeling, impulse, decisiveness, confusion, frustration, dumb luck, accident […] can all become tools like colours on a palette. And then the work of painting becomes creating an event from how all those decisions come together. When I begin I'm never sure where the painting will end up, so as I look for some surprise in the painting that I didn't know was there, the working through has a dramatizing effect.

DR: *Without wanting to enter the muddy waters of theory, perhaps somewhat related to this is Deleuze and Guattari's evocation of a wonderful medieval concept in their discussion of literature: the notion of* haecceity, *roughly meaning 'thisness'. But Deleuze and Guattari mention this in relation to certain indeterminate qualities which nonetheless become absolutely specific in certain modernist novels: the sensation of light, a particular time of day, the meaning of a specific landscape,*[1] *etc. It's tricky to apply this to abstract painting, but it somehow seems pertinent. Especially this translation from the indeterminate (say, of colour, or form) into a* haecceity *of image, that convinces of its specificity and 'thisness'. I do think about this in relation to, not only individual paintings of yours, but also the sets and series. How does this pan out for you, this idea of a 'set' of paintings and what they will investigate? More simply put, I'm asking how you determine what a set of paintings might begin to reveal, how does this get started in the studio as a set and how do you discover its particularity?*

JH: Well, in response to this, I'm thinking of Alain Robbe-Grillet or Georges Perec, where one finds minute inch by inch detail of a scene or setting; hyper-specific micro detail followed by rapid zooming out to establishing shot, theme and content. In very striking ways it establishes a vivid sense of inhabited space, and I agree it's uncanny how the overall effect is completely abstract in direct opposition to what one expects from detailed description. It's highly specific yet indeterminate. I think the idea is to place you (reader, viewer) into the space of the work as an already fully engaged subject, but it feels very discombobulated and fragmented because of the wildly diverging focal points. There's familiarity and alienation in equal measure. Because there's very little in the way of characters, you become the character, both inhabiting and observing the space. I've been obsessed, in my recent work, with bringing a feeling of hyper-specificity into an otherwise undetermined, or abstract, entity. This allows me to take myself out of the work as much as possible because it places me on the same level as any viewer. The painting has to be a place for anyone to inhabit, not just my little world that others can peer into. So there's that on the level of the individual work, but I don't work on paintings singly. I work in 'sets' or bodies of work.

When I'm beginning a body of work it takes me some time before I can begin to find the parameters – both micro and macro – of the space of the work, the mental space as it materializes

1. On *haecceity*, Deleuze and Guattari are referring to, 'a mode of individuation very different from a person, subject, thing, or substance', as in, 'a season, a winter, a summer, an hour, a date [each] have a perfect individuality lacking nothing'. In this context they mention the wind as an intensity of presence in Charlotte Brontë, and the vividness of, say, heat, colour, and the particularity of a moment in D. H. Lawrence or William Faulkner (see Deleuze and Guattari [1987] 2003: 261).

Humphries, Jacqueline, and David Ryan. "Painting as Event: An Interview with Jacqueline Humphries."
Journal of Contemporary Painting 4, Issue 1, April 2018, pp. 45–58.

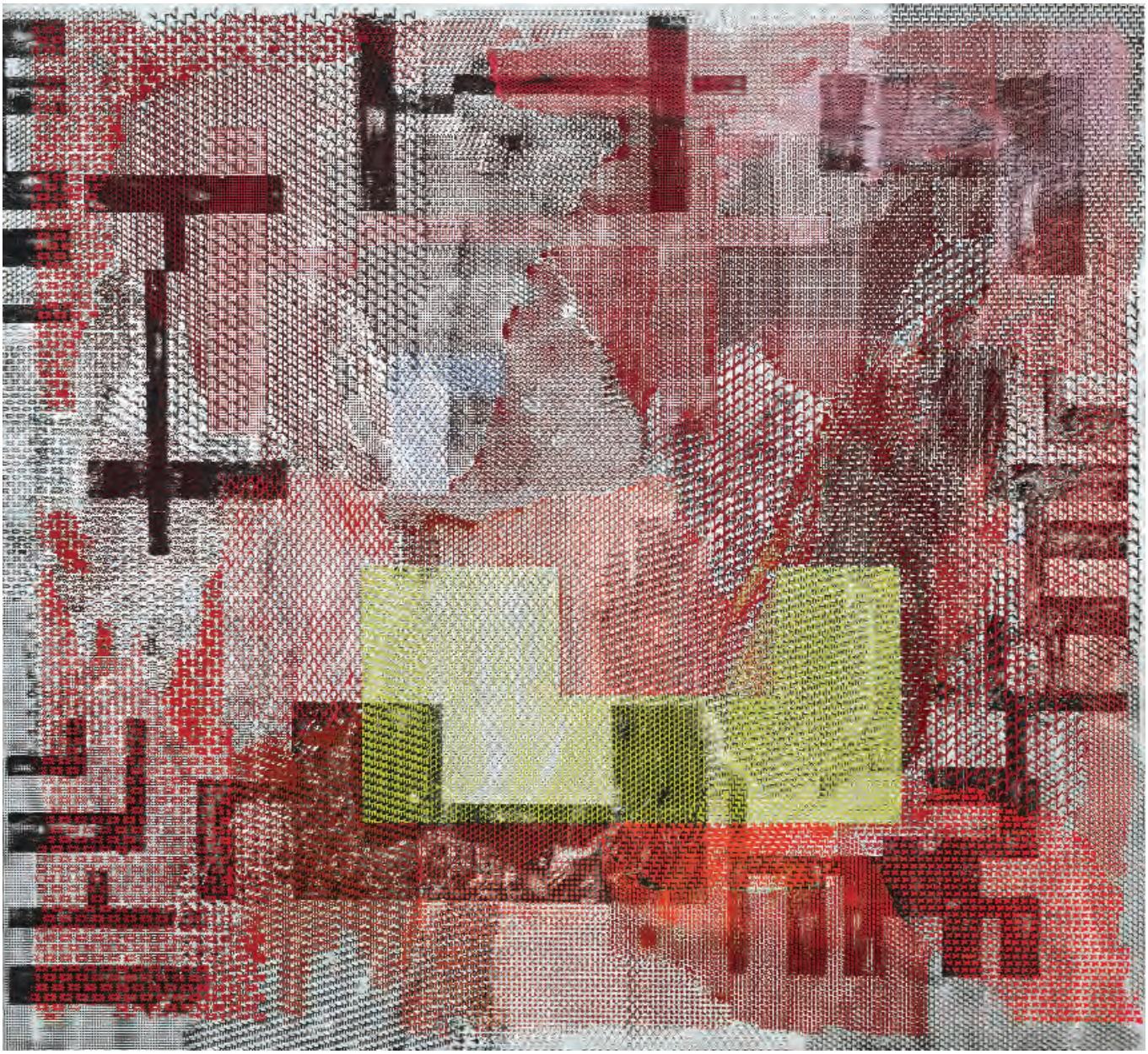


Figure 2: Jacqueline Humphries (2016), [###]*, oil on linen, 228.6 × 243.8 cm, courtesy the artist and and Gisela Capitain, Cologne, photo: Simon Vogel.*

Humphries, Jacqueline, and David Ryan. "Painting as Event: An Interview with Jacqueline Humphries." *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 4, Issue 1, April 2018, pp. 45–58.

into painting. Working on many paintings simultaneously, there's a lot of trial and error; the ideas flow through all the paintings, seemingly chaotically at first, until finally things begin to gel. I don't make drawings preliminary to paintings so everything must be worked out in the paintings themselves, in real painting space–time. It can be slow and arduous initially but eventually as I gain more sense of what I'm doing the paintings can seem almost to paint themselves. A momentum builds, giving energy and velocity to the process. It's only when I'm on that downhill slide that I have a greater sense of what I'm up to and can see, between all the paintings in the group, how they build a kind of mental space between themselves.

DR: *Yes, it also seems you are always ready to undercut or outplay intentionality in that way. It often seems to be an art of interruption – at the right time in the process. In the studio one can, in my case at least, often feel that the work is too 'wilful' somehow. Form is perhaps being a little forced – while your paintings always have this satisfying effect of a give and take between materials, reflecting on that materiality resulting in a subsequent set of actions. How do you see this dialogue between intentionality and its deflection? Is it, in fact, a dialogue for you?*

JH: It's one thing to imagine or envision and another to paint; there's really a lot of space between those activities. You have to start with something but the thinking occurs in materializing the ideas and that can feel like a dialogue insofar as there's a back and forth. Sometimes it's even an argument or a fight. I mentioned above that I don't draw or make studies or plan out a painting in advance. I simply start with something. Sometimes I get it right the first time but still may choose a longer path, where strategies like interruption or undercutting might come into play. I often find myself painting over really nice passages that I like in themselves, but which interfere with the overall effect: '[t]oo willful' as you say. With another painting, I might take it apart and put it back together more or less the same way, almost like one would a car engine; through that dismantling and rebuilding it may not substantially alter its appearance, but nonetheless it's transformed somehow by having been put through that process. Scrutiny may reaffirm a decision as well as cause a change: those outcomes are equally valid. It becomes almost a game of questioning or mistrusting my original intentions in favor of something I didn't yet know was my intention until it emerged. Perhaps we give intentionality too much importance because really the trial and error is equally important. It's never my 'real intention' to truly bungle a painting but that can lead to great outcomes too, so then by doing that deliberately it opens things up in the process. I can get really so bored and fed up with my intentions, especially when they become too predictable. I also want adventure. But sometimes the difficulty for me is simply the 'given' of the visual aspect and how that seems to ignore the physicality of painting which differentiates it from other kinds of images. Essentially, paintings are built out of complex material procedures whereby a protean and theoretical spatiality may be resolved into image by the painter

Humphries, Jacqueline, and David Ryan. "Painting as Event: An Interview with Jacqueline Humphries."
Journal of Contemporary Painting 4, Issue 1, April 2018, pp. 45–58.

and, by extension, the viewer, because the viewer must completely reconstitute the painting every time she views it. The term 'visual' does not adequately describe the procedural and perceptive physics of painting in all its aspects.

DR: *I was reading somewhere in a text by the art historian Heinrich Wölfflin, that all form is 'in dialogue'. I like this idea that form can be in dialogue internally but also outwardly – an external dialogue with its context. Critics like David Joselit have been very concerned with related ideas, of paintings having a dialogue with particular contexts, social contexts even, and I noticed your paintings from 2008 included in the exhibition, 'Painting 2.0 Expression in the Information Age', co-curated by Joselit, which are rather like placards from a demonstration, like remnants from a performance almost. I wondered if you could say something about those works?*

JH: I think they came out of a kind of frustration with my desire to make a painting DO something. They seem to indicate an intersection of thought and action […] they're protest paintings, but it's not clear what they may be against. Presumably they could be picked up and paraded around just in the general spirit of protest: 'I'm against it, whatever it is'. And when I've exhibited them propped up in groups against a wall, there's a sense of a protest or an action having been abandoned, though I never used them in a performance which was documented or anything like that. I guess I found their ambiguousness in relation to these various things oddly satisfying, like putting something to rest regardless of its success or failure.

I think artists can fantasize a lot about their power. Perhaps this is essential, but it is also comical. Roberto Bolaño wrote about this brilliantly in *The Savage Detectives* (2008), which is about a group of young Mexican underground poets who call themselves 'Visceral Realists'. They act and speak like gangsters, but they're also sort of street punks who just write little poems, to no audience beyond their small group. Between the various warring factions or camps in this underground poetry scene in Mexico City, differences centre around arcane poetic differences which wouldn't matter or be noticeable to most anyone, but which for these poets become grounds for violent retribution. Fealty to Neruda and Paz over other poetic traditions becomes something worth dying and even killing for. One of the poets has a small poetry press – funded by selling drugs – called 'Lee Harvey Oswald' a name he arrived at purely through a misunderstanding, demonstrating that they are as ridiculous in one sense as they are dignified in another. The important thing here is that amongst themselves their seriousness and dedication to their passions begins to resonate outside their little group. They become quasi-mythic. These kind of antics remind me very much of the type of inside conversations that occur between artists in the art world, which can seem quite ludicrous perhaps to most, but which nonetheless centre on very sincerely held beliefs. Anyone with ideas about poetry or art's relation to power or ability to be powerful can seem to walk a line so razor-thin

Humphries, Jacqueline, and David Ryan. "Painting as Event: An Interview with Jacqueline Humphries."
Journal of Contemporary Painting 4, Issue 1, April 2018, pp. 45–58.

Figure 3: Jacqueline Humphries (2015), installation view, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, courtesy the artist and Greene Naftali, New York.

Humphries, Jacqueline, and David Ryan. "Painting as Event: An Interview with Jacqueline Humphries." *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 4, Issue 1, April 2018, pp. 45–58.

close to delusion […] and fervent discussion can even compound that feeling, of the illusory nature of all this.

I think of Blanchot's phrase describing poetry as 'power without power' (Blanchot [1981] 1995: 331), one of his many riddles.

DR: *In a very different way, the idea of 'activation' seems an important recurring concern within your work. I'm thinking of the black light paintings, for example, where the paintings are viewed (and transformed) under ultraviolet light, or the allusions in many of your works to the screen or the use of light sensitive pigments such as silver. All paintings are activated by the environment they are shown in, of course, but you seem to have stressed this fact with either the specific choice of materials or formal allusions?*

JH: The idea was really about the paintings activating their environment rather than the other way around. The painting isn't just on the wall with you looking into it, the painting is really in the room. It becomes a light source and 'projects' that way. So this would follow what I said above – to have the painting do something, to make it active, and to intensify the sense of one's own interaction with it. By making the paintings hypersensitive to light conditions (especially pronounced with the black light paintings) I suppose I'm bringing attention to light as the underlying condition of visibility. And again in relation to the black light environments, I remember wondering initially why this very large segment of the electro-magnetic spectrum had been almost thoroughly ignored in the context of the art exhibit.

DR: *Let's talk about your recent exhibition at Gallery Gisela Capitain in Cologne. These paintings continue another dialogue in your work: the mechanical and the handmade. The recent paintings make use of emoticons – the texter's shorthand for emotion or feeling – repeated so as to become fields or grounds. What was the impetus for using these emoticons, and how do you see them functioning?*

JH: In spring of 2014 I began making paintings using fields of dots in laser cut stencils, varying the size of the dot and density of pattern, layering those things, and was getting some surprising results. Spatially. It was great ammunition against lateral composition thinking, just to layer the patterns over each other. What I found (and now it seems so 'duh') is that I could achieve transparency using very dense opaque patterns, and I liked that. To know I could paint over a painting and still see the painting I had painted over. It's superimposition, but I was surprised how much of the painted over painting I could see. Furthermore, the patterns themselves vibrated to create a kind of colour effect. This is all pretty technical but suffice it to say there was very fertile ground here, it almost felt as if I was breeding something in the studio. There was a giant petri dish feeling as patterns begat new patterns, but eventually I became bored with only dots so began to find new elements to make patterns out of.

Humphries, Jacqueline, and David Ryan. "Painting as Event: An Interview with Jacqueline Humphries."
Journal of Contemporary Painting 4, Issue 1, April 2018, pp. 45–58.

I simply had the idea of using emoticons one day; I don't know maybe I was texting with a friend. It seemed right, being so elemental – just punctuation marks – but it felt like a stretch too. I knew that the explosion of emoticon speech had both delighted and annoyed me at times, but it seemed to have become an essential component in the general impoverishment of SMS speech, so that made me really want to make it work but it took a lot of fooling around and experimenting, getting the right scale and density, all that normal painting stuff. It seemed a funny idea that a painting could come with its own expression, for instance in the case of :), which is a blue painting, I layered the emoticons vertically but upside down, so then it appears to frown. That way the painting becomes, on its face, 'a blue painting that is sad'. The more important thing is that, by forcing the paint through the stencils very gesturally, I could make the gesture register in the pattern, and that's primarily what you see – a kind of fragmented mechanized gestural haze – until you get very close to the painting, and only then can you see the tiny emoticons. That added another dimension, that the paintings were very different from varying distances and invited you to walk up very close to them. Later I began to use emoji as well, taking just the face out of ☹ for instance, eliminating the bubble and forming that into patterns. That's something that came online with the paintings I showed at Capitain last March.

DR: *The use of the emoticon combined with the brushstrokes raises questions of artificiality, distance and direct contact within the one painting. The stencilled marks can also give the works a 'nowness', a contemporary feel referencing the changing terms of the technological. Other works – for example, some of the large paintings, build up a complex surface of interacting geometries through stencilled marks and have the feel of earlier (now obsolete) computer graphics programs. It has something of the awkwardness that computer graphic packages of the 1990s had, displaying their pixelated construction, and yet inviting spontaneity. I wondered what your thoughts were around these issues of signs of the contemporary and obsolescence? One leads inevitably to the other of course – but is that useful to you as a painter? Is there nostalgia for obsolete technology?*

JH: I don't think I would call it nostalgia, that would denote a kind of longing for the past, usually a false or constructed past. Look, sometimes you just stumble on something that you recognize as coming out of some deep sense memory, but it's not a willed thing, it's just raw. I mentioned earlier a point in the studio when there was a petri dish feeling of breeding something. Then one day I made a painting which made me think '*Pong*. This is like playing *Pong*'. The logic had shifted from that of an organic process to a kind of gaming process. So I built on that and actually my assistant turned me on to a game called *Dwarf Fortress* which uses the language of MS DOS as a visual field; not out of nostalgia but because that visual platform is much more instrumental to the needs of that game than would be more rendered graphics. You see that in *Minecraft* too, though differently: new uses

Humphries, Jacqueline, and David Ryan. "Painting as Event: An Interview with Jacqueline Humphries." *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 4, Issue 1, April 2018, pp. 45–58.

for primitive means. But with *Dwarf Fortress*, there is a very purist, fetishist aesthetic to it which is very pleasing. It's a gaming terrain that looks like it's made out of pure data, which it is. You know, it's 'the matrix' made visible or whatever. But the main point about everything I'm saying here is the idea of play. By equating a canvas with a screen (common in my work through many different iterations), I can play out behaviours that I think are ever more present and common in our culture. I can transform those behaviours into painting. I'm much less interested in how the tools of computerization (like Photoshop) can transform painting than in how those myriad tools and interactions transform us and our very relationship to the world.

DR: *Given these emoticons or emoji are, in their original context, a highly coded stand-in for the communication of feelings – how do you now see the critique of expression, which was prevalent for your generation of artists – the critique of neo-expressionism, and of painting per se?*

JH: I agree with all that, I really do; I mean it's part of how I think and how I make painting. For many artists the subtext of that discourse was to abandon painting but for me it was already too late for that and besides I felt that this kind of critical thinking was necessary to establishing a new way of thinking about painting. It was a kind of trial by fire for painters like me and perhaps it was taken too far. Not many distinctions were made between this and that kind of painting – the brush was too broad from my point of view. But the truth is I never had and still don't have any good defence of painting. I can't and don't want to defend it, maybe because at bottom it's indefensible. Maybe most things are like that if you dig deep enough. That critique from that time when I was younger is so internalized at this point and I think my failure to follow fully on its directives has something to do with why I make paintings in such a straightforward, rather conventional way – paint on canvas. No shaped canvases, no anything, just the very generic set up. It's like saying 'yes okay, but still…'.

DR: *Deleuze, again, in his late writings and some lectures, referred to painting as 'blocks of space–time'*[2] *– again, relevant to, I think, how paintings construct time, how they are 'read' in time, but also create space, and operate within space. I was wondering how you see this relationship especially regarding the way you stage diverse tempi or speeds of working within a single piece?*

JH: Space and time are locked together in painting because the act of painting is making space in time, but the narrative of making painting and of looking at it are not the same. To make an overly simplified example: the last thing the painter does is the first thing the viewer sees, meaning the painting is always being seen backwards or in reverse. Paint is extremely malleable and the trick is to make the paint in a way that it comes alive in the painter's hands so that then when it's applied it can have its own time: a gesture can register as a trace the energy and speed of the action that made

2. See Deleuze in a lecture given in 1987, 'What is the Creative Act?', available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_hifamdISs. These ideas are also elaborated in Deleuze and Guattari (1996).

Humphries, Jacqueline, and David Ryan. "Painting as Event: An Interview with Jacqueline Humphries." *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 4, Issue 1, April 2018, pp. 45–58.

it. Loose paint or dense paint will do that in different ways – that's all part of the physics of painting. This is also a structuring which can either reinforce or undermine 'compositional' structure, or as is so often the case in my work it can have a disruptive or troubling effect on other things going on in the painting. Varying the tempi and the speed (I think those are different things) of groups of marks within a larger network of marks can cause a warping or distortion of the field. A surface or plane can be made to seem to expand or contract at various points on its continuous surface, giving the impression almost of respiration, for instance. And so the literal time of making a painting becomes the deliteralized time of the painting itself, effected through the manipulation of speed and tempo as I move across the canvas. I simply exaggerate the inconsistencies in the pattern of marks which unavoidably occurs in the making of painted space.

DR: *As opposed to, say, a modernist demand for wholeness and unity, your paintings play with notions of interruption, cancellation and disruption. Again, events that point to readings in time as well as space. David Joselit writing of your work suggested, '[a]n explosion has occurred in the all-over field and has opened a new threshold. The painting no longer needs need to be one; it can be a multitude hosted by the same rectangle of the canvas' (Joseit 2015: 30). How do you see these conflicting demands in painting for resolution on the one hand and the 'openings of new thresholds', to paraphrase Joselit?*

JH: What's striking in today's screen culture is how one image is so rapidly replaced by another which doesn't relate to it in any way: there's no *definitive* image, nothing which synthesizes or sums up, just an endless torrent. The screen itself is the unifying element, and compresses within itself this multitude. I can't look at an image on a screen any more without sensing another one or another billion images lurking just behind it ready to push it off-screen. The way windows can appear to stack up on the dimensionless area of a computer screen also has a very unsettling effect. But to give a sense of this reality in painting is a different matter partly because its a fixed image but also because we expect different things from painting, namely unity or resolution. And though I don't seek to always deliver fully on those expectations – which maybe is impossible anyway – I still have to lock everything together so that nothing can be removed or added. Breaks or cuts in the fabric of the image introduce spaces through which the painting can be entered and the painting itself must enact this sense of saturation, as if its space were fully saturated, even seeming to contain dimensions (or other images) within it, which are almost or entirely concealed. Disparate parts have to be working on each other with some kind of force – repulsion or attraction for instance – and if the disparate parts there don't seem to belong together they must still hang together. A painting is a physical object so I must enact this sense of compression on those terms. If the result feels like it has something wrong with it, as painting, that's a good thing because then I (the viewer) can feel a heightened sense of complicity with it. A painting is better when there's something wrong with it.

Humphries, Jacqueline, and David Ryan. "Painting as Event: An Interview with Jacqueline Humphries."
Journal of Contemporary Painting 4, Issue 1, April 2018, pp. 45–58.

***DR**: While constructing a painting, as you say, still demands a certain 'compression', and with all the simultaneities and multiplicities now available at a click, do you feel painters are using time and history differently today?*

JH: There's been. a profound shift from a feeling of linear progression, things moving back in time in a somewhat orderly way – this thing following on that thing followed by another – to a sense of the total collapse of that into one giant plane of information which can be organized in an infinity of ways. This has very much to do with digitalization, but also with commerce. I also have a sense of the massive disappearance of the connective tissue which held all of that together – historical thought – which is really a loss of image, of the more or less fixed way that all this can be viewed, how it's seen. This new 'regime of the image' (if you will) is as meaningful for painting now as photography was in the nineteenth century. So, if artists are using time and history differently today, it's in response to a radically shifting landscape of knowledge and the massive social impact of that. The library is no longer a gridded block but an unnavigable amoeba.

References

Blanchot, M. ([1981] 1995), 'Literature and the Right to Death' (trans. L. Davis), in W. Hamacher and D.E. Wellbery (eds), *The Work of Fire*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 300–344.

Bolaño, R. (2008), *The Savage Detectives* (trans. N. Wimmer), London: Picador.

Brown, C. (2009), 'Jacqueline Humphries by Cicely Brown', *Bomb*, 107, Spring, http://bombmagazine.org/article/3262/jacqueline-humphries. Accessed April 2016.

Cook, A., Hudson, S. and Joselit, D. (2015), *Jacqueline Humphries*, Köln: Konig Publishers.

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. ([1987] 2003), *A Thousand Plateaus* (trans. B. Massumi), London and New York: Continuum.

—— (1996), *What is Philosophy?* (trans. H. Tomlinson and G. Burchill), New York: Columbia University Press.

Hochdorfer, A., Ammer, M. and Joselit, D. (2015), *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age*, Munich, London and New York: Delmonico Books/Prestel.

Joselit, D. (2015), 'Painting time: Jacqueline Humphries', in A. Cook, S. Hudson and D. Joselit (eds), *Jacqueline Humphries*, Köln: König Publishers, pp. 15–30.

Suggested citation

Ryan, D. (2018), 'Painting as event: An interview with Jacqueline Humphries', *Journal of Contemporary Painting,* 4:1, pp. 45–58, doi: 10.1386/jcp.4.1.45_1

Contributor details

David Ryan is a visual artist, musician and writer based in London and Italy. Recent exhibitions include 'Crossing Abstraction' at Kunstlerhaus Bethianen, Berlin (2009), 'Kunsthaus and Forum Konkrete Kunst', Erfurt, Germany (2012); 'After Image' (2013), Emerson Gallery, Berlin; 'At the Point of Gesture' (2015), Wimbledon Space; 'June Mostra' (2016), British School at Rome. Screenings of his video works have taken place at Konzerthaus, Berlin; Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatoire; Issue Project Space, New York; V22 Space, London (2012 and 2016); Logos, Ghent (2013); Qo2 in Brussels, Belgium (2013), Teatro Pollini, Padua (2014) ICA, London (2014) and the Venice Biennale (2015). He is currently Reader in Fine Art at Cambridge School of Art and is on the editorial board of the *Journal of Contemporary Painting*.

Contact: Cambridge School of Art, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, East Road, CB1 1PT, UK.
E-mail: david.ryan@anglia.ac.uk

Jacqueline Humphries is a key contemporary abstract painter, born in New Orleans and based in New York, she has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Williams College Museum of Art, Kunsthalle Wilhelmshaven in Germany, and the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh. She has also been included in group exhibitions at notable institutions including the Dallas Museum of Art, the Nagoya Museum in Japan, the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, and New Orleans's Contemporary Art Center. Her work was included in the 2014 Whitney Biennial. Humphries' work is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Tate Modern, London; Albright-Knox Art Gallery; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and the Smithsonian Institution, DC.

Humphries, Jacqueline, and David Ryan. "Painting as Event: An Interview with Jacqueline Humphries."
Journal of Contemporary Painting 4, Issue 1, April 2018, pp. 45–58.

THE NEW YORKER

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

JACQUELINE HUMPHRIES

By The New Yorker

"A painting is better when there's something wrong with it," Humphries has said. The lucky faults in this show of large, squarish, stately canvases pertain to the mutually abrasive effects of lyrical brushwork and the stenciled, rat-a-tat lines of letters, numbers, and punctuation marks; happy- or sad-face emojis intrude on occasion, like tiny panic attacks. Humphries's dissonances complicate but don't overrule the sensuous glories of her color and texture. The works are like pleasurable invitations to think. *(Greene Naftali; Through Dec. 16.)*

Published in the print edition of the November 13, 2017, issue.

Schjeldahl, Peter. "Jacqueline Humphries." *The New Yorker*, November 13, 2017.

Journal of Contemporary Painting

Reviews

'Jacqueline Humphries', Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 11 June–5 October 2015

Reviewed by Matthew L. Levy, Penn State Erie, The Behrend College

We are surely nearing the apotheosis of the emoji. In 2013, *Emoji Dick*, a crowd-sourced, line-by-line translation of Melville's novel, became the first emoji-only volume in the United States Library of Congress. In June 2014, two London-based programmers announced the release of Emojli, a social network exclusively comprised of emoji-based communication – a possibility greatly enhanced by the previous month's Unicode software update that bequeathed 250 new emojis to mobile device users, ranging from weather indicators, to an extended middle finger, to a derelict house (Robb 2014). What was once a limited selection of emotional signifiers has exploded into a veritable pictographic language ideally (if not tragically) suited for an age in which meaningful communication is said to occur in 140 character chunks. It is therefore a curious moment for Jacqueline Humphries to begin painting emoticons, the emoji's typographic forebear. When we can ☺, whither :-)?

In this concise exhibition of work from the past two years, the emoticon emerged as the artist's newest motif, appearing alongside her lexicon of modern painting's more historical formal devices: the drip, scrape, grid and Ben-Day dot. Consisting of twelve paintings and an artist book installed primarily in two galleries – one each for her silver and black light paintings, the two dominant strands of her recent production – the exhibition presented an opportunity to survey the achievements of this mid-career painter and to draw preliminary conclusions about new directions in her work, foremost among which was the emoticon, which appeared in both a black light and silver painting.

Created with custom-made, laser-cut stencils, this motif appeared in repeated rows of standardized affect. *O*, a silver painting of 2015, interspersed the emoticon with a variety of other stencilled forms, including an enlargement of a gestural paint splatter and gridded arrays of Xs and massive Ben-Day dots, all of which hovered in the ambiguous spatial matrix created by Humphries' silver paint. Eliciting a mobile form of spectatorship, which is reinforced by her works' bodily scale, this metallic paint seemingly flickers between material states – reflective frontal plane from one vantage point, translucent scrim from another. While Humphries has related her silver paint to cinema's silver screen (specifically that of film noir), the exhibition's curator, Amanda Donnan, rightly notes that these works now evoke the screens of computers and smartphones, which similarly transform with the touch of a button from reflective slabs to shallow trays of illusion containing overlapping windows and apps (Donnan 2015).

The paintings thus layer the digital (screens, emoticons), the mechanical (Ben-Day dots, stencils), and the handmade (thick impasto, gestural scrawls), a syncretism that also obtains at the level of process. In *O*, for example, Humphries digitally translates an expressionistic paint splatter to stencil with a laser cutter before mechanically applying it to canvas. At this point, the handmade seeps back

Levy, Matthew L. "Reviews: 'Jacqueline Humphries', Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 11 June–5 October 2015." *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 2, Issue 2, October 2016, pp. 322–26.

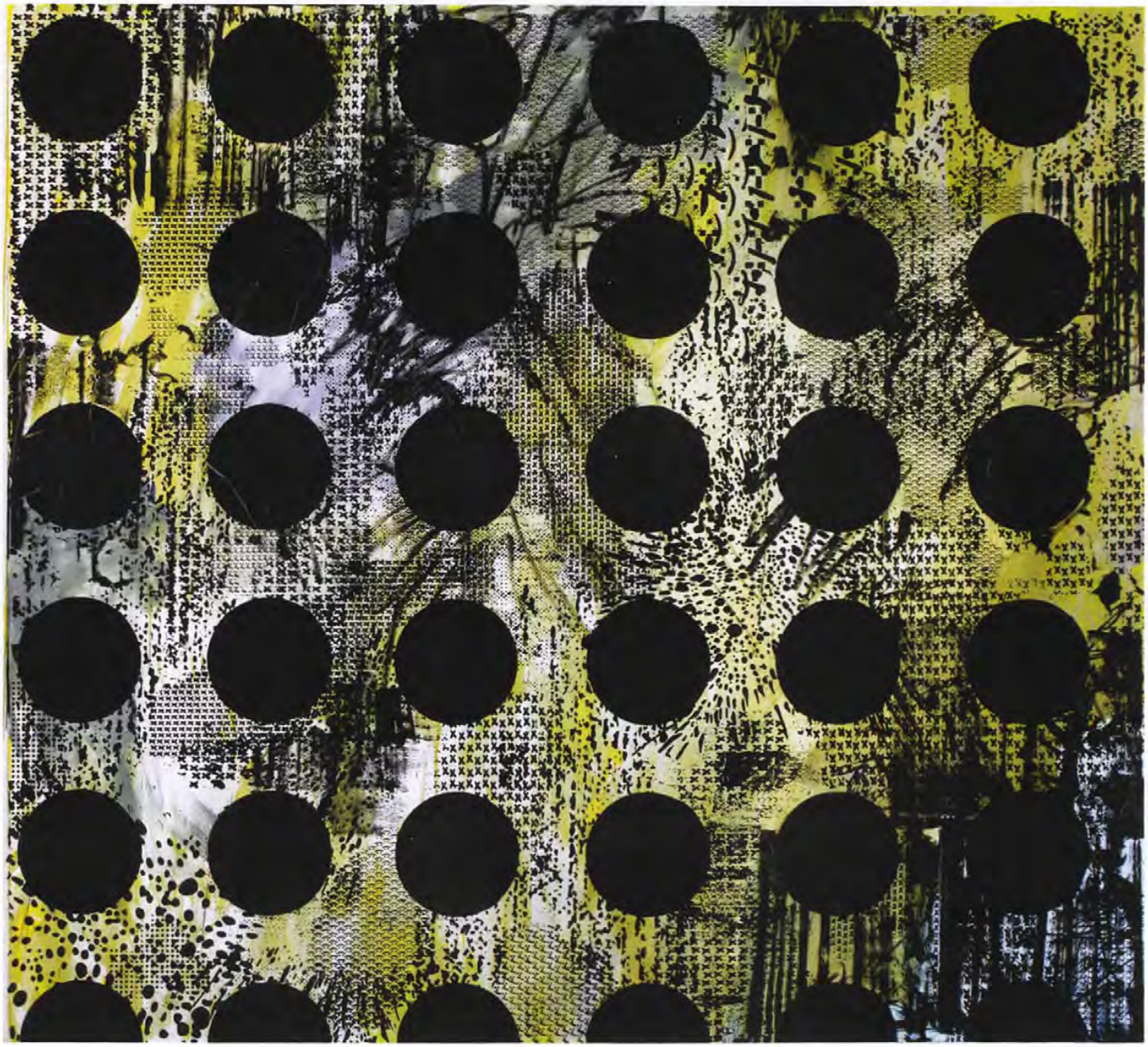


Figure 1: Jacqueline Humphries (2015), O, Oil on linen, 100 × 111 inches (254 × 281.9cm) courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali, New York.

Levy, Matthew L. "Reviews: 'Jacqueline Humphries', Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 11 June–5 October 2015." *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 2, Issue 2, October 2016, pp. 322–26.

into the picture, as she often overloads her stencils, resulting in a tactile facture and motifs that bleed beyond their boundaries. This mechanization of the gestural mark might evoke Roy Lichtenstein's brushstroke paintings, but where the Pop artist ironized Abstract Expressionist bombast, Humphries' paintings, with their richly textured surfaces, appear more earnest. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say they assume a *posture* of earnestness. Lamenting the cynicism of postmodern appropriation, she once proposed, '[W]hy not appropriate an attitude of seriousness, or even sincerity, whereby the distancing of cynicism is removed?' (Humphries 2009: 28). A Humphries painting feels something like a Frankenstein laboratory, attempting through the life-giving jolt of painterly panache to revivify obsolescent sign systems: the emoticon during the ascent of the emoji; the printer's dot in the age of the pixel; and the gestural mark, that rare signifier that has come to signify its own extinction. And yet the paintings also internalize Humphries' doubts about such a project – each mark always already mediated by technology, by history – doubts echoed by the only other emoticon besides the smile in her repertoire, :-/. This equivocation might, in part, explain the improbable exclusion of this consummate New York painter from the Museum of Modern Art's recent painting survey, 'The Forever Now', which featured peers such as Laura Owens, Amy Sillman and Charlene von Heyl. Like these artists, Humphries mines the medium's historical signifiers, though without the sense of unburdened atemporality that the exhibition claimed as the essential condition of contemporary painting (Hoptman 2014).[1]

At the Carnegie, Humphries' penchant for the outmoded was nowhere more evident than in her black light paintings. Created with fluorescent paints and hung in a gallery specially lit by ultraviolet tubes, these works immersed the viewer in what felt like a den of 1960s' psychedelia, with a heap of beanbag chairs in the middle of the floor inviting viewers to submit to the altered states of consciousness the art might elicit. One could read these works as a wry sendup of the epiphanic rhetoric of modernist abstraction – 'presentness' cum stoner kitsch – if only the paintings were not so visually arresting. Humphries' banal motifs pulsate before fields of retina-searing colour, whose fluorescence seemingly dematerializes the canvas into a hallucinatory haze. The paintings mesmerize; yet, one cannot escape a nagging scepticism of their gimmicky allure, particularly when confronted by a swath of mindlessly grinning emoticons glowing from within a work's phantasmagoric depths.

Suspended between postmodern doubt and the modernist's faith in the redemptive power of the aesthetic, Humphries' practice represents a new chapter in painting's history of dialectical renewal. While her critics frequently mention her engagements with Abstract Expressionism, the pressured nature of her practice recalls a later moment in that history – namely, that of the 1960s' painters associated with Minimalism. Studying at the Whitney Independent Study Program in the 1980s, a watershed moment for the application of critical theory in the visual arts, she too committed to painting at a time when many met it with raised pitchforks. Her silver and fluorescent paints recall the materials used by painters like David Novros, Billy Al Bengston, Judy Chicago and others, who similarly adopted non-traditional (often commercial) paints, not only for their luminosity but also for their cultural referentiality. Like Jo Baer and Ralph Humphrey, she has made works that feature

1. Humphries, Owens, Sillman and Von Heyl were featured together in the 2014 Whitney Biennial and were also considered together in Mark Godfrey's recent article (2014: 294–303, 344).

Levy, Matthew L. "Reviews: 'Jacqueline Humphries', Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 11 June–5 October 2015." *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 2, Issue 2, October 2016, pp. 322–26.

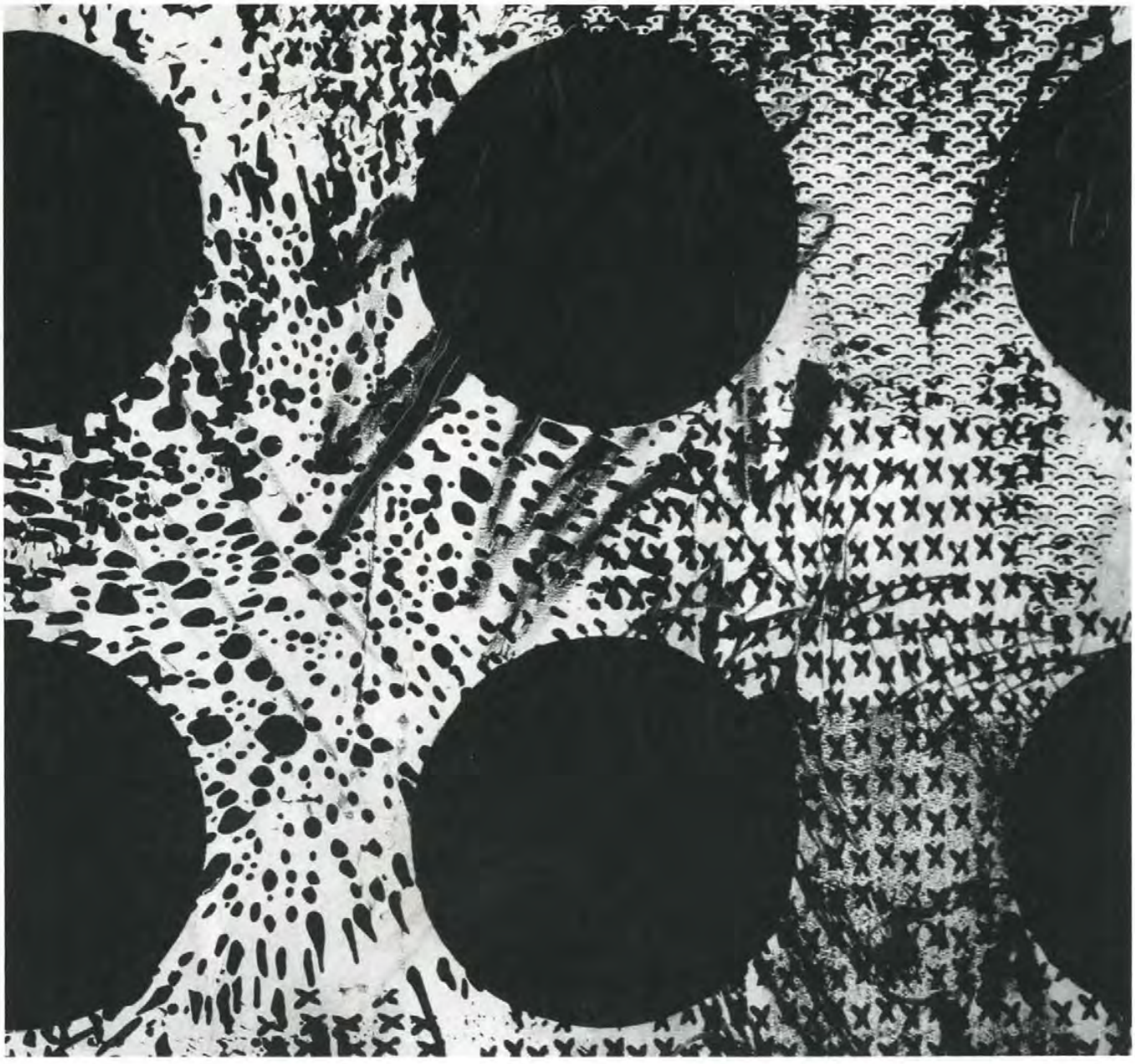


Figure 2: Jacqueline Humphries (2015), O, detail, Oil on linen, 100 × 111 inches (254 × 281.9cm) courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali, New York.

Levy, Matthew L. "Reviews: 'Jacqueline Humphries', Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 11 June–5 October 2015." *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 2, Issue 2, October 2016, pp. 322–26.

an internal painted frame, two of which hung in introduction to the Carnegie exhibition on a wall that bridged its two primary galleries. Whereas Humphrey and Baer used this motif as a bulwark against literalist claims regarding painting's objecthood, Humphries' frames assume a different cultural valence. She never leaves these forms intact. In one painting, crisp, masked lines of red were in places doubled, as if copied and pasted, or frayed to reveal underlying paint layers. In the other, she vandalized heavy black framing bands with graffiti-like scribbles of silver and a runny splash of translucent pink. These paintings encapsulated the ambivalence that ran through the entire exhibition. They express a desire for autonomy (for the work of art and, by extension, for the apperceptive self), while acknowledging the permeable and provisional nature of the frames – be they technological, institutional or discursive – that underwrite contemporary experience.

Note: This exhibition subsequently travelled to the Contemporary Arts Center New Orleans, 19 November 2015–28 February 2016.

References

Donnan, A. (2015), 'Pictures in pieces', *Jacqueline Humphries*, exhibition brochure, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 11 June–28 September.

Godfrey, M. (2014), 'Statements of intent: The art of Jacqueline Humphries, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman and Charlene Von Heyl', *Artforum*, 52: 9, pp. 294–303, 344.

Hoptman, L. (2014), *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World*, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 14 December–5 April 2015.

Humphries, J. (2009), 'Jacqueline Humphries', interview by Cecily Brown, *Bomb*, 107, Spring 2009, pp. 22–31.

Robb, A. (2014), 'How using emoji makes us less emotional', *New Republic*, 7 July, http://www.newrepublic.com/article/118562/emoticons-effect-way-we-communicate-linguists-study-effects. Accessed 20 July 2015.

Contributor details

Matthew L. Levy is Assistant Professor of Art History at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College. His essay 'David Novros's painted places' was recently published in the catalogue for the artist's survey exhibition organized by the Museum Wiesbaden and Museum Kurhaus Kleve. He is currently working on a book project that situates the practices of abstract painters, including Robert Mangold, David Novros and Jo Baer, within the discourses of Minimalism.

Contact: Penn State Erie, The Behrend College, 4951 College Drive, Erie, PA 16563, USA.
E-mail: mll33@psu.edu

Levy, Matthew L. "Reviews: 'Jacqueline Humphries', Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 11 June–5 October 2015." *Journal of Contemporary Painting* 2, Issue 2, October 2016, pp. 322–26.

ARTnews

‘The Thrilling Feeling of Creating Light’: Jacqueline Humphries on Her Recent Work

BY ANDREW RUSSETH October 7, 2015 1:25pm

Installation view of Jacqueline Humphries‘s solo show at the Carnegie Museum of Art, 2015.

CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART

In 2005 a fire broke out in Jacqueline Humphries’s studio in Manhattan’s Financial District. “You know how they say, about a painter, that the best thing that could happen is a fire in their studio?” Humphries asked me one morning last summer. “That was really true for me at the time. I was working on a bunch of stalled things. It was the best thing possible.”

Russeth, Andrew. “’The Thrilling Feeling of Creating Leigh’: Jacqueline Humphries on Her Recent Work.” *ARTnews*, October 7, 2015.

After the fire, Humphries produced the first of her scintillating "black light" paintings, which radiate wild, ghostly neon colors in dark rooms under ultraviolet light—not a technique that one sees contemporary artists using very often. "Fluorescent colors are very powerful, yet they were so bounded by these typical associations—African princess sex goddess, marijuana and magic mushrooms, Jimi Hendrix and the Doors, and that was kind of it," Humphries said, sitting in a backroom at Greene Naftali, her longtime Chelsea gallery. "I grew up in the '60s, so I was into it. Why not take something like that and see if you can make serious abstraction with it?"

Those works rank among the most beguiling and adventurous abstract paintings so far this century, and they started Humphries on a decade of quicksilver innovation. She has made paintings in which gestural strokes seem to be cut through with digital glitches, and many with shimmering metallic surfaces that are impossible to capture properly in photographs. They are tough, clever, and sensual, and they have established her as a leader in painting that responds to the particular aesthetic quandaries of the present moment.

Installation view of Jacqueline Humphries's solo show at the Carnegie Museum of Art, 2015.

CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART

Russeth, Andrew. "'The Thrilling Feeling of Creating Leigh': Jacqueline Humphries on Her Recent Work." *ARTnews,* October 7, 2015.

Jacqueline Humphries, 🙂, 2015, oil on linen, 114 x 127 inches.

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND GREENE NAFTALI GALLERY

A solo show of recent work—in black light and otherwise—recently ran at the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh, and will travel now to the Contemporary Arts Center in New Orleans, where Humphries grew up. It is her first museum show since 2006, and it comes just after her inclusion in the 2014 Whitney Biennial.

Humphries's work almost always feels like it could only be made right now, but her newest paintings are blanketed with especially contemporary signs: emoticons. (Another unusual sight in art.) She uses an industrial-grade cutting machine in her studio to punch the little guys into plastic stencils, which she uses to apply symbols onto canvas in dense grids. At a distance, you can't quite make them out—they look like tiny dots, or maybe some sort of abstract map—but then you get closer and realize what you are looking at: 🙂 🙂 🙂 🙂 🙂 🙂 🙂 🙂 🙂 🙂 or :-/ :-/ :-/ :-/ :-/ :-/ :-/ :-/ :-/ flying across the picture plane over flat slashes of color.

Russeth, Andrew. "'The Thrilling Feeling of Creating Leigh': Jacqueline Humphries on Her Recent Work." *ARTnews,* October 7, 2015.

Is she a texter? “Yes,” Humphries said, somewhat ruefully, holding her phone. “It’s great, and it’s horrible—it’s both. I really wanted to engage this aspect of our life with screens—how much time we spend looking at these little teeny things on our phones when there’s this big world out there. In the summer you notice almost-naked 18-year-olds in the street passing other almost-naked 18-year-olds looking at this”—shaking her phone—“when they should be looking at that—that’s flesh!”

The history of painting is filled with attempts at capturing the big moment, unleashing the grand gesture, using the canvas as a window out onto the world. Humphries work in some ways reverses that project while maintaining its intensity. “You have to boomerang the other way and start thinking about not just the ideas of the sublime and the infinitely large but you have to think about the infinitely small,” Humphries said excitedly. She described today’s phones as “this world that you’re looking into that gets infinitely small. It’s like this Mandelbrot set—it keeps opening up.”

Her work champions intimate details and complex fractures. When she hit her stride making her newest pieces, she said, “I had this feeling that I wasn’t painting. The feeling was that I was breeding something. It was this petri-dish-like feeling. Different stencils and different-sized dots felt like DNA that I could combine in a painting. And then, at a certain point I didn’t have that feeling anymore. I feel more like I was playing Pong. It was like I was gaming, or playing with code.”

Installation view of Jacqueline Humphries’s 2015 show at Greene Naftali.

COURTESY GREENE NAFTALI GALLERY

Her eighth one-person show at Greene Naftali, which was on view in the summer, included a number of these emoticon-laded paintings. Bubbling underneath the icons were her trademark fields of rough, swooshing color, which she makes by building up and scraping away paint. One senses wild improvisations—growths and destruction—taking place

Russeth, Andrew. “‘The Thrilling Feeling of Creating Leigh’: Jacqueline Humphries on Her Recent Work.” *ARTnews*, October 7, 2015.

Installation view of Jacqueline Humphries's solo show at the Carnegie Museum of Art, 2015.

CARNEGIE MUSEUM OF ART

within certain fixed rules, as in nature. "I start with a vague sort of feeling of what I want to do," Humphries said of her process, "and I can kind of stab around until I see the sort of economy and ecology of things that I want to see in a painting."

In her black light paintings, that stabbing around is literal, since she and an assistant work in the dark, with the invisible black light switched on, in a spectrum in which color operates completely differently. "I have this spray gun that's made to spray rubber—so much paint gushes out of it," Humphries said, laughing. "It's like painting with a fire extinguisher or something."

"The more paint that goes on the canvas," Humphries continued, "the more light there is in the room because the paintings actually create light. There's a kind of thrilling feeling of creating light in the room."

Russeth, Andrew. "'The Thrilling Feeling of Creating Leigh': Jacqueline Humphries on Her Recent Work." *ARTnews*, October 7, 2015.

That is an idea that sounds at once psychedelic and almost religious, and, as it happens, when Humphries started making the pieces ten years ago, she was also thinking about the Rothko Chapel, the painter's solemn suite of paintings in Houston. "How would I update this?" she said, thinking of that Houston landmark. "What if the Rothko Chapel were a disco or a nightclub? You obviously would have a black light abstraction."

Edouard Manet, *Stéphane Mallarmé*, 1876.

COURTESY MUSEE D'ORSAY, PARIS

Flick on the lights or turn off the ultraviolet and the paintings disappear—the electric colors that Humphries has gingerly handled evanesce. That fact, I think, is part of the strength of those works. They evince a tenuous beauty—one that is just barely balanced and uncertain.

Asked about what art she had been looking at recently, Humphries said that she had been spending time with a catalogue of the flower paintings that Manet made in the last year of his life. He was a pivotal artist for her, and when she was 20 years old, living in Paris, she said, she was particularly taken with his portrait of Mallarmé, at the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume. (The Musée d'Orsay now holds it.) It has the poet lounging quietly atop a bed, lost in thought, one hand in his jacket pocket, the other touching an open book.
"I would just go look at that painting at least once a week," she said. "I couldn't get my mind around it." What was so special about the piece? She thought for a second. "I don't know," she said. "It's barely there, but it's so there, you know?"

"Art of the City" is a weekly column by ARTnews co-executive editor Andrew Russeth.

Russeth, Andrew. "'The Thrilling Feeling of Creating Leigh': Jacqueline Humphries on Her Recent Work." *ARTnews,* October 7, 2015.

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS NEW YORK

Jacqueline Humphries

Greene Naftali Gallery

Greene Naftali Gallery | 508 West 26th Street 8th Floor

May 15, 2015 - June 20, 2015

By Claire Lehmann

Jacqueline Humphries, *:)*, 2015, oil on linen, 9' 5" x 10' 5".

Jasper Johns punctured AbEx's ballooning supremacy in the late 1950s with the most unassuming of means: His painterly renderings of letters, numbers, targets, and flags were a sly reminder of the abstraction inherent in our everyday symbolic systems. After devoting her career to picking up where the New York School left off, Jacqueline Humphries has introduced representation of a Johnsian sort in her new work: The eleven paintings in her current exhibition are veiled with emoticons, letters, and eight-bit glyphs. The glyphs are actually enlarged and rasterized pencil rubbings

of canvas that, from a distance, resemble television snow; but don't mistake this white noise for the susurrus of bland asset-class abstraction—up close, Humphries's canvases bristle with layers of complex ambition.

These works are an information-age update on the artist's fascination with cinema's silver screen, the metaphorical and literal ground of her chimerical metallic-pigmented paintings of the last decade. The stenciled graphical fields have been troweled on, frosting-like, in fluorescent hues as well as a distinctive, lusterless black, whose silty texture evokes the rare earths that power our glowing devices. A distaff bent seems to reveal itself at times: In *: : :*, 2014, a silver-and-purple underpainting features gridded dark circles interconnected by scraped-off lines, resembling tangled wires criss-crossing a telephone switchboard—that classic domain of feminine industry—while *oo oo%*, 2015, and *Xx*, 2014, are marked with painted and stenciled x's, recalling cross-stitches, chromosomes, or kisses. Humphries evinces an ambivalence for the affective labor that on-screen communication often requires: She flipped the grins of *:)*, 2015, into frowns and dotted two works with multiple masks of indecision *(:-/)*. There's nothing uncertain in these paintings' effect, though: Mesmeric, like the electronic screens that transfix us, it's nearly impossible to look away.

Lehmann, Claire. "Jacqueline Humphries." *Artforum,* June 5, 2015.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY
523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

ARTFORUM

Statements of Intent

MARK GODFREY ON THE ART OF JACQUELINE HUMPHRIES, LAURA OWENS, AMY SILLMAN, AND CHARLINE VON HEYL

Above: **Charline von Heyl, *Blotto*, 2004,** oil on linen, 78 x 82".

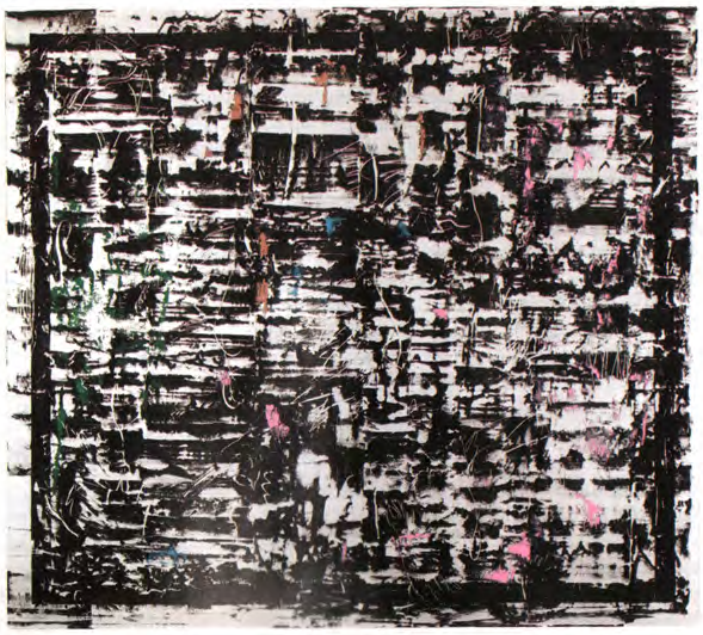
Right: **Laura Owens, *Untitled*, 2014,** Pantone ink, silk-screen ink, Flashe paint, acrylic paint, oil, pastel, paper, and wood on linen, 11' 6" x 8' 8".

Godfrey, Mark. "Statements of Intent: Mark Godfrey on the Art of Jacqueline Humphries, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman, and Charline von Heyl." *Artforum* 52, no. 9, May 2014, pp. 294–302, 344.

Above: **Amy Sillman, *S*, 2007,** oil on canvas, 45 x 39".

Right: **Jacqueline Humphries, *Untitled*, 2014,** oil on linen, 9' 6" x 10' 7".

LIKE A SOCIALIST INVESTMENT BANKER, a painter in a top MFA program circa 1990 was something of a living contradiction in terms. It's no coincidence, argues curator MARK GODFREY, that artists JACQUELINE HUMPHRIES, LAURA OWENS, AMY SILLMAN, and CHARLINE VON HEYL all got their starts as renegade practitioners of gestural abstraction in the poststudio atmosphere that prevailed a quarter century ago. Challenging their own educations as well as the gendered connotations of their chosen field, Humphries, Owens, Sillman, and von Heyl established resistant positions poised between authenticity and appropriation. Here, Godfrey looks at the commonalities that unite his subjects, proposing that an adroit "fakery" of gesture and a new engagement with composition, agency, intention, and other erstwhile taboos inform the practices of all four painters—and have made them central to the art of today.



Godfrey, Mark. "Statements of Intent: Mark Godfrey on the Art of Jacqueline Humphries, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman, and Charline von Heyl." *Artforum* 52, no. 9, May 2014, pp. 294–302, 344.

BAD EDUCATION

IN 1986, when she was a student in the famously theory-driven Whitney Independent Study Program, the artist Jacqueline Humphries presented a group of her abstract paintings to visiting professor Yvonne Rainer and received a silent shrug in response. The gesture, Humphries recalls, appeared to mean something like "Oh well—there's nothing I can do for someone like you." Humphries was taken aback to find Rainer at a loss for words, but from our vantage point the anecdote isn't so surprising: There were no words, at that time, with which an ISP faculty member might credibly discuss abstract painting. Or rather, there were plenty of words, but all their permutations seemed exhausted. Influential critics had recently dismantled the "return to painting" and had decried the late-1970s retrenchment of unreconstructed expressionism, while artists such as Sherrie Levine, who confronted modernist abstraction as a set of worn-out conventions, had found favor. [2] Between these poles—abdication of criticality on the one hand and proclamations of the medium's depletion on the other—there seemed to be no middle ground. So what *could* Rainer say when confronted by a student who was not treating abstraction with cool detachment, yet was intent on making work that was critically informed?

Fast-forward some twenty-eight years. Today, Humphries has taken her place as one of the most interesting figures in an increasingly celebrated generation of painters that also notably includes Laura Owens, Amy Sillman, and Charline von Heyl. But the words to describe these artists' endeavors still seem to be missing. All four have had key shows in the past year, and seem to garner more institutional support by the month (all are in this year's Whitney Biennial). At a moment that gives every indication of marking a turning point in these artists' receptions, it seems appropriate, if not crucial, to determine what commonalities—not only with respect to concrete matters of paint handling and composition but also in relation to history, to gender, to technology—have placed these artists at the forefront of contemporary painting, and to attend to their own words, their extensive interviews and statements, when doing so.

Any such account must begin by emphasizing the fact that the artists *all* faced Rainer's shrug, so to speak—that is, they came of age in an environment in which their interests in abstract painting were discouraged. The resistance they faced turned out to be productive, something worth considering when we think of younger painters emerging from the anything-goes art school context today. "At the time of my early encounters with the medium," Humphries recalls, "to paint at all denoted artistic failure. So painting's status as the disavowed underside of artmaking gave it fresh meaning—it was almost a kind of rogue practice."[3] Sillman, who studied painting at the School of Visual Arts in New York not long before Humphries's ISP stint, has also spoken about this context, highlighting the extent to which it was inflected by gender expectations: "AbEx painting was not the expectation for a female art student in the 1970s. . . . There is a certain 'transgressive' goal in trying to exploit a collapsed and forbidden terrain in order to open it up, de-mythologize, exploit and change it for new people's use. At that time it was basically like trespassing."[4] Von Heyl now works in New York and Marfa, Texas, but she spent her formative years in the Rhineland, and, as she recalls, "abstraction was absolutely nonexistent in my immediate surroundings in Germany in the '80s. The positions that I was confronted with were Sigmar Polke, Jörg Immendorff, Martin Kippenberger, and Albert Oehlen's. It was a heavily male, very jokey, and ironic stance toward painting. Anarchistic and also quite arrogant."[5]

Owens started out slightly later, studying at CalArts in the mid-'90s, but the atmosphere was hardly more wel-

These artists, in their different ways, have departed from the authentic gesture of midcentury painting *and* the emptied postmodern gesture. Instead, their canvases are populated by the uncertain, fake, or unlocatable.

Below: **Amy Sillman, *Thirteen Possible Futures: Cartoon for a Painting*, 2012**, digital animation, 5 minutes 9 seconds.

Opposite page: **Jacqueline Humphries, *Untitled*, 2011**, oil on linen, 90 x 96".

Godfrey, Mark. "Statements of Intent: Mark Godfrey on the Art of Jacqueline Humphries, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman, and Charline von Heyl." *Artforum* 52, no. 9, May 2014, pp. 294–302, 344.

coming. Students had to wade through the critical literature about painting before setting off on their paths, as if their instructors hoped to dissuade them from actually picking up a brush.[6] Yet thanks in part to David Reed, who was a visiting professor during Owens's student years, Owens did have access to a history of '70s painting that included Mary Heilmann and Joan Snyder. In the early '90s, there was nothing for Owens to read about the links between this work and feminism (later, Helen Molesworth's essay "Painting with Ambivalence," in the catalogue for the 2007 exhibition "WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution," would elucidate these connections[7]), but at least she could glean a sense of a possible relationship between feminism and abstraction. Save for Sherrie Levine's comments about her strategy of showing "the uneasy death of modernism,"[8] largely associated with a canon of male protagonists, no such resource was available to the other three.

APPLYING PAINT

EMERGING WITHIN THESE DIFFERENT CONTEXTS, each of these painters would be highly conscious of the heroic and gendered associations of the AbEx and Informel brushstroke, though they also recognized that generations of artists before them, from Robert Rauschenberg and Roy Lichtenstein to Polke, had deflated these gestures. They would also have taken note of postmodern parodies and appropriations of certain kinds of brushstrokes. But they understood that to base a practice on mapping abstraction's failures or exposing styles of paint application as empty conventions was no longer valid. Sillman has noted in these pages that such critiques are themselves a lazy cliché: "[AbEx's] detractors would have it that the whole kit and caboodle is nothing but bad politics steel-welded around a chassis of machismo—that the paint stroke, the very use of the arm, is equivalent to a phallic spurt."[9]

Intent on transferring the liquid matter of paint to canvas, the four artists developed a variety of responses to these fraught circumstances. Sillman's strategy has been to deploy this gestural mode, but in such a way as to indicate a kind of hesitancy about its use. Each of her strokes reveals itself not as the final masterful decision but as just one more application on a surface already covered with other strokes, which you can see behind to the last one. In addition to layering strata of pigment in paintings such as *S*, 2007, she complicates the distinctions between brushed areas of color and the drawn lines that outline forms or describe vectors, creating a sense of uncertainty as to the identity of each.

Humphries also confronts AbEx tropes, recognizing that quotation and parody are not the only ways of playing with preconceptions. In an untitled painting from 2011, a slathering of pink pigment, dripping toward the work's bottom edge, evokes such tropes, but Humphries's

Godfrey, Mark. "Statements of Intent: Mark Godfrey on the Art of Jacqueline Humphries, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman, and Charline von Heyl." *Artforum* 52, no. 9, May 2014, pp. 294–302, 344.

Above: **Charline von Heyl, *It's Vot's Behind Me That I Am (Krazy Kat)*, 2010,** acrylic and oil on linen and canvas, 82 x 72".

Below: **Charline von Heyl, *Dusty Dafni*, 2011,** acrylic on linen, 82 x 72".

treatment of this quintessential AbEx mark goes far beyond allusion. "A drip, formerly a symbol of feckless artistic abandon, becomes for me a primary structuring agent," she says. "To enact a gestural mark, I must locate myself in the gap between its form and its received meaning."[10] In *41/14*, 2014, in the Whitney Biennial, drips that we assume were the product of unintentional runoff are in fact highly constructed, resulting from the buildup of dry paint rather than the movement of liquid paint: fake drips.

In von Heyl's work, too, what appears to be a drip or a quickly made stroke is, as often as not, something else altogether. For instance, in *It's Vot's Behind Me That I Am (Krazy Kat)*, 2010, a line of drips changes color, indicating that half of them are "painted" drips rather than trails of paint. And von Heyl hunts down modes of paint handling that are even more problematic than the AbEx stroke, often looking back to artists whom she calls "second rate" and who have fallen utterly out of favor. She might emulate the thin lines in Bernard Buffet's portraits (her *Bois-Tu de la Bier?*, 2012) or the thick black lines in Celestino Piatti's illustrations (her *Big Zipper*, 2011) or the "heavy-duty, existential oil painting"[11] of Georges Rouault (*Igitur*, 2008). Sometimes she will appear to have faithfully replicated such marks, but "when you get close, you realize that the surface is not keeping that promise; it's almost like a betrayal."[12] She remarks, "I never saw myself as appropriating styles. I'm using different effects and procedures, and different materials."[13] Nor does she wish to critique the idea of the unitary author by avoiding the development of a signature style. The idea, for her, is to ask in what ways these absolutely "forbidden" methods might be useful now, stripped of the rhetoric that once surrounded them. Von Heyl also seeks to make marks that look as if they've been mechanically printed—she may fake the appearance of the ink smudge (*Dusty Dafni*, 2011), say, or the engraved line. These notions of paint application as faking, even betrayal, are important, as is the distinction from quotation or parody: We feel confused by an act of faking, but sure of ourselves with an act of quotation. Von Heyl, moreover, has proposed a position of falseness as the beginning of a new kind of sincerity. "At the core of my being in the world, and my being an artist, is this feeling of falseness, which feels paradoxically like the one truly existential sense of self left, or possible. And it is this paradoxical twist that gives me a new lease on pathos."[14]

Owens's approach to applying paint is perhaps best illustrated by her experiments with impasto in "Pavement Karaoke," 2012, a series of seven paintings, and in the twelve works made in 2013 for her space, 356 S. Mission Rd., in LA. In these works, impasto, that erstwhile calling card of impassioned expressionism, does not carry the meanings it did in the '50s. The thick strokes of whipped-up Day-Glo paint are confined within crisply outlined, bulbous shapes that, one quickly concludes, must be digitally generated. In fact, the forms are created by a painting program that allows the user to select a curved line from a menu and elaborate it into perfect squiggles and equally perfect erasures; Owens projects such figures onto canvas and fills them in with impasto. The impression of fakeness is amplified by the illusionistic drop shadows she paints in to accompany the real shadows cast by the physical crests. Discussing these works in these pages, Owens has said that she wanted "to emphatically try to inhabit the gesture."[15] But she went on to ask, "Is it even possible for a woman artist to be the one who marks?" She sees her recent paintings not only as subjecting gesture to forms of mediation but also as posing a radical question: If painterly gestures have long been understood in relation to the male orgasm, and if "the female orgasm has no use [in terms of reproduction], no mark, no locatability," is it possible to conceive of the female orgasm as a "model for a new gesture"—one that is both hard to locate spatially and not identifiable as assignable to a particular author?

All four of these painters, then, in their different ways, have departed from the authentic gesture of midcentury *and* the emptied postmodern gesture. Instead, their canvases are populated by uncertain, fake,

Godfrey, Mark. "Statements of Intent: Mark Godfrey on the Art of Jacqueline Humphries, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman, and Charline von Heyl." *Artforum* 52, no. 9, May 2014, pp. 294–302, 344.

View of "12 Paintings by Laura Owens," 2013, 356 S. Mission Rd., Los Angeles. All: *Untitled*, 2013. Photo: Joshua White.

Humphries, Owens, Sillman, and von Heyl all describe the procedure of beginning a work as a confrontation—they speak of being in front of a blank canvas, of facing the vertiginous uncertainty of just starting off.

or unlocatable gestures. And where we do find "real" drips or passages of firm brushwork, we find it impossible to read them as we once did. Meaning is thrown back onto the viewer as the artists' own subjective investments in their decisions around paint handling become indeterminate and unknowable.

COMPOSITION

THE VERY IDEA OF COMPOSITION is as beleaguered as the brushstroke. In a recent statement summarizing his career-long theorization of this subject, Yve-Alain Bois contrasted the fundamentally arbitrary gesture of the traditional composing author—"the expressionist route taken by Kandinsky"[16]—with Mondrian's rigorous approach to composition, where "a painting is understood as a highly balanced assembly of diverse elements unified through the action of an extremely complex system of thought."[17] It is, however, noncomposition, as Bois has shown, that is the defining rubric of modernism. Noncompositional responses to expressionist composition have played out in each generation over the twentieth century, generating modernism's signal strategies: the grid, the monochrome, the allover, the indexical transfer, the deductive structure, and various chance procedures such as the abdication to nature or gravity in process art.

The four painters under discussion here share a nuanced skepticism of the "expressionist route," and they do not work in strict sequence, with one composition generating a formal problem to be tackled in the next, in the manner of Mondrian. Most important, and against the tide of recent critically sanctioned abstraction, they complicate and even eschew noncomposition, developing ways of composing that are organic, unpredictable, and contingent. Such terms would seem the very definition of one strain of noncomposition—the organic, unpredictable, and contingent province of chance—but these painters show that one can productively mine both the subjective gesture and the contingent event, and need not make a false choice between the two. To them, many artists engaging noncomposition today can appear problematically proud, as if congratulating themselves on how each decision about color, canvas shape, amount of pigment, and so on is subject either to some preconceived system or to some aleatoric operation. The four probably recognize that noncompositional strategies have always involved initial personal, though underacknowledged, decisions on the part of artists; but there are more serious reasons for their departure from noncomposition. They realize that it has historically been (and to an extent

Godfrey, Mark. "Statements of Intent: Mark Godfrey on the Art of Jacqueline Humphries, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman, and Charline von Heyl." *Artforum* 52, no. 9, May 2014, pp. 294–302, 344.

Laura Owens, *Untitled* (detail), 2012, acrylic, Flashe paint, oil, resin, collage, and pumice on canvas, 108 x 84 x 1¾".

still is) the privilege of white male artists to do away with their subjectivity (even if, of course, many artists have specifically used noncomposition to combat the hegemony of the bourgeois, Western notion of the individual subject). When one does not fit that default position, there is rather more at stake in deciding whether or not to foreground the self in all its ineluctably political specificity.

There is another factor militating against noncomposition for these painters: They are working at a moment when technological changes are dramatically reconfiguring and arguably devastating the subject, when the "personal" is largely a function of how we self-advertise on social media, and when scanned fingerprints are about to replace PINS (our memories bypassed, our bodies finally become machines for buying). Adopting chance or systematic procedures associated with noncomposition could today be seen as replicating the manner in which complex algorithms present and predict information, a submission to the rule of technology. For Humphries, Owens, Sillman, and von Heyl, then, subjective compositional procedures have a contemporary urgency but are reinstated in new ways. The painter, though constantly making considered decisions during composition, is never quite transparent to herself and never, therefore, quite transparent to her viewer.

All four describe the procedure of beginning a work as a confrontation—they speak of being in front of a blank canvas, of facing the vertiginous uncertainty of just starting off. Once they begin, the process is one of constant accumulation and "violation,"[18] "compulsive undoing,"[19] "sabotage,"[20] transgression, and so on. They are all well aware that the notion of the painting as a "living thing" has previously been dismissed as an absurd, romantic cliché, but nevertheless say that they get to a point where the painting begins to appear to them as an entity that makes calls on them, that might irritate them, surprise them, confuse them. Von Heyl is clearest: "I don't want to make the painting, I want the painting to invent itself and surprise me."[21]

There is a term or idea that recurs in their accounts, and that is *unknowability*. Humphries says, "I have to destroy the painting I know to make the one I don't know yet."[22] Sillman has said, "Making paintings for me is liminal: not quite-known, coming-into-being, not-yet-seen, being-remembered."[23] Von Heyl phrases it thus: "I can get beyond [design] only in the

Charline von Heyl, *P.*, 2008, acrylic and crayon on linen, 82 x 74".

Jacqueline Humphries, *41/14*, 2014, oil on linen, 9' 6" x 10' 7".

Godfrey, Mark. "Statements of Intent: Mark Godfrey on the Art of Jacqueline Humphries, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman, and Charline von Heyl." *Artforum* 52, no. 9, May 2014, pp. 294–302, 344.

The painter, though constantly making considered decisions during composition, is never quite transparent to herself and never, therefore, quite transparent to her viewer.

Charline von Heyl, *Oread*, 2011, acrylic, oil, and oil stick on linen, 82 x 74".

unknown. . . . I can force myself into that concentrated mindspace that is just looking and goes beyond thinking."[24] Owens makes a similar point when she speaks of her refusal to "language"[25] her work—the word *language*, repurposed as a verb, referencing an exhaustive thinking-through of each decision, so that refusal to "language" is a kind of refusal to know, or to know too much.

Such invocations of unknowability could be caricatured as so many New Age bromides, but we would be wrong to characterize them in this way. For a start, the unknowable has a new premium in a culture that prides itself on being able to know everything via instant access (constitutional or not) to massive troves of information. The language of the unknowable also resonates with Eva Hesse's claim that she wanted to get to "what is yet not known."[26] This lineage raises the question of whether we can locate a feminist position in this approach to abstraction. Molesworth, for one, has already pushed for the term *unknowability* in a 2013 essay on Sillman: "For me, feminism is a critique of power and mastery, and most of all it's a warning about how the combination of mastery and power has, historically, led to violence. One result of this questioning of power is that unknowability emerges as a kind of virtue."[27] What seems astonishing, and what may be the generative paradox at the heart of these practices, is the fact that each painter harnesses unknowability as an essential part of making art, but at the same time brings to her practice a profound knowledge of how to make, and fake, marks on canvas, how to navigate the histories and associations of those marks and control what impact they might have on viewers.

To get a finer-grained sense of this dialectic of the known and unknown, a closer look at each artist's process is in order. Owens's process (at least in recent paintings) is slightly distinct, given that her work is begun on a computer, and that her methods involve silk-screening and require assistance and planning. Nevertheless, there are fundamental similarities between her approach and those of Humphries, Sillman, and von Heyl. For "Pavement Karaoke," her first decision was to spell the unlikely titular phrase across the canvases in areas of silk screen made from vintage newspaper classified ads. She added sections of gingham, painted grids, and tilted lattices; the computer-drawn, impasto-filled brushstrokes discussed above; painted-in shadows; and scatters of applied lava rocks. Strikingly, these components have no evident conceptual connection either to one another or to the idea of singing Pavement songs in a karaoke bar. This collision of elements might be viewed as hermetic and incoherent, but should be understood as a direct refusal of the pedagogy of CalArts, where artists were trained to explain and justify each step of each project. Owens willfully blasts her paintings with heterogeneous materials, processes,

Godfrey, Mark. "Statements of Intent: Mark Godfrey on the Art of Jacqueline Humphries, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman, and Charline von Heyl." *Artforum* 52, no. 9, May 2014, pp. 294–302, 344.

references, and textures, with no reverence toward the medium, confident that such amalgams will coalesce as dynamic works that could not have been planned in advance. "I really want paintings to be problems. . . . The painting is coming out at you and asking you to put these things together. . . . What interests me in painting is that it comes out into the room, almost punches you in the face."[28]

Von Heyl's ambition is "to create an image that has the iconic value of a sign but remains ambiguous in its meaning."[29] She has stated, "I want to get abstraction to a point where it screams that it is something: a representation and a thing."[30] To do this, the painting has to go beyond what she calls "design,"[31] a term that for her refers to the visually known world—not only designed objects but also products, websites, ads, etc. Design gives things recognizability, and the meaning of designed things relies on this recognition. It is what a painter will fall into when she knows what she is doing—so von Heyl says she inevitably finds herself designing, but that she strives to go beyond this. For her, abstraction, when successful, has the same reality and visual power as design, but will be more difficult than design and will not convey a meaning. She will borrow memorable and identifiable elements from visual culture—checkerboards (*Yellow Guitar*, 2010), harlequin patterns (*Blotto*, 2004), figurative shapes (*Skull*, 2012), frames (*Dumka*, 2007), sawtooth serrated edges and zigzag lines (*P.*, 2008)—but her aim is to exceed the easy interpretations they promise. Similarly, she uses the bold colors associated with product design in ways that make them unfamiliar: In *Oread*, 2011, for instance, a thin layer of fluorescent yellow is detached from a brash composition of bulbous black forms and circles beneath.

Humphries, for her part, aims to produce works that powerfully communicate a sense of being unfinished: "I start a painting by finishing it, then may proceed to unfinish it, make holes in it or undo it in various ways, as a kind of escape from that finitude."[32] Across another painting at the Whitney, *Untitled*, 2014, for instance, there are several small silver loops, and it's hard to tell if they're the result of scratches or strokes. Appearing as impromptu doodles, they feel like initial, rather than final, gestures, productively out of kilter with the scale of the painting. Humphries has for some time begun her compositions by painting frames, and these serve as structures against which to work: "The frame is a way of saying, 'this, here, now' then I break into that."[33] The frames also lead us to anticipate an all-over arrangement of marks within them, but often Humphries fractures the internal space, leaving prominent diagonal or vertical breaks which (as in *41/14*) can feel productively awkward. She seeks a final (if not necessarily finished) state in which figure-ground relationships have disintegrated. The idea of a place from which to feel a sense of authority as a viewer disintegrates, too, because it is impossible to orient oneself to any particular point or shape.[34] Whereas von Heyl, having taken a composition past the recognizability of design, stops when the painting asserts itself as a powerful image that has not existed before, Humphries ends in a place where the painting will not cohere and creates the experience of the unknown at every instance of looking at it.

These artists are not particularly preoccupied with the effects of techno-culture on the life of images. Instead, their concern is with the effect of technological shifts on *our lives*.

Left: **Jacqueline Humphries, *Untitled*, 2013**, oil on linen, 100 x 111".

Right: **Charline von Heyl, *Jakealoo*, 2012**, oil and acrylic on canvas, 82 x 74".

Godfrey, Mark. "Statements of Intent: Mark Godfrey on the Art of Jacqueline Humphries, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman, and Charline von Heyl." *Artforum* 52, no. 9, May 2014, pp. 294–302, 344.

Amy Sillman, *Clubfoot*, 2011, oil on canvas, 91 x 83⅛".

Above: **Amy Sillman, *Duel*, 2011,** oil on canvas, 90½ x 84¼".

Below: **Amy Sillman, *Thirteen Possible Futures: Cartoon for a Painting*, 2012,** digital animation, 5 minutes 9 seconds.

VIEWING BODIES

THIS BRINGS US TO THE QUESTION of what happens when we, as embodied subjects, view these paintings. It seems clear that these artists recognize the changing conditions of perception and subjectivity in the world of digital spectacle, and hold out against this regime's vitiation of corporeal experience. Humphries, Owens, Sillman, and von Heyl are not particularly preoccupied with the effects of techno-culture on the life of images, as, for example, Wade Guyton is, with his attention to the change in appearance and materiality of an image between computer screen, printout, and catalogue page. Their concern is with the effect of technological shifts on *our lives*. They recognize the way these shifts alter our sense of space and scale, our capacity for attention, our anxiety level as our iPhones keep us constantly at work. Acknowledging all this, they challenge us to look carefully and slowly, insisting on the works' physical presence and on the real differences among layers on the surface of canvas, and restoring to us a sense of our human scale as we encounter the paintings within real, not virtual, space.

Some years ago, thinking about the illumination of faces by the glow of computer screens, Humphries began to work with silver paint that she mixed herself, alongside deep, nonreflective, powdery black. Rather than emitting an even glow, as screens do, her surfaces absorb light and reflect it unevenly, while the borders between areas of absorption and reflection are scratchy and ill defined. The viewer is kept mobile by this optical instability and, as when Humphries is collapsing figure-ground distinctions, is unable to settle on a fixed position. The experience in front of Humphries's work can be like a dance,

Godfrey, Mark. "Statements of Intent: Mark Godfrey on the Art of Jacqueline Humphries, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman, and Charline von Heyl." *Artforum* 52, no. 9, May 2014, pp. 294–302, 344.

but the dancer is beset by uncertainty about where to be.[35] And this experience is complicated by the "false drips" and by the way Humphries works with layering and color. Flashes of color in paintings, such as *Untitled* at the Whitney, that are mainly covered in silver and black initially appear to constitute the works' top layer, but as we get closer we discern that the colored pigment is a prior layer.

Humphries is clear that her primary motivation is not to create uncertainty as a value in itself but to captivate a viewer just as screens do. Aware of screens' allure, she aims to offer an equally seductive but more complex experience: "I think a painter's first job is to get someone to look at a painting." She cites "a kind of theatricality which may even veer toward the melodramatic."[36] Such terms might also be used to characterize the experience of viewing von Heyl's work, which also teasingly defies presumptions about layering. One assumes instinctively that the yellow and white stripes in Orpheus,2008, lie behind the brown forms, but close up to the painting, you discover the stripes are in fact above, painted around. In *Jakealoo*, 2012, it seems clear that orange and red stripes have been laid down below a white expanse in the top right corner. Von Heyl painted two little black-framed windows in the white field as if to let us see through to this earlier layer, but when you get near, you see within the frame a third layer of yellow and red lying above the white. Unlike, say, the aleatory rips in Gerhard Richter's squeegee paintings, which offer glimpses of earlier layers of paint, von Heyl's sleight of hand is premeditated: "My paintings have weird shifts where you don't expect them. . . . It's not about mystifying anything; it's about lengthening the time of pleasure. Or torture."[37] She has also spoken of a "visual mindfuck."[38] It strikes me that what von Heyl does with layering acknowledges the supersmooth layering in computer screens but complicates it, insisting on the physical rather than the virtual, rewarding a different mode of attention that, as her language suggests, can be just as libidinal as digital visuality.

With their powerful frontality, the layers of Owens's paintings—grids, letters, strokes, all stacked parallel to the picture plane—might also remind us of the windows on computer screens. But her digital processes and references to the visual world of the screen serve only as tools in a larger project that insists on the importance of material surfaces seen in real space. Viewing her works means contrasting peaks of impasto and fake drop shadows; it means understanding that the real gaps between the paintings of "Pavement Karaoke"are part of the composition; it means spotting the frayed gingham beside slickly painted-on grids; and it means making decisions about whether to stand close enough to read the silk-screened texts or far enough away to see the whole work. It also means being assaulted by color so intense as to seem viscerally present.

In von Heyl's studio, it struck me that all the paintings, despite differences in composition, facture, and color, were about the same size. Her immediate explanation: The works were scaled to her reach. In making her largest paintings small enough to be worked on without ladders, von Heyl is close to Sillman and Humphries. The paintings' essentially anthropomorphic scale, a few feet high and an arm-stretch wide, reminds us of our own bodies as we view.[39] Owens's "Pavement Karaoke"canvases and the paintings that appeared in her 2013 exhibition at the Los Angeles venue 356 S. Mission Rd. are considerably larger. However, even these works do not lend themselves to white-cube hyperbole. At 356 S. Mission Rd. it was clear that the space, with its raw architecture, was a gathering spot as much as a site of display, and in addition to providing a necessary openness in contrast to the enclosure of screen culture, this sociable atmosphere made the paintings feel generous in scale rather than bombastic.

Humphries's and Owens's insistence on physical experience is echoed by Sillman's and von Heyl's insistence on the bodily within their imagery. Many of Sillman's most abstract paintings are derived from sketches of figures. In other works by the artist, the body is unmistakable even if only recognized in fragments—dislocated shoulders, drooping limbs, and so on, as seen for example in *Clubfoot*, 2011. In von Heyl's work, the body registers, but never in its totality as a coherent depiction. Marks in one painting might recall smears of blood or excrement; a handprint appears in another. Knowing that the history of Western painting has centered on the representation of skin, and that its depiction can act as a lure for a viewer, she detaches skin from the body and subjects it to strange travails—for instance in *Frenhoferin*, 2009, in which it looks as if skin is being pushed through a sieve.

Sillman is the only one of the four to actually make works for the screen. In a recent exhibition at Thomas Dane, London, pride of place was given to a heavily worked painting called *Duel*, 2011, dominated by a slit flanked by two drooping hands. Next to this she hung an iPad showing *Thirteen Possible Futures: Cartoon for a Painting*, 2012, an animation suggesting various directions the composition of *Duel* might go, were she to continue working on the painting. The animation gives clues to Sillman's own compositional processes: The slit becomes a curtain, then a wound, and later simply a line. Lines become limbs and hands become blobs; blocks of color squeeze to penis shapes and balls become breasts. Things excrete as they transform. It makes no sense to see abstraction and figuration as poles—like the male and female body parts, they are in a constant state of becoming each other. Memorable scenes convey attempts to probe sources: A man digs up the ground, a bunny blabs on an analyst's chair, a searchlight shines in the dark, but against the promise that stable origins could be discovered, there is a constant sense of morphing. Where Owens hints at the computer-drawn origins of her "brushstrokes" by making them so perfectly bulbous, Sillman manages to make the slick surface of an iPad appear like a canvas layered with translucent pigments. It's not just that we see things that touch and are touched: The glass of the iPad itself seems "scumbled," or "scratchy," or "buttery."[40] The way the compositions change in the animation implies no straightforward intentionality but suggests the artist submitting herself to the contingencies of humor, desire, and the pleasures of change. Yet at the same time, Sillman is surely reflecting on the conditions of her own practice. She has spoken about the way the juxtapositions of iPad and canvas undercut the idea of the painting as a finished entity. But the juxtaposition also destabilizes the authority of the screen and, with it, the credibility of the promises that screens seem to offer: to make life more efficient, to allow us to communicate better,and so on. Sillman's animations offer no such platitudes: Like the surface of the painting, already thickened with past ideas, the iPad animation keeps on going, refusing conclusions.

MARK GODFREY IS A CURATOR AT TATE MODERN IN LONDON.

Godfrey, Mark. "Statements of Intent: Mark Godfrey on the Art of Jacqueline Humphries, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman, and Charline von Heyl." *Artforum* 52, no. 9, May 2014, pp. 294–302, 344.

NOTES

1. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Figures of Authority, Ciphers of Regression: Notes on the Return of Representation in European Painting," and Douglas Crimp, "The End of Painting," *October*, no. 16 (Spring 1981): 39–68 and 69–86.

2. In his essay "Signs Taken for Wonders," Hal Foster wrote that Levine's "abstract paintings simulate modes of abstraction, as if to demonstrate that they are no longer critically reflexive or historically necessary forms with direct access to unconscious truths or a transcendental realm beyond the world—they are simply styles among others." *Art in America*, June 1986, 80–91, 139.

3. Jacqueline Humphries, "Statement," *Artforum*, Summer 2011, 351.

4. "Parts & Labour: Amy Sillman in Conversation with Matt Saunders," *Frieze*, September 2010, frieze.com/issue/article/parts-labour.

5. Shirley Kaneda, "Charline von Heyl," *Bomb*, Fall 2010, bombmagazine.org/article/3655/charline-von-heyl.

6. Owens's CalArts classmate Monique Prieto comments: "Rather than just bypassing the critical texts or letting them stop me dead in my tracks, I tried to take them in and glean any elements that might allow a poor fool like myself to carry on." "Thick and Thin: A Roundtable," *Artforum*, April 2003, 177.

7. Helen Molesworth, "Painting with Ambivalence," in *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Cornelia Butler, exh. cat. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 428–39.

8. Sherrie Levine, quoted in Elisabeth Sussman, "The Last Picture Show," in *Endgame: Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture*, ed. Elisabeth Sussman, exh. cat.(Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 61.

9. Amy Sillman, "AbEx and Disco Balls: In Defense of Abstract Expressionism II," *Artforum*, Summer 2011, 321.

10. Humphries, "Statement," 351.

11. Kaneda, "Charline von Heyl."

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. "Kaja Silverman and Charline von Heyl," in *Charline von Heyl*, ed. Jenelle Porter, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2011), unpaginated.

15. "Optical Drive: Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer Talks to Laura Owens," *Artforum*, March 2013, 236.

16. Yve-Alain Bois, "Abstraction 1910–1925: Eight Statements," *October*, no. 143 (Winter 2013): 8.

17. Ibid., 8.

18. Kaneda, "Charline von Heyl."

19. Thomas Eggerer, "Meditations of the Split Self," in *Amy Sillman: One Lump or Two*, ed. Helen Molesworth, exh. cat. (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2013), 148.

20. John Kelsey, "Charline von Heyl Talks About Sabotage," *Artforum*, October 2008, 331.

21. Kaneda, "Charline von Heyl."

22. Cecily Brown, "Jacqueline Humphries," *Bomb*, Spring 2009, bombmagazine.org/article/3262/jacqueline-humphries.

23. Amy Sillman, "Process," in Painting: *The Implicit Horizon*, ed. Avigail Moss and Kerstin Stakemeier (Maastricht, the Netherlands: Jan van Eyck Academie, 2012), 102.

24. Kaneda, "Charline von Heyl."

25. Laura Owens in conversation with the author, January 2014.

26. Eva Hesse, "Statement" for "Art in Process IV," 1969, Finch College Museum of Art, New York.

27. Helen Molesworth, "Amy Sillman: Look, Touch, Embrace," in Molesworth, *Amy Sillman: One Lump or Two*, 52.

28. Stephen Berens and Jan Tumlir, "Still Lifing: Conversation with Laura Owens," *X-Tra*, December 2013, 92.

29. Kaneda, "Charline von Heyl."

30. Kelsey, "Charline von Heyl," 331.

31. Kaneda, "Charline von Heyl."

32. Paul Soto, "Painting in Silver and Noir: Q+A with Jacqueline Humphries," *Art in America*, April 30, 2012, artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/interviews/jacqueline-humphries-greene-naftali/.

33. Ibid.

34. Humphries has referred to this space as comparable to the space of film noir: "In film noir, the figure is completely collapsed into the picture. His face is often in shadow when he is speaking, and he is completely embedded in the atmosphere and light of the frame. [Paul] Schrader [in 'Notes on Film Noir'] says something else that is interesting, he says, 'No figure can speak authoritatively from within a space that is continually being cut into ribbons of light.' I feel this statement captures something that I am after in the paintings, of complete embeddedness, with a sense of the painting itself as figure, conterminously layered on top of and under the ground." Ibid.

35. Reviewing Humphries's 2006 exhibition, Johanna Burton wrote, "The viewer is strongly tempted to dance in front of paintings that seem to change according to one's viewpoint." *Artforum*, February 2007, 292.

36. Brown, "Jacqueline Humphries."

37. Kaneda, "Charline von Heyl."

38. Ibid.

39. This kind of bodily scale can be achieved without making work relating to our height and arm span. Tomma Abts's works are scaled to the human face and are perceived in this intimate way; of Ulrike Müller's paintings, Sillman herself writes, "Ulrike's paintings maintain a scale of provocatively intimate one-to-one body operations, or body-to-object operations, reminding the viewer of objects of desire that she touches daily." Amy Sillman, "This Place Which Is Not One," in *Ulrike Müller: Franza, Fever 103*, and Quilts, ed. Achim Hochdörfer and Barbara Schröder, exh. cat. (New York: Dancing Foxes Press, 2012), 68.

40. Matt Saunders uses these adjectives to describe Sillman's surfaces. Matt Saunders, "Amy Sillman," *Artforum*, March 2014, 282.

Caption acknowledgments

Pages 69–70: All works © Estate of Nancy Holt/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. **Pages 97–98:** All works by Marcel Broodthaers © Estate Marcel Broodthaers/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SABAM, Brussels. **Page 111:** Christof Kohlhöfer and Sigmar Polke's *Der ganze Körper fühlt sich leicht und möchte fliege . . .* (The Whole Body Feels Light and Wants to Fly . . .), 1969. © Christof Kohlhöfer; digital transfer by Dieter Schleicher. **Pages 111–112:** All works by Sigmar Polke © The Estate of Sigmar Polke/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, Germany. **Page 184:** Carl Andre, Foot Candle, 2002.© Carl Andre/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. **Page 187:** Page from Jasper Johns's *Foirades/Fizzles*, 1976. © Jasper Johns/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. **Page 188:** Andy Warhol, *Poster (Halston Advertising Campaign: Men's Wear)*, 1982. © The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. **Page 276:** Lygia Clark's proposition for *Ping-Pong*, 1966. Photo: Associação Cultural "O Mundo de Lygia Clark," Rio de Janeiro. **Page 314:** Fortunato Depero, *Sketch of Pavilion for the Davide Campari & C.*, 1933. © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SIAE, Rome.

Godfrey, Mark. "Statements of Intent: Mark Godfrey on the Art of Jacqueline Humphries, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman, and Charline von Heyl." *Artforum* 52, no. 9, May 2014, pp. 294–302, 344.

Art in America

Painting in Silver and Noir: Q+A With Jacqueline Humphries

By Paul Soto April 27, 2012 12:10pm

Over the course of a more than two decade-long career, Jacqueline Humphries has approached every canvas with the intent to mess it up. She sees its blank white form as the perfect *last painting*, and she's nowhere near her last. Lately, the artist has been covering and uncovering her canvases with lurid veils of paint in signature metallic, washing them out, scraping at them, smudging them, and then re-painting all over them again. The traces of these gestures resurrect various historicized tropes of abstraction-fields of expressionist marks are frequently layered upon chilly monochromes, representing the painting's version of personality shopping in its search to find itself.

Humphries, Jacqueline, and Paul Soto. "Painting in Silver and Noir: Q+A with Jacqueline Humphries." *Art in America*, April 27, 2012.

In the ten new works on view at New York's Greene Naftali [through April 28], the artist's cannibalization of painting's recent history is evident in layered compositions of dense atmosphere rendered primarily in silver and black. Humphries has taken to working especially in the corners and along the edges of the canvas, a departure from the central abstract figures pictured in her 2009 exhibition at the gallery. In one untitled painting (all works, 2012), a sea of black calligraphic strokes and vertical sponge smears are corralled by a blue swathe that encircles the image. In another, a mosaic of striped rectilinear planes crowd in to create a border within the painting. It is on the periphery that the artist interrupts the allover painting's continuum, directing viewers toward the irregular, sputtering movement of sight and the body.

A.i.A. visited Humphries in her studio recently to discuss her latest show.

PAUL SOTO Where do you start when you begin a painting?

JACQUELINE HUMPHRIES I'm continuing to work with the metallic paint that I've been involved with for some years now, where the light isn't in the painting, but remains outside it. I start a painting by finishing it, then may proceed to unfinish it, make holes in it or undo it in various ways, as a kind of escape from that finitude, or wiping down the canvas, getting at what is behind the painting, what is the real of the canvas and support. That's usually a way of building my conflict about painting into the very act. And I ask myself questions: does painting even have an interior? Is it all exterior? Can you enter it, or are you just up against a wall?

Jacqueline Humphries
Untitled, 2012 oil on canvas 90 x 96 inches

Jacqueline Humphries
Untitled, 2012 oil on canvas 90 x 96 inches

Humphries, Jacqueline, and Paul Soto. "Painting in Silver and Noir: Q+A with Jacqueline Humphries." *Art in America*, April 27, 2012.

Jacqueline Humphries installation at Greene Naftali.

SOTO The allover painting seems to be up against the corners and the borders you paint, which are like framing devices. Those devices seem to conceal and contain a painting, to wall it all in. Are the painting's nature and those devices in conflict?

HUMPHRIES I think so. The frame is a way of saying, "this, here, now" then I break into that, and introduce varying passages of speed or slowness. Often I find myself entering in through the corners as a way to violate the field. Huge portions of the paintings get removed and washed out over a number of sessions. Colors get lost and covered over and other portions are torn out. The whole ground, in the end, becomes this puzzled together yet semi-unified field of patches, with parts removed and absences, that bears traces of certain acts that had occurred, which are like clues.

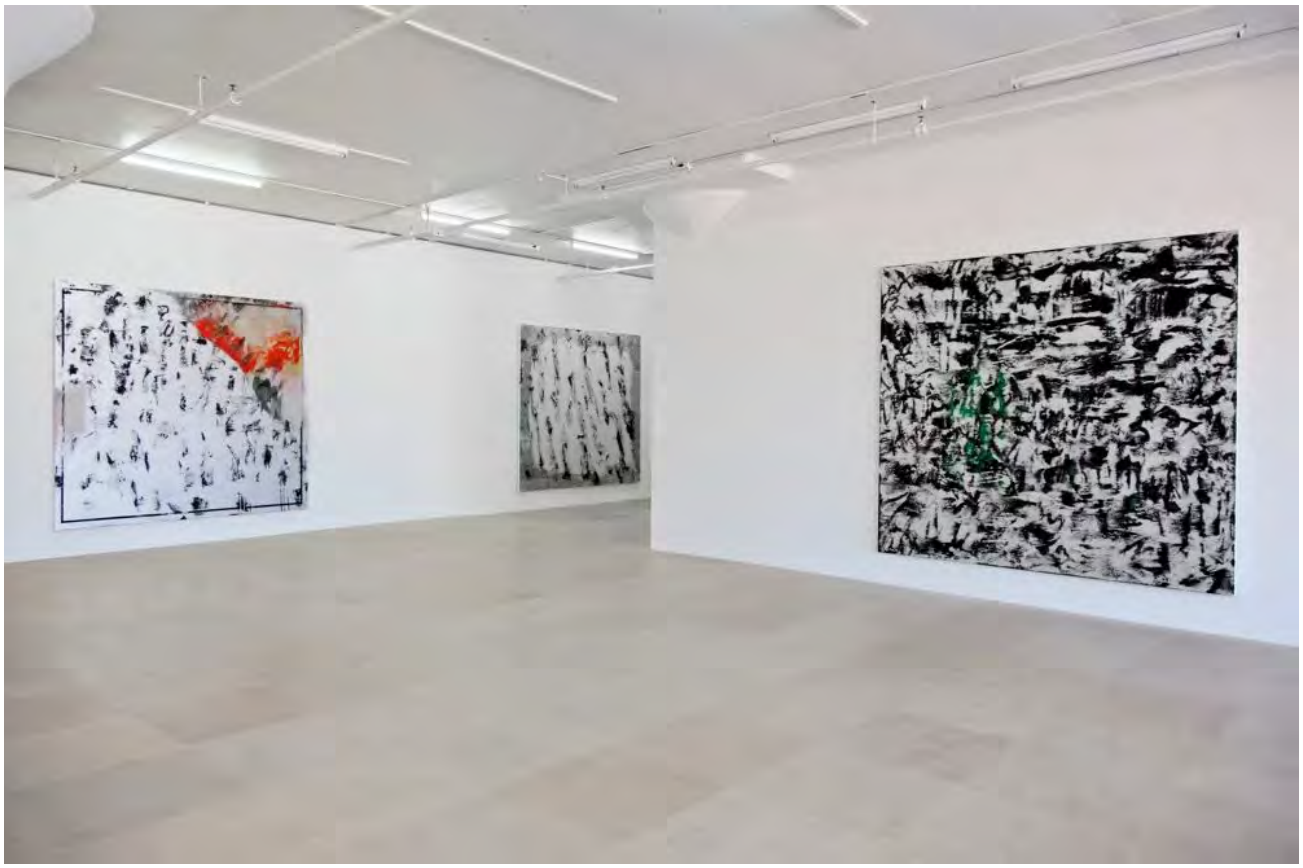
SOTO The idea of the clue captures the sense of mystery contained in their compositional brokenness. The press release mentions film noir as a specific influence on this body of work. How do the paintings reflect noir imagery?

HUMPHRIES I want to be clear that I'm not making the work "about" film noir per se, it's more discovering parity with something that is out there in the culture as a way of talking about the work. After I finished this work I found an essay by Paul Schrader's called "Notes on Film Noir"—I

believe it's from 2008. In one passage about the stylistics of film noir, he talks about how the character, or figure, in noir films, is unlike the figure in Western or gangster films, where you have a vertical figure against a horizontal background that he stands out from. In film noir, the figure is completely collapsed into the picture. His face is often in shadow when he is speaking, and he is completely embedded in the atmosphere and light of the frame. Schrader says something else that is interesting, he says, "No figure can speak authoritatively from within a space that is continually being cut into ribbons of light." I feel this statement captures something that I am after in the paintings, of complete embeddedness, with a sense of the painting itself as figure, conterminously layered on top of and under the ground. The ground is the figure, background is identical to figure.

SOTO How does your palette play into your approach to ground? Your use of color is restrained, and the metallic has a gradient effect in the light and is constantly shifting.

HUMPHRIES The black and silver themselves make for a very noir atmosphere. There's a kind of half-light quality to the metallic paint, and it changes, brightens and darkens with the light and as you move around it, it's very unstable. Color in these paintings has a very disruptive effect, almost seems to register on a separate plane than the black and silver, worrying the effect of unity. it's almost an unwanted element, a specter of another painting, formerly banished, insisting through a wall of metallic and black. I consciously avoid colors conspiring together to create any naturalistic



Jacqueline Humphries installation at Greene Naftali.

Humphries, Jacqueline, and Paul Soto. "Painting in Silver and Noir: Q+A with Jacqueline Humphries." *Art in America*, April 27, 2012.

Jacqueline Humphries installation at Greene Naftali.

feelings. I'm also a big fan of Michael Mann's films. Supposedly he goes around on the location set and actually paints things. He's violating the naturalism of the film image by painting it.

SOTO He's messing it up.

HUMPHRIES Unfinishing a work! [*Laughs*]

SOTO So the traditional hierarchy of seeing a painting, between figure and ground—and we're thinking about it metaphorically here, since we're talking about abstraction—is rejected, or violated, in favor of atmosphere, through the lens of noir?

HUMPHRIES It's rejected in favor of seeing just the world, where figure is everywhere, dissolved into field. I'm even uncomfortable talking about it in these terms, because it's immaterial, there is no figure obviously. But in any case film noir is a promotion of this certain way of seeing. It's significant that film noir developed at the same time as Abstract Expressionism. Knowing that, you can see the very noir qualities latent in Pollock for instance. It runs completely opposite to the rhetoric around Ab-Ex, the thematics of the heroic or the sublime. One can begin to sense real loss and a sense of disillusion in those works, things which are very blantantly expressed in film noir.

Humphries, Jacqueline, and Paul Soto. "Painting in Silver and Noir: Q+A with Jacqueline Humphries." *Art in America*, April 27, 2012.

Jacqueline Humphries
Untitled, 2012 oil on canvas 90 x 96 inches

SOTO There are portions near the corners of your paintings that look like they are on fire, resembling film that has been "caught in the gate" and has burned around an edge. You are employing the formal logic of film noir, based on multiple perspectives and compositional structures. Are you also referencing experimental abstract film here, like those of Stan Brakhage? That seems to be present.

HUMPHRIES Yeah, I think films of all sorts have been a most important influence on my work. Growing up in the '60s, I saw experimental film all around, and it was imprinted on me. Seeing a piece of film burning in a gate is a powerful statement about the ephemeral nature of visual culture, the fiction of it. It breaks the reality effect. The real and the reality become opposed.

SOTO That celluloid can burn away and, in the process, burn away entire worlds.

HUMPHRIES Yes, it's not material, but it is material. It's somewhere between materiality and mentality, a weird dimensionless plane floating between the mind and the world. The silver screen, which in itself is a very evocative thing. I think film embodies this order of nothingness yet totality. It's a nearly dimensionless piece of celluloid, yet it is capable of projecting a world.

Humphries, Jacqueline, and Paul Soto. "Painting in Silver and Noir: Q+A with Jacqueline Humphries." *Art in America*, April 27, 2012.

BOMB

INTERVIEW

Jacqueline Humphries by Cecily Brown

APRIL 1, 2009

Detail of an installation in *Ideal Auto Repairs* for Prospect.1, New Orleans, 2008. Courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali, New York.

It's a relatively limited *type* of adjective that clings to recent abstract painting: intricate, quiet, lyrical, seductive, mysterious, atmospheric. Aggressive doesn't much come to mind, much less assaultive; hence the fracture between Jacqueline Humphries and the archetypical 21st-century abstractionist. Paintings without content have taken on dubious connotations of overwrought interiority. Humphries's paintings—whether metallic, phosphorescent, or paradoxically not even there—do the opposite: they put *you* on the spot. Her silver paintings reflect glaring bursts of light back at the viewer, necessitating a multi-angled tour of the canvas in order to form a complete image of it. With strokes both gestural and hard-edged, the silver paintings are a heap of contradictions: they catcall only to become invisible; their spontaneity is policed by tape. Humphries's lightbox paintings are made with fluorescent paint on translucent fabric, set within a lightbox, and lit with a black light—sneering X-ray abstractions. These and her paintings on canvas lit by black lights coolly conjure the nocturnal energy of a sweaty danceclub. Recently back from an emotional trip to her hometown of New Orleans, where she showed paintings and—in her words—"non-paintings" in the Prospect.1 Biennial, Humphries is preparing for an April solo show at Greene Naftali. For this interview, Humphries had a series of conversations in her New York City studio with fellow painter Cecily Brown, whose brushstrokes edge toward figuration more than Humphries's do, but are equally strident and confrontational. Here the two discuss, among other things, whether an abstract-figurative dialectic remains relevant to painting, and how to channel something positive from the destruction of your birthplace.

—Nick Stillman

Cecily Brown
Let's talk about how your paintings discourage stationary viewing. They seem to want to be perceived from multiple points of view. The reflectivity of your silver paintings especially emphasizes the unfixed nature of things;

do you think of them as having one preferred point of view? Or does that change as our physical relationship to the painting changes?

Jacqueline Humphries
What fascinates me is how little I can control their behavior in new situations. An image will coalesce and then disintegrate, giving way to another reading that sort of comes out of the background. To me some parts of a painting appear as if you're looking down at them from an airplane window; others might evoke something that you're very close to which is out of focus, and maybe this is interlaced with forms that feel very distant, and crisper. The objective is to knit wildly varying perspectives into a unified space. Because of the way light reacts to the metallic paint, the paintings change as your physical relationship to them changes. I like the unstable situation that depends on the light and the viewer both moving around; the painting changes before your eyes. They're impossible to photograph—there's no "accurate" image.

CB
And that destabilization almost becomes the subject or content of the painting. Do you want uncertainty to be the content?

JH
I don't think the artist can determine the meaning of content. What I am trying to do is alter baseline conditions of viewing to anticipate a new kind of viewing, to establish a site for "content" or experience. In a way, the paintings resist meaning.

CB
I wouldn't want to pin it down that much, either. The more I look at your paintings, it seems like space and light are your subjects.

JH
Yeah, well if you're painting anything, you're painting air to some extent. It's not so much that I'm driving at uncertainty as content as much as I want to captivate and entertain a viewer. I think a painter's first job is to get someone to look at a painting. Perhaps it's about motion and light. Having a heightened sense of the painting changing in front of your eyes gives it an almost cinematic quality—light moves across the surface and makes new images before your eyes.

CB
In a way, that's what painting has always done. A painting shifts and changes as one moves backward and forward; it has from Velásquez to Pollock. If destabilization isn't your content, it's at least something that's always present.

JH
Yes, it is always present; that's what makes painting so fascinating, that it's fixed yet in motion. I read *you* say that somewhere. With the silver paintings, the same part will one minute be bright, as if in light, the next dark, as if in shadow. This kind of image behavior is proper to cinema. Any painting looks different on separate viewings, and it forms a kind of composite in your mind: "Today the painting did this, yesterday it did that." Paintings do behave this way, or rather people do, so I attempted to heighten this sense of mutability.

CB
It's more like a living thing.

JH
Or something that gives the illusion of being alive. This comes with its own risks: a painting can look really bad

sometimes, which I'm willing to accept for the possibility that it's going to look good at other times. Under normal conditions of viewing, some things are going to excite you and then maybe later the same thing won't. It's a very human thing to see a person today and like them; they attract you, but next time maybe they don't. So you could say that consciousness is built into the actual viewing situation as an aspect of its subject matter.

CB

It's almost like allowing the paintings to be fickle. I'm interested in your use of the word entertainment, by the way. It's very refreshing. It's not a word that artists use much—entertainment is usually seen as frivolous.

JH

I made a whole series of paintings about cinema screens, cinema space, so I've thought a lot about what movies do—how a whole crowd of people will walk into a room and sit in their seats and look at the screen and not confer with each other but devote their attention to the screen with the expectation of being entertained. But there's no protocol for making people look at paintings. I don't know if this happens to you, but I can get upset if I have a picture in the room and no one really looks at it. I know it's greedy and I shouldn't admit it. Does that happen to you?

CB

Oh, God, yes, it's awful! I think that's why I cling to figuration: it seems more likely that a figural work will get people's attention. It's a hook, especially in narrative painting, where people feel included in the action. I would think that when painting in a purely abstract way, if there is such a thing, there's a danger of not hooking the viewer in the same way. Viewers want to feel that they're part of the space of the painting. I think you pull that off; there's a generosity to the space, an almost baroque feeling.

JH

A complete refusal to depict "real things" forces me to seek other ways of getting you on the hook, of making you feel included in the image or addressed by it. What I'm after is a kind of psychological hook, as if there's almost suspense or a sense of something wrong. A kind of pictorial distortion. And I pull out those stops, the reflectivity and the disruption, to get across a pressure or urgency. There's a kind of theatricality which may even veer toward the melodramatic.

CB

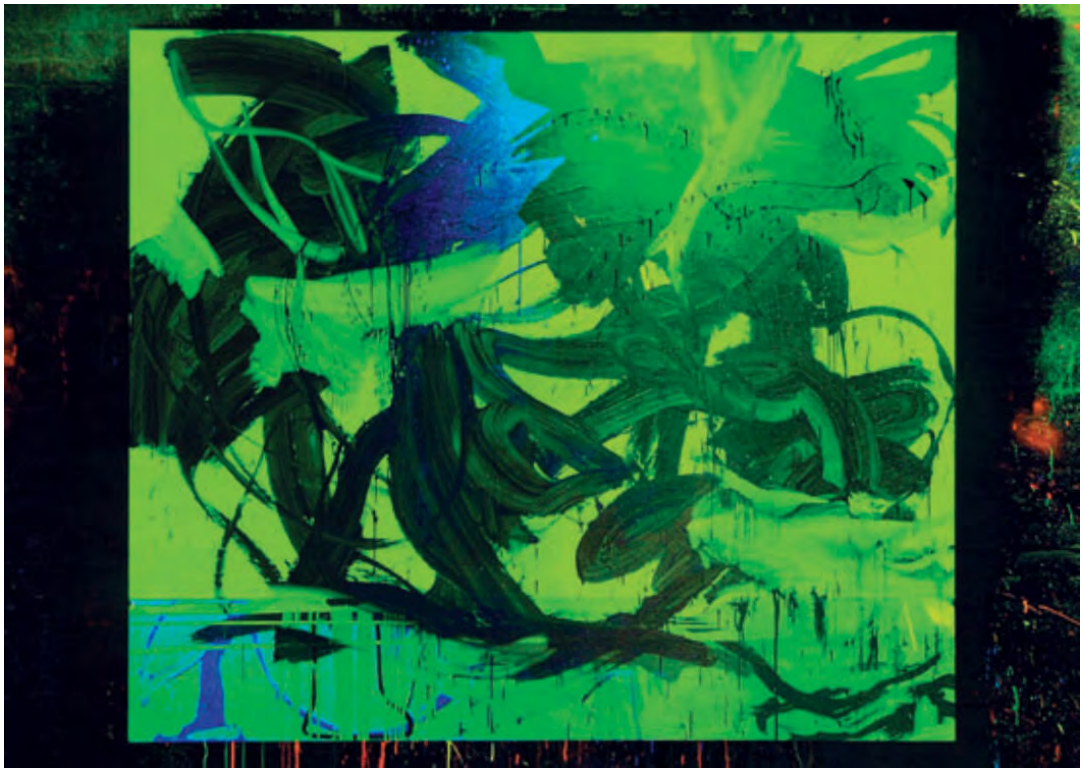
Disruption is an important part in thinking about the works you did in New Orleans for the Prospect.1 Biennial. You had regular three-dimensional paintings hung on the walls alongside paintings that were spray painted directly onto the walls. This must have given viewers a sense of dislocation. At a glance it looked like a room full of paintings, but as you got closer you realized some were not there in the same way. You managed to express your way of thinking about painting as a type of trace. The pieces that were directly on the walls were like shadows or ghosts of paintings.

JH

There's a play between the paintings and the non-paintings. I wanted to see if real paintings would behave differently in this space, an auto garage, than if they were simply in a white space with other paintings. I left a trace to point to an absence with the wall paintings. So there's something there as a way of saying there's nothing there. It's almost like the hyperpresence is the paintings themselves, the presence is the room itself, and the absence is those black paintings on the wall that give the sense of the reality of the environment having vanished.

CB

Exactly what happened in New Orleans—



Clockwork Lemon, 2005, oil and enamel on linen, 72 × 84 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Nyehaus, New York.

JH

Displacement and disappearance. Architecture, of course, is a very important register of the events that occurred. You go there and see how the architecture has been affected, and you think, These were homes, lives happened here. I wanted that context, which is why I chose a space with all the texture and ambiance of New Orleans; it's decayed, its paint is peeling, it's old, it's dirty, it's soggy, and baked. It's all those adjectives that characterize the look and feel of the city, before the hurricane and after.

CB

We talked recently about how your new paintings in Prospect.1 had started looking almost figurative. Being from New Orleans, you must have felt so … *ravaged*.

JH

Every now and then you see an image in the world that crystallizes so many things for you—a symbolic energy gathers there and says something not just about what it pictures, but about repercussions and implications on a much larger scale. This thing had a global impact.

CB

It showed how America neglects its own.

JH

Yeah, it was like a true image; it revealed something. And more particularly, things that I actually saw—a washing machine in a tree or an upside-down car on top of a house—lent an utter transparency to … something. Something that interests me: the feeling of uselessness and waste. So much was expressed just by what you saw on the streets. It gave me a lot of ideas about how I might go about structuring a painting. The crushed houses in the Lower 9th Ward looked very particular but also totally generic. When water pushes a house three blocks down the

street, the way the resulting debris sits is both generic and very specific. It doesn't have to be illustrated in order to be depicted or expressed. I was down there a few months after the storm and took a lot of photographs, none of which came close to expressing what it was really like.

CB

New Orleans is your childhood, your home. I wonder how this is going to affect you over time. It sounds kind of cold, but as a painter, you can take this and use it.

JH

Yeah, in the way that Goya channeled things that he saw and elaborated on them. We have to think about how what we do is open to the world. There was a readiness in Goya's imagination to receive these things. Similarly, when you grow up in New Orleans, people talk a lot about the big storm: "It's gonna come and the whole city's gonna flood and it won't exist anymore!" and it's like, Hahaha! Party on! I had become so used to the precariousness of the city. I never imagined that New Orleans would become this symbol of trauma and neglect … of cruelty, really. I had long thought of New Orleans as still being in a just-post-Civil War era, where all the tensions of Southern history remain, alongside a latent desire for release from those conditions. It always felt to me like a left-behind place. Then suddenly it was really left behind, right there on national television. So it is changed but you have to wonder how the situation could have been addressed differently to really benefit the city, both on a practical and a visionary level. Which also throws a light on the nature of the failure of politics. I mean, where is our Voltaire to put the proper spin on this? We're the city that care forgot.

CB

It seems like your installation dealt with it in a very eloquent way. It felt melancholic without being melodramatic. The ghost paintings where the bricks are showing through—it's a very clear way of talking about something that could have been sentimental.

JH

I wanted the installation to be for the people living there. And I actually thought to avoid melodrama in this situation in favor of stating something very soberly. I avoided doing anything in the 9th Ward because I felt like the damage and suffering is truly citywide without being publicized that way. Mid-city: the neighborhood in the heart of the city is basically abandoned, and I don't know how they're going to knit back any urban community with that population hole.

CB

Your next paintings will be the first body of work since making those. Do you feel that the experience is going to inform what you're up to next, or is it too soon to say?

JH

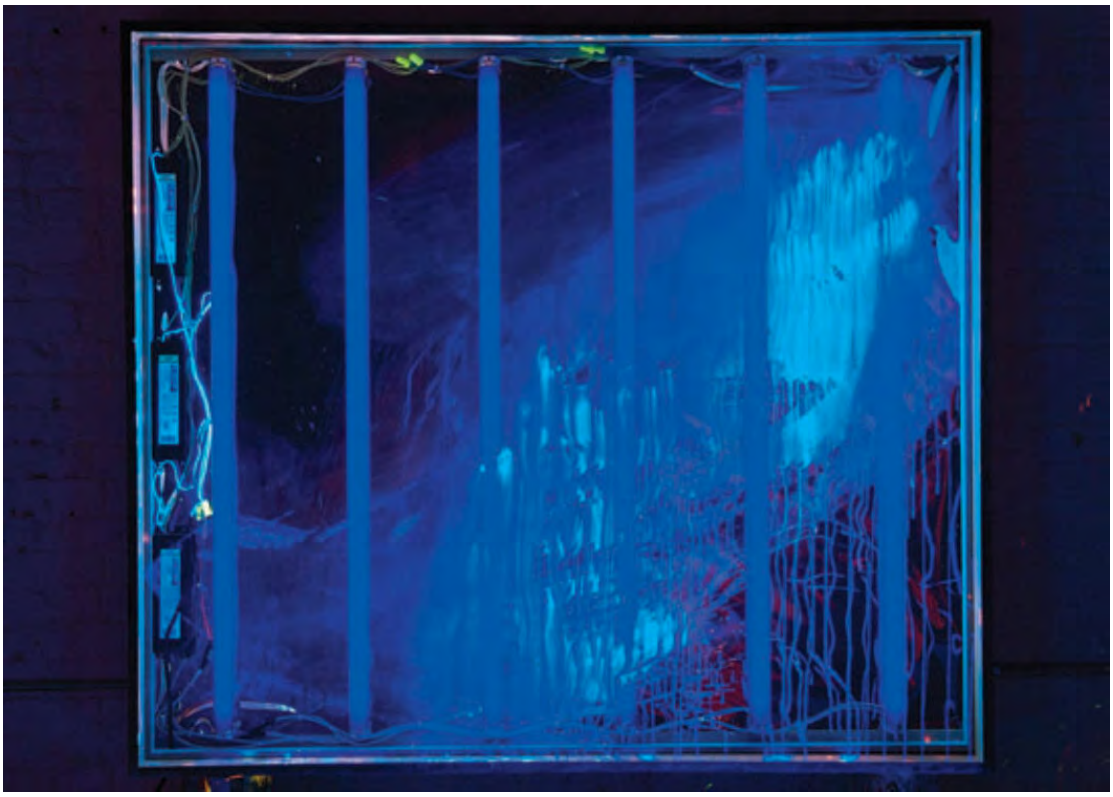
I've done that work; it's finished. I've said what I had to say about it, and it was nice to have had that opportunity at all. Things in the studio are going in a different direction now; I intend to have a bit of fun.

CB

I've said to you that I don't want to talk about myself because I think that's really vulgar, but we have to just slightly go into this abstract thing.

JH

But I want to talk about you, see?



Untitled, 2005, black lightbox, acrylic on fabric, 52×60 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Nyehaus, New York.

CB

I always get panicky when there isn't really a figure or a trace of a figure in a painting of mine. But your abstract paintings for New Orleans seem filled with content about loss and about destruction, and, to me, that's the magical thing. How do you get that without depicting anything, without referring to anything? Do you paint out the references?

JH

The referent is never there; there's no starting with something which I then paint out. I like to think you make a painting against the background of all other pictures, so the figures are there, offstage. My goal is always to paint a picture, not just an abstraction. It's a kind of situation where you're totally thrown back on yourself to conjure something, and confronting that situation of not knowing what the picture is going to be interests me maybe because it makes me so anxious. It's nice, what you said you got out of the New Orleans paintings. I always find this hard to put into words. It's a notion I have about what abstraction can do, which I attempt to answer differently with each body of work; that maybe you can augment the "real" effect without the intermediary of represented "things." For example, there are ways of expressing fullness and emptiness other than with objects. And what really compels me is the very palpable risk of failure, as if edging up to an abyss.

CB

I think it's almost impossible to not allude to something. I must say, "abstraction" is a term I personally find very frustrating and limiting.

JH

For painters I know, the dogmatic division between abstraction and figuration is no longer relevant, because maybe both camps are dealing with many of the same problems. Possibly one day people won't make the distinction between figurative and abstract painting.

Brown, Cecily, Jacqueline Humphries, and Nick Stillman. "Jacqueline Humphries by Cecily Brown." *BOMB*, April 1, 2009.

CB

I don't make the distinction. A painting ends up as it wants to end up. It's a combination of will, consciousness, and self-consciousness. You're the kind of painter you are; you can't help that any more than you can the sound of your own voice.

JH

I think painters identify certain things that nag at them, maybe beginning with their preceding generation.

CB

And the more you create your own history, the more you paint, the more there is to deal with, because you have to deal with what you last did as well.

JH

Right, and then maybe you're working away in your 21st-century way, and suddenly you're thinking about a 17th-century artist you never gave much notice to or didn't like and then you see this whole dimension opening up. I used to hate Caravaggio, and then one day I had an almost revelatory experience in front of his work in a church in Rome. I suddenly saw what he was doing—it was not an obvious thing. The forms on the canvas were making me see things that weren't actually painted there, yet I had the overwhelming feeling I was seeing what he wanted me to see. I felt like I'd seen a ghost. So the more you paint, the more it opens up what painters did in the past for you, which then gives you more insight into ways in which you can refigure what you're doing. Painters you love—the great ones, dead ones, usually—they're like lovers. You get so intimate with them, and it's thrilling and different with every one. But then you're spending all this time in the graveyard and eventually you have to get out of there. Painting always has been dead, but, in the same measure, so alive. It's the unlife.

CB

You paint in relation to the things that excite you, so inevitably the New York School was a starting point.

JH

There was a great deal of antagonism against Abstract Expressionism in the '80s, so that attracted me. I wasn't ready to be told what should engage me, but I didn't have a sack over my head either. I never went to the Cedar Bar; I wasn't bearing a torch. I was at Pyramid Club and Save The Robots every night. Engaging the New York School in the early '80s did not make you popular with anyone. You have to understand, I was in the Whitney Program and reading a lot of theory even before that. But I was terribly interested in what had been achieved by the New York School. How a Barnett Newman can be so agressive, and also inviting; the way a Pollock messes with your mind and body; the kind of direct address of a Guston. The way a de Kooning feels almost magnified and turned inside out.

CB

You said something about how you felt figuration had almost played itself out.

JH

I felt it had lost its historical grip, and that loss indicated something important about our time. Modernist painting for me as a young artist was the given, the ground in front of me, what I had to face and think about in order to paint. I felt that there were implications there which had to be addressed, not cynically but not naively either.

CB

You wrote to me recently, "Abstraction had carried on with painting and produced a different experience with it and I wanted to continue that work, take up that challenge, the legacy of all painting as inherited by abstraction."

JH

And then it soon became obvious to me that that was as much a dead end as figuration.

CB

Part of the deal of being a painter now is that the dead end is yet another thing you're dealing with, you know?

JH

Right, because you must go on; you have no choice. I always thought it was historical narcissism to think that it's our age in which no more paintings can be made. Maybe painting is dead, but paintings must still be made. We are not the first generation to feel that we're post-art. You have to wonder about all those 19th-century painters painting scenes from antiquity—what did they think about their own time? Foucault talks about this extensively inThe Order of Things: this projected time of plenitude which is always past or future.

CB

How would you feel about being described as a modernist?

JH

Are you calling me names?

CB

A student called me that the other day, and I thought, Maybe it's my guilty secret.

Dirty Mind, 2008, oil on linen, 90 × 96 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali, New York.

Brown, Cecily, Jacqueline Humphries, and Nick Stillman. "Jacqueline Humphries by Cecily Brown." *BOMB*, April 1, 2009.

JH

But there's so much humor in your paintings, which is a way of putting your ass on the line. Postmodernism is supposed to be all about appropriation and cynicism; about adopting an attitude more suited to being intellectually advanced. But why not appropriate an attitude of seriousness, or even sincerity, whereby the distancing of cynicism is removed?

CB

I think one of the great things about working today is that there is more allowance for a diversity of approaches. I was actually reading about Mondrian and De Stijl and their rules: no diagonals! When van Doesburg put a diagonal in, Mondrian cut him off! I know similar things happened with the Surrealists. It must have been rather wonderful when it was all so deadly serious.

JH

The Mondrian example brings up this whole notion of freedom and latitude. Maybe in the end, painting is as much about constraint as about freedom, how constraint allows freedom … and transgression.

CB

I read your interview with Tony Oursler in your catalog for the Black Light Paintings show at Nyehaus in New York. These go back to your idea of making things entertaining. Doing lightbox and black-light paintings seemed to me like a genuine investigation, and that's one of the great luxuries of our time. It wasn't suddenly like you had to face a chorus of venom from purists.

JH

Black-light art is a cliché. I liked to think that I could redeem it somehow, make it fresh again. I thought, What happens when I put the whole painting in this machine? What if I just change the entire light conditions of the painting?

CB

You talk in the interview about all of the associations and cultural affinities of black light: psychedelic posters, spook houses, folk art, the use of black light in surveillance, jellyfish, invisible ink. You talk about the color as a lure, the seductive role of color, and again we go back to what we both agree is our primary job: to get people to stop and look. These luminous, fluorescent colors appear in nature as a kind of siren song. Did it seem sort of flat to return to regular old painting?

JH

Well, the silver metallic paint was estranged enough from conventional color, so there was a lot of continuity. It was nice to be able to turn the lights back on, too. It happens very subtly, but the silver reflects what's in front of it, so your presence registers in it when you're standing before it. That functions as a kind of subliminal lure. There is a physics to how the metallic reflects light that is completely different from conventional pigment. It picks up light in unpredictable ways, sometimes coming forward very aggressively, at other times going more dead gray and giving way for the color to advance. So, at times they look really gaudy and crass, and at other times quite sedate.

CB

Do you ever use spray paint on the canvases?

JH

I like it because it neutralizes the handmade quality of the gesture. At some point it occurred to me that it really wasn't my job to make the painting, but to destroy it. I have to destroy the painting I know to make the one I don't know yet. One thing I'd like to talk about is the idea of intentionality versus happenstance. I think you have to risk taking responsibility for accidents as much as for deliberate acts. Because who's to say what you really meant?

This whole thing of control is an illusion; we're not really in control of outcomes. I think most people accept that. What's harder to accept is that maybe we're not really in control of our actions, either.

CB

It doesn't feel exciting if it's too conscious. You don't want to feel like you're just plodding along, slapping paint down.

JH

Maybe it's not a *respectable* way to go about things. Certainly it puts the idea of an author's authority into question, but it's the only way I know how to go about painting.

CB

You're almost running a race against yourself while painting. The most desirable state for me is when you feel like you're just trying to keep up with yourself. Everything is intuitive or instinctive—you know exactly which color to reach for.

JH

Yeah, when it's practical and logical but from the seat of your pants. I like the notion of instinct more than intuition because you're dealing with a kind of impulsiveness—archaic and primitive knowledge.

CB

I can imagine this is what it's like when a writer is flowing; there's no groping for a word. All that time spent sitting there *staring*, agonizing, wondering what to do next … all that is preparation for when you're actually painting. I have all sorts of tricks for getting myself started, like just cleaning up one corner of the palette or putting out just one color. It can help to lower your expectations—not to go into it thinking, This will be a good painting. But rather to sort of creep up on it.

JH

I noticed watching the Olympics—the swimmers, of course, because that was the big thing this year—how they always get wet before they're going to swim; it's like they have to become one with the pool. I realized I have to be prepared to be dirty to be able to do anything worthwhile in the studio. I find that those preliminary painting activities are a similar sort of thing.

CB

Yeah, even putting on work pants as soon as you get in the door can affect the whole day. I could never be one of those painters with a team of assistants mixing up my paint and who just walks in, picks up the brush, and starts at it. Sometimes you can spend half an hour mixing up your colors and then find a total void. Not knowing what to do or how to start. Or you get interrupted. But it isn't always a waste because even if you're not physically painting you are still using the painting brain—any painting or studio activities use that part of the brain.

JH

None of this is really normal. It's all learned. But, in a sense, it is natural. The very substance of paint is a sort of abstract, formless thing that's very *other*, but physical and biological, too. It's very base.

CB

Yeah, one gets more and more informed and knowledgeable about moving the stuff around, so it's not like being an infant smearing shit, despite what some people think. Even when you're at your most unconscious or instinctive. That's why painting gets more exciting the longer you do it: it's an *informed* smearing of shit. (*laughter*)

Brown, Cecily, Jacqueline Humphries, and Nick Stillman. "Jacqueline Humphries by Cecily Brown." *BOMB*, April 1, 2009.

JH

Don't you think writers have trouble writing about painting? *What do we do with this thing called painting?* It's almost become its own category: there's art, and then there's painting. There doesn't seem to be any available way to effectively discuss or make sense of issues in painting, or even to make judgments about it, which is astounding, especially since there's been so much of it around lately. Note to self: reinvent the discourse of painting; try to get it done by Tuesday.

CB

Do you think reinventing the discourse is ultimately up to the artists?

JH

I think what painters have done in the past 20 years calls for a reinvention of the discourse. Certainly there is art writing which is attempting to do this. A sticking point seems to be the issue of form and how to discuss that. Like what does formal *mean*?

CB

Formal issues are the elephant in the room. A lot of students I talk to are so focused on content that they seem shocked if you say, "Have you tried putting a little more oil in your paint?" or "How about using a yellow ochre instead of lemon?" Outside circumstances may shift slightly, but in the end, painters are still concerned with the same handful of problems.

JH

Yes, but maybe painters are doing things *differently*. Like the precise way in which your paintings are truly figurative but approach concerns that are more properly in the domain of abstraction: certain ways of using paint, making forms, the way the image disperses and re-congeals, the respiratory quality of your forms and how they seem to expand and contract, the way movement occurs. I think there's something new happening there.

CB

I'd like to think so, because you want to feel like what you are doing could only be done*now*. It would be depressing to feel that you could have been making these at any time in the last 50 or 70 years. But at the same time, doesn't painting move on a slower timescale than other art? Are we juggling the same issues as Manet?

JH

I think every painter has to start from the very beginning.

CB

How does it avoid just being self-regarding?

JH

Or self-referential … do you know the answer? (*laughter*)

CB

No, although I think painting is the least elite of all the arts. It still irritates me when painting is accused of being the evil capitalist when everything else is just as expensive these days.

Cecily Brown is a painter who lives in New York and was born in London. In addition to several solo exhibitions at Gagosian Gallery, she has had exhibitions at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington DC, the Reina Sofía in Madrid, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

Brown, Cecily, Jacqueline Humphries, and Nick Stillman. "Jacqueline Humphries by Cecily Brown." *BOMB*, April 1, 2009.