

Diehl, Travis, "Jon Pestoni, David Kordansky Gallery," Critic's Pick, *Artforum.com*, April 10, 2015

ARTFORUM

Los Angeles

Jon Pestoni

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

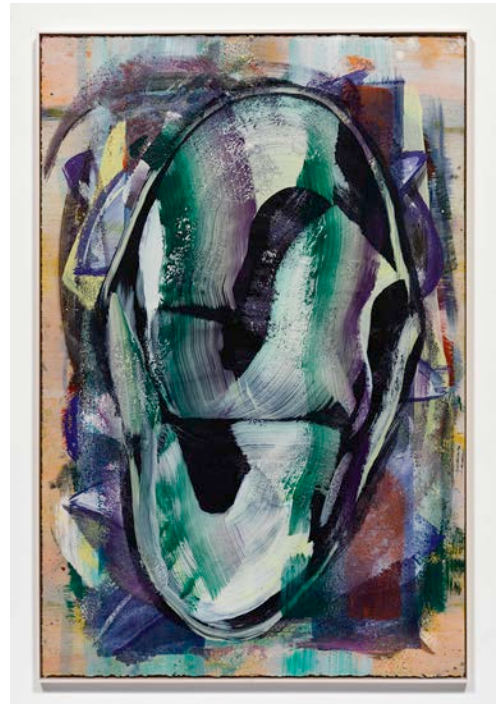
5130 West Edgewood Place

March 28–May 23

Lots of people make paintings these days; few are painters; rarer still are those who, like Jon Pestoni, are able to contort the suspicious self-evidence of their medium into something complex. His latest solo exhibition presents ten self-deprecating, layered works, each broad swath neurotically qualifying the last with technically virtuosic, singular style.

Pestoni has spent long enough in this nonfigurative territory that the gestural arcs, dry-brushed on top of colors already jostling to recede and pop, read as self-aware, increasingly inadequate redactions. Topcoats smeared with wide curls both efface what came beneath and paradoxically suggest figures. In the big canvas *Underbite* (all works 2015), the artist submerges outlines of teeth and gums in several layers of expressive slurry, as if to say that figuration still won't shut up. Equally wry is the way his successive almost wash-thin scribbles-out suggest a sense of depth—an optical feat immediately mocked by the cat litter that lends zones of his otherwise smooth paintings a kind of bargain texture. Throughout, melding with the dusty bold primaries of old Chevy trucks, are—not what are called acid hues, but—per the title of *Tums*—antacid. Tame, pastel mint, dirtied with yellow, finishes the twin calamari-like tori of *Untitled*.

Pestoni's advanced color maneuvers perform the anxiety of painting—which nonetheless overpaints a very real self-effacement. So what if every abstraction is a small battle with the self? Pestoni maintains that even when painting is a cruel joke, maybe art isn't.



Jon Pestoni, *Untitled*, 2015, oil and mixed media on paper, mounted on aluminum with frame, 48 3/4 x 32 1/2 x 1 1/4".

--Travis Diehl