

ATHENS

Alex Hubbard and Jon Pestoni

ELENI KORONEOU GALLERY

This was not the first time Alex Hubbard and Jon Pestoni have collaborated. In 2010 they paired up for a show at Shane Campbell Gallery in Chicago, and in 2012 they produced a conversation between a "man" (in the role of the interviewer) and a "horse" (in the role of a painter) for *Mousse* magazine on the occasion of Hubbard's exhibition at Galerie Eva Presenhuber in Zurich. In this colloquy they talk about painting's "hardware," and "particularly the recursive program known as Abstract Expressionism"—produced from "explosive formal innovations (qua Malabou's plasticity)," which the horse-painter retrofits with "the readymade sense of contemporary art equipment (qua Gilles Deleuze's stoic cybernetics)." They posit that an eager young dealer would spin the work by evasively positioning it as neither one thing nor another. This slipperiness is heightened in the jointly produced text by the fact that we aren't made aware of which character—man or horse—

View of "Alex Hubbard and Jon Pestoni," 2014. Left: Alex Hubbard, *Untitled*, 2014. Right: Jon Pestoni, *Split Beaver*, 2014.



represents Pestoni and which represents Hubbard. The two artists seem to be speaking with one, albeit split, voice: a convergence also mirrored in their latest joint exhibition.

Presented in a neat, white-cube space in which each artist was given half the gallery, this show was a dynamic pairing of two very different styles. Hubbard's brilliantly colored canvases (all 2014), ranging from bright yellows, oranges, and purples to turquoises and deep lilacs, embody a minimal kind of expressive abstraction that bridges rough-shod strokes with softly stained lines evocative of Color Field painting via choice blocks of thick, shiny, colored urethane that highlight the weave of unprimed canvas. In the case of Pestoni, canvases are worked on laboriously until underlying images are covered with layers and layers of paint that dissipate into what seems to be sprays of color produced by globules created from the texturing of the canvas with such materials as cold wax and cat litter. Both artists pay homage to the history of their medium while playing with its freighted legacy. Pestoni's texturing of the surface recalls the work of Antoni Tàpies or Jean Dubuffet; Hubbard draws from an entirely different set of references. His measured treatment of line—furious strokes tempered at times by soft, luminous marks stained into unprimed canvas à la Morris Louis—brings to mind a kind of melting and pulling apart of Mondrian's beloved grid. Layering is presented as both a bodily act and a conceptual one, in which the artist is positioned as a mediator of languages and historical tropes that are somehow embedded into the legacy of the medium.

In this, the two artists meet in their struggle to transcend the horror vacui of the canvas so as to extract pure, reflexive potency. In Pestoni's *With Teeth*, 2014, for instance, layers of color have been muted by a dominating wash of midnight blue-black that borders the edges of the canvas while manic strips of blue, yellow, pink, and white cut through the center of the frame. The effect is one of heaving—colors at once float into and sink out of the currents of oil paint and matter, a movement that presents itself in Hubbard's work via an effect akin to a light scanning over a prism and projecting hues on a surface, a result of Hubbard's effective use of urethane so as to produce reflective pools that at times cover, conceal, or illuminate existing strokes. Both approaches demand the sustained attention that activates the sensual experience of color, texture, and illusory depth through a treatment of the canvas as a modulating space.

—Stephanie Bailey