

Greenbaum, Joanne, "Jon Pestoni," *BOMB*, Winter 2013

# *BOMB*



Jon Pestoni, *Avenue PM*, 2013, oil on canvas, 67 x 60 inches. Photo by Fredrik Nilsen. Images courtesy of the artist and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA, unless otherwise noted.

How do I write on another painter without the jargon or obscure art-speak? I have no idea. I went to see the work of Jon Pestoni at Real Fine Arts in Williamsburg anyway, and looked at his work online. The work poses more questions than it answers. Should I talk about process, history, modernism, postmodernism, the market, or just a person in his studio making stuff? How does anyone know what goes on inside the artist's head, and what their inner dialogue is, if there is any at all?

There is nothing wrong with trying out different modes of working with abstraction. And who is to say what one should or shouldn't do in the studio? Pestoni's earlier work seemed at first elegant, pretty, dumb almost. You could see it over a couch, because of its human-scaled size—kind of non-threatening. The newer work takes more chances; it's rougher and worse, in a way, but then better because of that. Stop learning to paint, stop composing, and then there is something.

Pestoni layers different actions on top of each other to create a harmony, or a two-dimensional three-dimensional space. How far back do these go? How many layers are there? That number seems infinite, but you can't go on forever—at some point you stop, and then you get a fleeting glimpse of something.

There is no figuration here, and no grid either, just the arm moving up and down, creating a forest. The work keeps bugging me because it is so hard to sum up. It doesn't scream out at me, drawing attention to itself.

Greenbaum, Joanne, "Jon Pestoni," *BOMB*, Winter 2013

The act of painting is an act of faith. You go in blind (one hopes), and then something emerges that's not literal at all—it doesn't reference the landscape, or nature, or the figure. You want to make something unnameable and real.

What's so fleeting about Pestoni's painting? Why can't I pin it down to a mode, a trope? Is he revisiting modernism, color field, 1970s' abstraction, or is it something else? I look for structure. I see it buried underneath, and then covered up with the edges of what is behind, peeking through. It's lovely to see this—a tease.

It feels as though the artist is pushing through, getting rid of the earlier elegant work to arrive at something grittier and also more innocent. Lately there has been talk about tired tropes, bad-boy painting, tons of phony minimalism redone over and over again. We see it all over the galleries. I think Pestoni is trying to get rid of that. His work feels genderless; it reduces painting to the action of it, which is itself a cliché.

When I was a student, the thing was to find a style, stick to it, develop slowly, and change gradually—only then would the work be good. This is modern art's cliché, the arc of cubism to abstraction. But that may have become obsolete. Instead of thinking that you have to progress or move forward, maybe now the idea is to move backward.



*Body Building*, 2013, oil and mixed media on wood, 72 x 48 inches. Courtesy the artist and Real Fine Arts, Brooklyn, NY.

Greenbaum, Joanne, "Jon Pestoni," *BOMB*, Winter 2013



*Cornered*, 2012, oil on canvas, 67 x 60 inches. Photo by Fredrik Nilsen.

Greenbaum, Joanne, "Jon Pestoni," *BOMB*, Winter 2013



*Locked Out*, 2012, oil on canvas, 92 x 78 x 1 ½ inches. Photo by Fredrik Nilson.

**Joanne Greenbaum is a New York-based painter.**