



## JOHN ARMLEDER SH/ASH/LASH/SPLASH

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY,  
LOS ANGELES  
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BY DAVID RHODES

John Armleder's second exhibition at David Kordansky is an enveloping experience, and whilst it is true to say that questions are asked of painting's art historical legacy, the effects of chance and playfulness guarantee an altogether immediate, and pleasurable, involvement for the viewer. Within this context both provocation and sensuality plentifully coexist. Armleder is another child of Fluxus, a movement that during critical theory's energetic denial of painting, actually enabled artists to find other approaches and methodologies open to life and politics. In Armleder's words, Fluxus in its openness and irreverence was "providing a platform for people to see things in a different way." Armleder had met key figures of Fluxus—John Cage and George Maciunas—in Geneva in the early 1970s and organized exhibitions with them. Though involved in performance and installation Armleder didn't abandon painting conceptually and sought to further use painting's capacity for visual rapture. Bernard Frize is another good example of an artist influenced by Fluxus who remained committed to painting. Armleder conflates the tropes of modernism with post-modernism into a constantly evolving flow of self-effacing—chance and humor defeat self-serious subjectivity—playful inclusiveness. This inclusiveness clearly resonates in our once again reactionary xenophobic times.

In this current exhibition the stand-alone pieces fit together as an interrelating installation. The motif for the exhibition is a giant, black cartoon splash of paint (*Spla)SH* (2019), carefully rendered across a gallery wall. This graphic representation of painterly incident clashes not only with several process-based paintings here but also a sculptural object, *Ash* (2019) that combines notions of change and movement, process and reflection, in the form of shattered mirrored glass and mirrored acrylic, disco balls, and stainless steel spheres. One of the mirrored elements is another representation of a splash. Other mirrored splashes are fixed to the walls—two across the giant painted wall splash—or incorporated as painted graphic elements into the process paintings, for example *Compression Z* (2019). This painting comprises, apart from the

graphic splash, thrown and poured paint that flows, congeals, and drips. There is more spontaneous unpredictable beauty in both layered and adjacent streams across the canvas surface. The sprays and drips of pigment are visually extraordinary as exciting painterly events, repaying close looking after the fun and energy of the dynamic composition has been absorbed. Another painting, *Quible* (2019) includes mediums that repel each other combined with paint, ensuring that materials coalesce to produce cracks, and at times an almost complete separation of layers. The pooling and forming of crusts in the paint explore the material for its own sake, for its on going potential to uncontrollably combine—creating surprises that temporally estrange the artist, putting him into the position of a viewer. Cage's lesson to use accident and relinquish control comes to mind. Other elements embedded into the paint are glitter, toys, and miscellaneous bric-a-brac that further connect Armleder's project literally to the world outside of fine art concerns. These objects are not only humorous, they also build up and disrupt the surface formally as they become part of the process. The paintings recall distant cousins in the works of Jules Olitski and Morris Louis—the paintings here easily absorbing foreign objects, and art historical reference—this amounts to an intensely realized heterogeneous happenstance. Armleder's new work continues to reveal foundational principles of art making and the nature of how people interact with artifacts. Armleder continues to be characteristically generous with his audience, extending this to interpretation he has said, "I always agree with whatever people say about my work." 🍷

**DAVID RHODES** is a New York-based artist and writer, originally from Manchester, UK. He has published reviews in the *Brooklyn Rail*, *Artforum*, and *Artcritical*, among other publications.