DAVID
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GALLERY

Lesley Vance

A Zebra Races Counterclockwise

September 12 – October 24, 2020

press@davidkordanskygallery.com
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David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of new paintings by Lesley Vance, A Zebra Races Counterclockwise. The show, which opens September 12 and will be on view through October 24, 2020, takes place across two of the gallery's exhibition spaces and features paintings that are Vance's largest to date. David Kordansky Gallery is currently open by appointment. Virtual visits are available.

Lesley Vance has honed an unmistakable visual language in which abstraction articulates its connections to realities both tangible and ephemeral. She has achieved this in numerous ways, emphasizing relationships between light and shadow, exploring different perceptions of space, and reckoning with the materiality of color. Her new exhibition's title is taken from a line in Frank O'Hara's Poetry, a poem that teases out connections between quickness, surprise, and desire, and that enacts, through its own slippery syntax, the ways in which the mind attempts to impart fixity to changing situations: "A zebra races counterclockwise. / All this I desire. To / deepen you by my quickness / and delight as if you were logical and proven..."

Several of Vance's most recent paintings are over six feet tall and therefore enter into dialogue with the body in wholly new ways. Like her works of the last few years, the underlying architecture of these paintings is based in freely flowing expressive gestures that she elaborates over time, transforming them into networks of lines, textures, and intercut volumes. Because of their increased scale, these marks communicate the sweep of an entire arm. Passages appear to speed up or slow down with newfound force. Furthermore, the vivid intensity of her palette creates fully immersive, intensely optical viewing experiences in which foregrounds and backgrounds constantly jostle for primacy. For all their formal power, though, these paintings are sensitive documents that record the action of intelligence and imagination as they intersect with sensate reality.

This reality includes the qualities of paint itself, especially at a larger scale. In Vance's case, this means that color can convincingly communicate illusions of weight and depth, becoming the focus of the viewer's awareness. The eye moves back and forth between two opposing modes of seeing: just as it begins to lose itself within surreal constructions of shapes, lines, and planes, it is confronted with the fact of the materials Vance uses to create them. The pristine nature of her surfaces only gain in seductiveness and complexity when seen in person, and they are revealed to be decidedly handmade, tactile things made from the movements of the artist's brush, arm, and hand.

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Working alone and without assistants, Vance establishes levels of intimacy and close engagement that are immediately palpable regardless of the size of the canvas. In several of the works on view, layers of brushy transparency carry with them the energy of expressionist gestures, thereby disrupting the otherwise intact edges that distinguish one distinct shape or space from another so that the fluidity of paint assumes center stage. The ribbon-like forms that swerve across Vance's canvases vary in density and composition, picking up or shedding hues as they go, momentarily pausing before slipping back into the thickets of color and luminosity from which they emerge.

Suffused with the feel of the physical world, Vance's paintings are full of shifting moods and paradoxes that deepen in complexity the longer they are viewed. Attuned to ever-finer nuances of perception and physical presence, her work becomes both stranger and more naturalistic as it continues to unfurl.

Lesley Vance (b. 1977, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; lives and works in Los Angeles) has been the subject of exhibitions at the FLAG Art Foundation, New York (2012); Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine (2012); and The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California (2012, with Ricky Swallow). Recent group exhibitions include Aftereffect: Georgia O'Keeffe and Contemporary Painting, Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver (2018); The Campaign for Art, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2016); Don't Shoot the Painter. Paintings from UBS Art Collection, Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan (2015); Variations: Conversations in and Around Abstract Painting, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2014); and Painter Painter, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2013). Her paintings are in the public collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Dallas Museum of Art; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, among many others. A monograph documenting the last seven years of her work was recently published by Gregory R. Miller & Co

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A Zebra Races Counterclockwise
September 12 – October 24, 2020

North Gallery

Lesley Vance
Untitled, 2020
oil on linen
80 x 67 x 1 1/2 inches
(203.2 x 170.2 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# LV 20.006)

Lesley Vance
Untitled, 2020
oil on linen
80 x 67 x 1 1/2 inches
(203.2 x 170.2 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# LV 20.003)

Lesley Vance
Untitled, 2019 - 2020
oil on linen
36 x 28 x 1 inches
(91.4 x 71.1 x 2.5 cm)
(Inv# LV 20.009)

Lesley Vance
Untitled, 2020
oil on linen
80 x 67 x 1 1/2 inches
(203.2 x 170.2 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# LV 20.005)

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Lesley Vance
Untitled, 2019 - 2020
oil on linen
36 x 28 x 1 inches
(91.4 x 71.1 x 2.5 cm)
(Inv# LV 20.007)

Lesley Vance
Untitled, 2020
oil on linen
36 x 28 x 1 inches
(91.4 x 71.1 x 2.5 cm)
(Inv# LV 20.011)

South Gallery

Lesley Vance
Untitled, 2019 - 2020
oil on linen
19 x 23 x 1 inches
(48.3 x 58.4 x 2.5 cm)
(Inv# LV 20.014)

Lesley Vance
Untitled, 2020
oil on linen
36 x 28 x 1 inches
(91.4 x 71.1 x 2.5 cm)
(Inv# LV 20.013)

Lesley Vance
Untitled, 2020
oil on linen
36 x 28 x 1 inches
(91.4 x 71.1 x 2.5 cm)
(Inv# LV 20.012)

Lesley Vance
Untitled, 2019 - 2020
oil on linen
80 x 67 x 1 1/2 inches
(203.2 x 170.2 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# LV 20.001)

Lesley Vance
Untitled, 2020
oil on linen
23 x 19 x 1 inches
(58.4 x 48.3 x 2.5 cm)
(Inv# LV 20.010)

Lesley Vance
Untitled, 2019 - 2020
oil on linen
80 x 67 x 1 1/2 inches
(203.2 x 170.2 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# LV 20.004)

Lesley Vance
Untitled, 2019 - 2020
oil on linen
80 x 67 x 1 1/2 inches
(203.2 x 170.2 x 3.8 cm)
(Inv# LV 20.002)

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LESLEY VANCE

born 1977, Milwaukee, WI
lives and works in Los Angeles, CA

EDUCATION

2003 MFA, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA
2000 BFA, The University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS / TWO PERSON EXHIBITIONS
(* indicates a publication)

2020 *A Zebra Races Counterclockwise*, David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

2019 Bortolami, New York, NY

2018 Herald St, London, England

2017 *12 Paintings*, David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Xavier Hufkens, Brussels, Belgium

2016 *Paintings, On Paper*, Meyer Riegger, Berlin, Germany

2015 Herald St, London, England

2014 Xavier Hufkens, Brussels, Belgium

2013 David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

2012 *The FLAG Art Foundation, New York, NY
**Lesley Vance & Ricky Swallow at The Huntington*, The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, CA
*Xavier Hufkens, Brussels, Belgium
*Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, ME

2011 David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Galleria Il Capricorno, Venice, Italy

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2008 *Lesley Vance and Ricky Swallow*, The Suburban, Oak Park, IL

2007 *Finer Days*, David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

2006 *Lesley Vance and Violet Hopkins: Against The Sky,* Stuart Shave / Modern Art, London, England

2005 *The Palm Over My Blonde,* David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

2004 *bowievanvalen*, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
(* indicates a publication)

2018 *Aftereffect: Georgia O'Keeffe and Contemporary Painting*, curated by Elissa Auther, Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, Denver, CO

2016 **The Campaign for Art*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA
Dreaming Mirrors / Dreaming Screens, Sprüth Magers, Berlin, Germany

2015 *Surface Tension*, The FLAG Art Foundation, New York, NY
Other Planes of There, Corbett vs. Dempsey, Chicago, IL
Don't Shoot the Painter. Paintings from UBS Art Collection, curated by Francesco Bonami, Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan, Italy
FOCA Fellowship 2015 Award Winners Exhibit, Fellows of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA

2014 *Variations: Abstract Painting Today*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA

2013 *Tenth Anniversary Show*, WALLSPACE, New York, NY
Painter Painter, curated by Eric Crosby and Bartholomew Ryan, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN
A House of Leaves. Second Movement, curated by Vincent Honoré, David Roberts Art Foundation, London, England
The Collecting Continues 1939-2013, James Phillips Collection, USC Fisher Museum of Art, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA

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2012 *A House of Leaves. Second Movement*, curated by Vincent Honoré, David Roberts Art Foundation, London, England
Difference, Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX
**Art on Paper 2012: The 42nd Exhibition*, The Bob & Lissa Shelley McDowell Gallery, Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, NC
**Michelle Grabner: The Inova Survey*, Inova/Kenilworth – Institute of Visual Arts, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI
Mark Hagen, Richard Hoblock, Lesley Vance, Anthony Meier Fine Arts, San Francisco, CA
Three Evidentiary Claims, curated by Rachel Cook, The Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY
Risk + Reward, Foster Gallery, University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire, WI

2011 **Tableaux,* MAGASIN - Centre National d'Art Contemporain, Grenoble, France
Everything You Can Imagine Is Real..., Xavier Hufkens, Brussels, Belgium
A Painting Show, Harris Lieberman, New York, NY

2010 *Psycho Painting*, Carlson/Massimo De Carlo Gallery, London, UK
Triumphant Carrot: The Persistence of Still Life, Vancouver Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC
**2010 Biennial Exhibition,* Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY
Kathryn Andrews, Heather Cook, Lesley Vance, Lisa Williamson, David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
PPP, Public Private Paintings, Mu.ZEE, Ostend, Belgium

2009 *Rich Aldrich, Zak Prekop, Lesley Vance*, Björkholmen Gallery, Stockholm, Sweden
Sam Moyer & Lesley Vance & Stan VanDerBeek, The Front Room, Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis, MO
The Longest Train I Ever Saw, Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York, NY

2008 *Delusionarium 4,* Bonelli Contemporary, Los Angeles, CA
Imaginary Thing, Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, CO

2007 *Painted Objects*, Harris Lieberman, New York, NY
ab.strac.tion, curated by Nancy Meyer, Michael Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

2006 *Among the Ash Heaps and Millionaires*, Ancient and Modern, London, England

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2005 *Drawn Out*, Gallery 400, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL

2004 *Kids of the Blackhole,* Stalke Galleri, Copenhagen, Denmark
Kiss On the Brow, Hayworth Gallery. Los Angeles, CA
Summer Drawings (and some are not...), Mixture Contemporary Art, Houston, TX
Mind Over Manner, Grimm Rosenfeld Gallery, Munich, Germany
Tapestry From An Asteroid, Golinko Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
The New Romantics, Greene Naftali Gallery, New York, NY

2003 *Inaugural Exhibition*, Golinko Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Making: WEEDS, LACMA Lab, Boone Gallery, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA
Yesterday there was a disaster, today is ok, Stevenson Blanche Devereaux Gallery, Valencia, CA

RESIDENCIES

2015 Fellows of Contemporary Art Fellowship, Los Angeles, CA

2011 The FLAG Art Foundation Summer Hamptons Art Residency Program, Long Island, New York

2005 Art Production Fund Giverny Residency Program, Giverny, France

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Dambrot, Shana Nys, “Fall Season Art Preview: Galleries Embrace By-Appointment Viewing” *LAWeekly.com*, August 20, 2020

2019 **Lesley Vance*, with texts by Douglas Fogle and Amy Sherlock, designed by Purtill Family Business, New York, London, Brussels, and Los Angeles: Gregory R. Miller & Co., Herald St., Xavier Hufkens, and David Kordansky Gallery, 2019
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**Lesley Vance: Paintings & Watercolours*, text by Michael Ned Holte, Brussels: Xavier Hufkens, 2012
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2009 Vogel, Carol, “Reality Leaves A Fingerprint On the Biennial,” *New York Times*, December 11, 2009, pp. C27-C28
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2007 Holte, Michael Ned, “Los Angeles,” *Artforum,* December 2007, pp. 288 – 291
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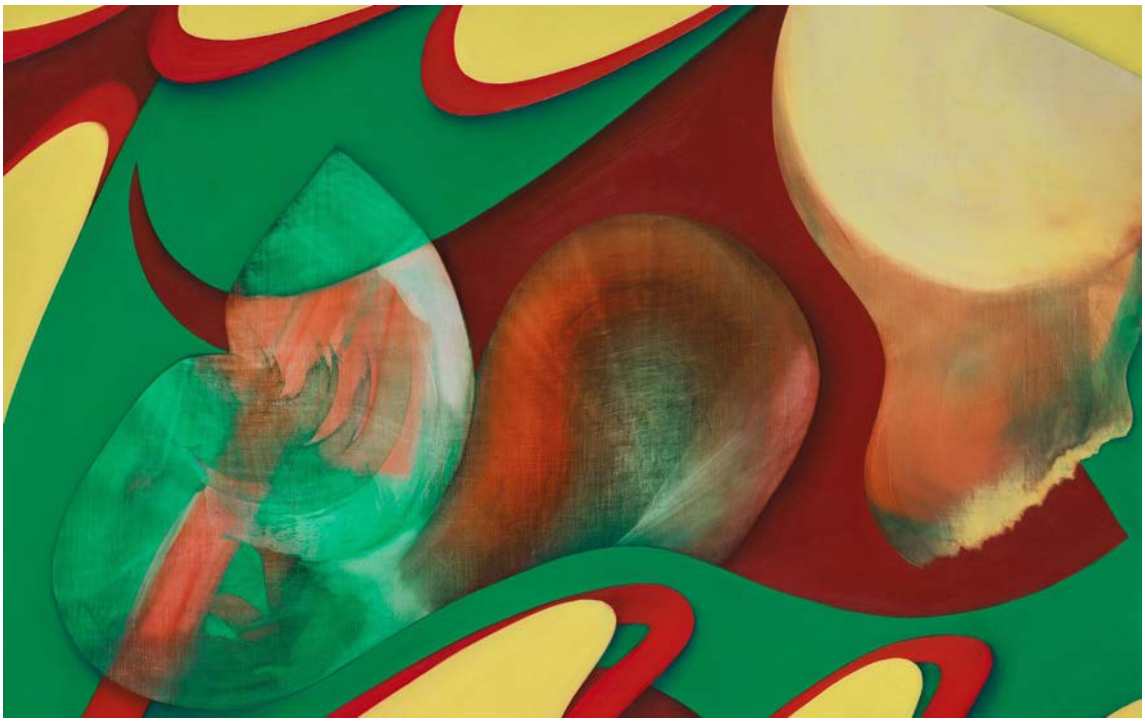
Sporn, Stephanie, “Lesley Vance’s Milestone Exhibition at David Kordansky Presents Her Largest Paintings Yet,” *GalerieMagazine.com,* September 11, 2020

Galerie

Lesley Vance’s Milestone Exhibition at David Kordansky Presents Her Largest Paintings Yet

Evoking a rainbow of ribbons unfurling in midair, these six-foot-tall canvases are the Los Angeles artist’s most ambitious to date

By Stephanie Sporn | September 11, 2020



A detail of Lesley Vance’s *Untitled*, 2020, oil on linen, 19 x 23 x 1 inches. PHOTO: FREDRIK NILSEN STUDIO, COURTESY OF DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY, LOS ANGELES

Psychedelic and commanding, Lesley Vance’s intimately sized, colorful canvases have for the last 20 years been meant to be appreciated up close. Now, for the first time, the artist’s admirers can experience her work in a new way: monumental paintings. Originally set to debut this spring and delayed on account of COVID-19, “A Zebra Races Counterclockwise” will be on view from September 12 through October 24 at David Kordansky. One of the Los Angeles gallery’s first in-person shows since its reopening, the exhibition will occupy two spaces, giving Vance’s paintings—several of which exceed six feet in height—plenty of room to breathe.

For her largest and most ambitious exhibition yet, Vance chose to title the show based on a line from American writer and art critic Frank O’Hara’s Poetry: “A zebra races counterclockwise. / All this I desire. To / deepen you by my quickness / and delight as if you were logical and proven…” The poem, much like Vance’s œuvre, references speed, surprise,

Artist Lesley Vance in her studio. PHOTO: YOSHIHIRO MAKINO

desire, and ever-evolving possibilities. At once dizzying and soothing, Vance’s ribbon-like, candy-colored patterns give the feeling of jumping down *Alice in Wonderland*’s rabbit hole—and when painted in this larger scale, the works become all the more immersive.

Throughout her career, Vance has experimented with light and shadow, as well as strategically layered vibrant brushstrokes, to convey movement and depth. From a distance, the works’ forms appear to have perfect hard edges, allowing for a high degree of perceived differentiation between background and foreground. The canvases, therefore, take on a three-dimensional effect, evoking the architectural curves and spontaneity of Frank Stella’s explosive metal sculptures and the kinetic sensibility of Victor Vasarely’s optical art.

Two works measuring 80 x 67 x 1 1/2 inches in Lesley Vance’s “A Zebra Races Counterclockwise” exhibition at David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, on view from September 12–October 24, 2020. PHOTO: JEFF MCLANE, COURTESY OF DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY, LOS ANGELES

Sporn, Stephanie, “Lesley Vance’s Milestone Exhibition at David Kordansky Presents Her Largest Paintings Yet,” *GalerieMagazine.com,* September 11, 2020

“When I’m working on a larger scale my entire arm’s span can get involved in creating the composition,”

LESLEY VANCE

Lesley Vance, *Untitled*, 2020 oil on linen, 23 x 19 x 1 inches. PHOTO: FREDRIK NILSEN STUDIO, COURTESY OF DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY, LOS ANGELES

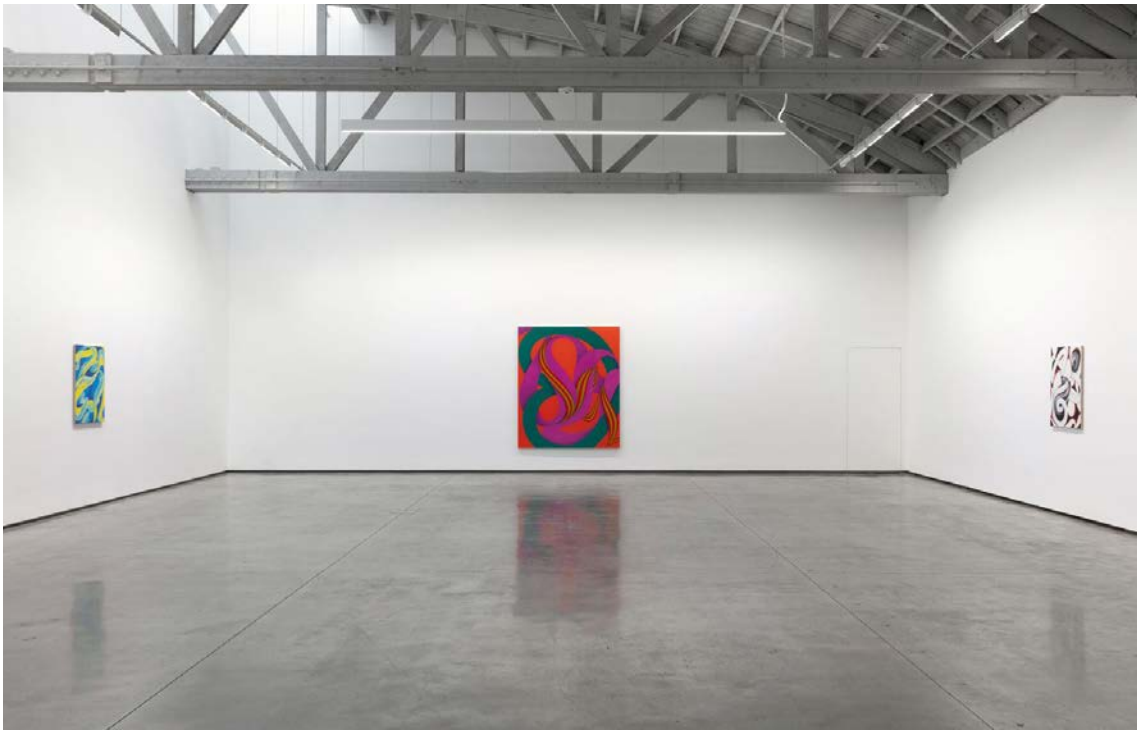
Lesley Vance, *Untitled*, 2020 oil on linen, 36 x 28 x 1 inches. PHOTO: FREDRIK NILSEN STUDIO, COURTESY OF DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY, LOS ANGELES

“My favorite aspect of working in a larger scale is that color itself becomes an experiential force,” Vance tells *Galerie*. “Also, when I’m working on a larger scale my entire arm’s span can get involved in creating the composition.”

Vance’s increasingly abstract art was recently chronicled in *Lesley Vance: Painting 2013-2019* (Gregory R. Miller & Co.) by Douglas Fogle, and her work can also be found in the public collections of New York’s Museum of Modern Art and Whitney Museum of American Art; the Dallas Museum of Art; Los Angeles’s Hammer Museum; and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, among others.

As for her future, we can expect to see further reinventions of painting—the artist tells Galerie that her large-scale canvases have unleashed a whole new wave of creativity: “There is more space to work in, and more free-flowing gestures and forms emerge. This has changed and opened up how I think about space in my smaller works as well.”

“A Zebra Races Counterclockwise” is open by appointment at David Kordansky, 5130 W. Edgewood Pl., Los Angeles. Timed reservations and virtual visits are available.



Lesley Vance, “A Zebra Races Counterclockwise,” David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, September 12–October 24, 2020.. PHOTO: JEFF MCLANE, COURTESY OF DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY, LOS ANGELES

Dambrot, Shana Nys, “Fall Season Art Preview: Galleries Embrace By-Appointment Viewing” *LAWeekly.com*, August 20, 2020

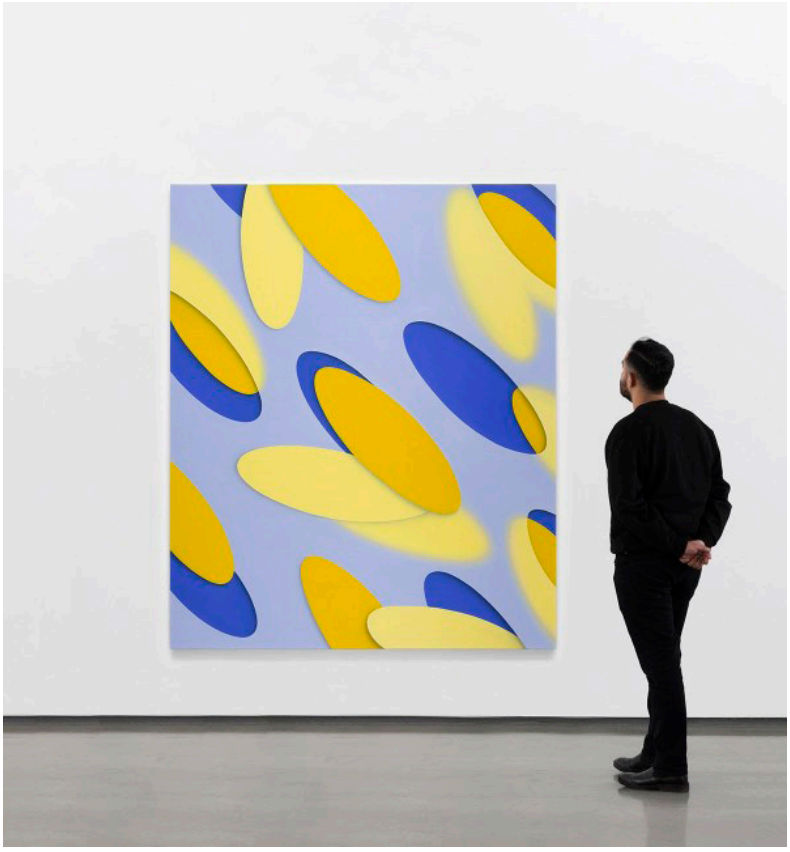
LA WEEKLY

FALL SEASON ART PREVIEW: GALLERIES EMBRACE BY-APPOINTMENT VIEWING

By Shana Nys Dambrot I August 20, 2020

September is typically a pretty big month in the art world, with a roster of high-profile gallery exhibitions that is both exciting and overwhelming, and a cluster of Saturday evening destinations with a sprawling simultaneity that defies the laws of time and space. But not this year — at least not the 6-8pm wine and cheese crosstown amazing race part. With pandemic disruptions pushing a lot of gallery content to the online space and forcing the open IRL venues to institute strict safety measures, this season, it’s all about embracing the concept of by-appointment gallery-going. Most open places have easy-to-navigate online booking akin to restaurant reservation apps, and what’s missing in terms of the social scene is replaced with the chance for a more profound, mindful engagement with the work — which you will, wonderfully, have all to yourself. A person could get used to this.

Lesley Vance at David Kordansky Gallery opens September 12



Lesley Vance, *Untitled*, 2020, oil on linen, 80 x 67 inches (Photography by Fredrik Nilsen Studio; courtesy of David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles)

Some folks paint with their wrist, some their elbow, and some swing from the shoulder — generating sweeping gestures that create a sense of scale and movement that discourse not only with the eye, but the space of the whole body. In the work of Lesley Vance, this physicality is augmented and amplified with a vivacious chromatic sensibility that keeps vision and cognition in a constant state of flux and motion as well. From energetic engagement with the architectural space to a proliferation of emotional moments within each composition, Vance’s work creates a pocket universe of contemplation and agitation that speaks to the enduring power of abstract painting.

David Kordansky Gallery, 5130 Edgewood Place, Mid-city; davidkordanskygallery.com.

Fogle, Douglas, “Medusa’s Hair,” *Lesley Vance*, designed by Purtill Family Business, New York, London, Brussels, and Los Angeles: Gregory R. Miller & Co., Herald St., Xavier Hufkens, and David Kordansky Gallery, 2019, pp. 50-58

Medusa’s Hair

Douglas Fogle

The outline should therefore be the result of the colors if the world is to be given in its true density. For the world is a mass without gaps, a system of colors across which the receding perspective, the outlines, angles, and curves are inscribed like lines of force; the spatial structure vibrates as it is formed.

—Maurice Merleau-Ponty[1]

A handsome blonde woman sits on a bench in a gallery in the Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco, staring intently at a historical portrait of another woman. As our gaze moves closer to the seated figure, our attention is drawn to the swirl of her hair, which has been fashioned into a coiffed bun on the back of her head. We look up as our eyes are directed to the painting she’s been intently staring at all this time. We realize that the figure depicted there also uncannily has what will now become a telltale vortex of hair. This encounter lasts all of fifteen seconds but lays the groundwork for a story of subterfuge, false memory, and murder that will lead to a descent into a maelstrom of male hysteria. Of course, you’ve probably guessed it. The scene I’m describing is from Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958; fig. 1), in which Jimmy Stewart’s “Scottie” spies upon Kim Novak’s alter ego “Madeleine” as she acts out a feigned obsession with, or perhaps supernatural possession by, the subject of the fictional painting *Portrait of Carlotta Valdes*. As rigorously composed as the spiral of Madeleine’s hair may be, it is nothing short of the

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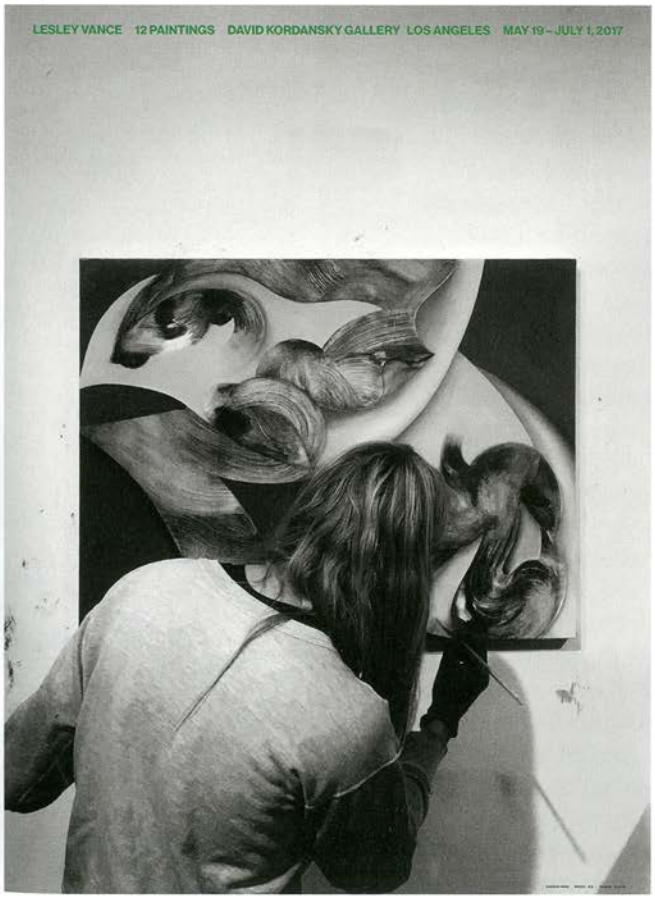
chaotic eye of a hurricane that is about to engulf the private detective Scottie, unmooring him from any fixed reality as his traumatically triggered psychological vertigo takes hold.

The painting of Carlotta Valdes is Hitchcock’s MacGuffin, the inconsequential object that the filmmaker always used to initiate a question or conflict and propel his filmic story forward. Putting aside the narrative machinations of Hitchcock’s masterpiece, I wonder if there might be another kind of MacGuffin at work in *Vertigo*, one based not on a narrative impulse but rather on the formal and material qualities of Madeleine’s and Carlotta’s hair. Instead of following Hitchcock’s camera as it moves up from Madeleine’s head to the painting of Carlotta on the gallery wall, what would happen if we continued to delve deeper and deeper into the spiral of Novak’s hair, in an ever-expanding extreme close-up along the lines of Charles and Ray Eames’s short film *Powers of Ten* (1977), which simulates a journey from the surface of the skin, up into outer space, and down to the level of the subatomic? In this case, if we were to push beyond the limits of the filmmaker’s cinematographic directive to dive straight into the eye of the storm created by Madeleine’s golden locks, we would be confronted by thousands of interlacing strands of hair, a series of Ariadne-like threads each with their own twisting path leading us to a different story or a different world. If we were to follow this formal exercise to its logical limit, the noirish angst of *Vertigo*’s narrative would slowly fade into the distance, becoming a kind of white noise or background radiation in a galaxy composed of ever-shifting abstracted lines of force. Venturing further into the entwined twists and folds of this microcosm of hair, we would find ourselves in worlds within worlds, both possible and impossible. It’s here, deep in the recesses of this labyrinth of hair, that we find ourselves caught between the forces of abstraction and figuration, where form has a content that leaves any kind of narrative closure behind in its vertiginous wake.

Fig. 1 (opposite)
Alfred J. Hitchcock, film still from *Vertigo*, 1958
Courtesy of Universal Studios Licensing LLC
© 1958 by Alfred J. Hitchcock Productions, Inc.

Fig. 2
Exhibition announcement for *Lesley Vance: 12 Paintings*, David Kordansky Gallery, 2017. Published by Canyon Rats. Designed by Sun An. Photograph by R.S.



The paintings of Lesley Vance sit firmly within the unstable contours of the imagined worlds embedded in the tangle of individual strands of hair, whether found on the head of Kim Novak or of the artist herself. A poster for Vance’s 2017 exhibition at David Kordansky Gallery in Los Angeles (fig. 2) offers a salient point of reference. We see the artist at work with her back to the camera, her hair falling to one side, and her brush intently applying paint to canvas. Printed in black-and-white, the eddies and currents of the artist’s hair become nearly indistinguishable from the swirling and restless forms moving across her canvas, with their scraped and pulled striations. This photographic portrait is telling in that it encapsulates much of what is at stake in Vance’s work.

Vance has spent the past fifteen years creating paintings that navigate the gravitational field generated by the opposing forces of abstraction and figuration. Early in this journey her practice was rooted in a

Fogle, Douglas, “Medusa’s Hair,” *Lesley Vance*, designed by Purtill Family Business, New York, London, Brussels, and Los Angeles: Gregory R. Miller & Co., Herald St., Xavier Hufkens, and David Kordansky Gallery, 2019, pp. 50-58

preparatory process that involved setting up still life scenarios, photographing them, and then using these photographs as a kind of structural exoskeleton on which to build abstractions. The resulting paintings, however, completely obliterated any indexical connection to the original photographic still lifes. As Barry Schwabsky has perceptively pointed out, for Vance the still life has been her own MacGuffin, that inconsequential Hitchcockian motif that acts as a catalyst for the story, or in this case the abstract painting.[2] Beginning from such objects and from the historical lineage of the still life as a genre, Vance would slowly remove layer after layer of denotative contours until the forms on her canvases became autonomous organisms set adrift in a sea of paint. These early works inhabit a tectonic fault line between the realm of the real and that of the abstract while already being set apart at one remove through the mediation of photography. Fittingly, Vance’s recent work has abandoned the conceit of the still life altogether, choosing instead to create a kind of alien painterly life form that no longer gives credence to the supposed dichotomy between abstraction and figuration.

In looking at Vance’s work certain questions beg to be asked. Was the material world in the form of the still life actually a MacGuffin used by the artist to propel her paintings into a nonobjective world, or is the problem posed by Vance’s paintings more complicated and multivalent? When looking at her work, are we condemned to fall into a trap in which the figurative and the abstract are uncompromisingly locked in a zero-sum war of attrition, or might we glean a way out of this double bind by taking seriously Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of Cézanne, in which he suggests that the spatial structure of the world around us “vibrates as it is formed”? One might look at the career arc of the reluctant Abstract Expressionist Willem de Kooning to illuminate this dilemma. De Kooning spent his entire career negotiating the shifting landscape between figuration and abstraction without ever coming down on one side or the other. As Gary Garrels has suggested in a catalogue devoted to the artist’s late work, de Kooning “never relinquished his fascination with the human figure in favor of the strict imperatives of abstraction.”[3] From his earliest black-and-white abstractions of the late 1940s to his frenetically rendered quasi-figurative Woman paintings first shown in 1953, he wrestled with the push and pull between these two forces without ever completely surrendering to either. He often riffed on the words of his favorite philosopher Søren Kierkegaard to describe his practice as defined by “*No* fear but a lot of trembling.” In his late works of the 1980s (fig. 3), strikingly, this painterly existential trembling between the objective and nonobjective resolved itself into the finely calibrated and symphonic vibrations of a tuning fork. A late burst of creativity from de Kooning led to a series of paintings that were liberated from the turgid painterly qualities of his earlier works, bringing together the linear play of the draftsman’s line with the optical flatness of a Matisse cutout. Although de Kooning worked from motifs taken from earlier drawings, his sinuous ribbons of color in these works summon a range of biomorphic fragments that float effortlessly on a stage composed of smooth fields of white and cream-colored paint. It’s almost as if we are looking through a microscope at a petri dish with red, yellow, and blue single-cell organisms swimming in and out of focus in our visual depth of field. The calligraphic gestures of these works, with their translucent colors, evoke a lyrical freedom and calm fluidity

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Fig. 3
Willem de Kooning (1904–1997), *Untitled*, 1985
Oil on canvas
77 x 88 inches (195.6 x 223.5 cm)
© 2019 The Willem de Kooning Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

whose perspective shifts back and forth in an upending of Euclidean space or any kind of grounded certainty. At the same time, they seem devoid of angst. As Peter Schjeldahl commented at the time, “Unlike other recent de Kooning paintings, these don’t appear caught in the act of tearing themselves apart.”[4] Far from tearing themselves apart, the flat and silky-smooth surfaces of these paintings create stark and luminous new worlds populated by a lexicon of organic arabesques that seem to both live and breathe.

The paintings of Lesley Vance inhabit a similar territory to that opened up by de Kooning’s late works. Having divorced herself from any referential connection to the world around us, the artist nonetheless creates slippery interlocking sets of curvilinear surfaces and planes that reside on the tremulous and shimmering edge between the organic and the inorganic and the architectonic and the abstract. These canvases share the liquidity and flatness of de Kooning’s surfaces while giving the impression of having frozen a dynamic state in a tenuous provisional abeyance. Vance’s paintings are purposely intimate in scale, eschewing the more monumental examples of historical abstraction in favor of a more contained and tension-filled field of play. Within the confines of these densely populated canvases she draws on vocabularies of form and stylistic gesture that run the gamut from undulating ribbons of color to tubular structures, translucent veils, seemingly calligraphic and typographic remnants, and skeins of twisting scraped forms of paint reminiscent of the texture of hair. In all of these works lines of force converge and diverge with pulsating rhythms at various speeds, leaving in their wake spatial conundrums and ghostly figures that lie just beyond the reach of visual resolution. In fact, Vance is a master of producing canvases in which space is warped into impossible forms, bringing to mind the non-orientable mathematical qualities of a Klein bottle (fig. 4):

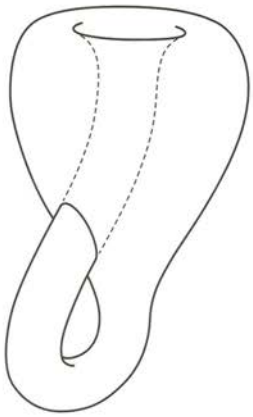


Fig. 4
Diagram of a Klein bottle

Fogle, Douglas, “Medusa’s Hair,” *Lesley Vance*, designed by Purtill Family Business, New York, London, Brussels, and Los Angeles: Gregory R. Miller & Co., Herald St., Xavier Hufkens, and David Kordansky Gallery, 2019, pp. 50-58

a boundaryless one-sided surface that, if walked upon, could be followed back to the point of origin while flipping the traveler upside down. “Non-orientable” is an apt description of the artist’s canvases, in which space collides and folds back on itself as figures melt into the planes they inhabit.

An interesting example of Vance’s Kleinian space can be seen in an untitled work from 2017 (fig. 5; p. 71). In this painting a set of smoothly polished white cylindrical forms are woven together in a serpentine manner with striated earth-toned rhizomes that seem to go inside and out, on top of and below these figures at one and the same time. Set against vibrating swaths of blue and red negative space, the painting conflates foreground and background while making any distinction between interior and exterior a meaningless exercise. While one could talk about the painting in relation to Fernand Léger’s fascination with technology in the machinic abstract forms of his “mechanical period” (1918–1923), Vance’s palette and interwoven forms also bring to mind Jean Fouqet’s *Madonna Surrounded by Seraphim and Cherubim* (c. 1452; fig. 6), which is one half of the Melun diptych commissioned by the French royal treasurer Étienne Chevalier in the mid-fifteenth century. Fouquet’s painting is notable for its monochrome red and blue cherubs, who form a chromatic canopy for the glowing, porcelain-like depiction of the Madonna and Child. The folds of the Madonna’s blue dress expose an unearthly orb-like breast, which seems to exist independently of her body as layers of fabric drape around her figure and that of the Holy Child like a cocoon of white light. Influenced by Flemish painting as well as artists of Quattrocento Italy including Piero della Francesca, Fouquet’s painting attempts to render three-dimensional perspectival space while at the same time appearing rather dizzyingly unstable. It is a beautiful but exceedingly strange work of art with startling modern echoes, and it creates a scene that would not be out of place in a science fiction film. Vance’s painting has an uncanny resemblance to this work in its choice of palette, and in the way in which its central curved forms take on the role of Fouquet’s Madonna while also seeming to pay homage to the ceramic forms of artists such as Ken Price and Ron Nagle. The difference here is that Vance’s figures are engaged in a Kleinian spatial dance, in which the flowing brown-and-white streams that penetrate and envelop the figures also provide portals to a place beyond the limits of the picture plane.

One particular element of Vance’s painting would seem to hold a key to the door to these alternate worlds. In the middle right-hand side of this work, a winglike form (strangely reminiscent of the wings of Fouquet’s angels) emerges from behind a white cylinder to float on top of a field of red and blue. Inside its contours Vance has pulled and scraped her mixture of black, brown, and white oils this way and that, one on top of the next, in a whirlwind of gestural moves that leave the viewer with a sense of looking through the painting to a tempestuous kinetic space just below the surface. This elongated

Fig. 5
Lesley Vance, *Untitled*, 2017
Oil on linen
31 x 24 inches (78.7 x 61 cm)
Collection of Glenn and Amanda Fuhrman, New York. Promised Gift to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Fogle, Douglas, “Medusa’s Hair,” *Lesley Vance*, designed by Purtill Family Business, New York, London, Brussels, and Los Angeles: Gregory R. Miller & Co., Herald St., Xavier Hufkens, and David Kordansky Gallery, 2019, pp. 50-58

Fig. 6
Jean Fouquet, *Madonna Surrounded by Seraphim and Cherubim*, 1452
Oil on panel
36 ¼ x 32 ⅞ inches (92 x 83.5 cm)
Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp
© Lukas-Art in Flanders VZW

pinion casts a subtle shadow on the swooping arc of red paint as if hovering above it, but paradoxically no shadow is cast whatsoever on the contiguous field of blue, implying that it is an open wound in the surface of the painting. As a painterly aperture it suggests an opening onto a parallel universe defined by a chaotic tangle of hair cascading off of someone’s head.

Rivulets of these hairlike gestures wind their way through Vance’s canvases, upending their compositional orderliness with a calm if disruptive energy. Indeed, in many of these works gravity itself seems to be put on hold thanks to the unique fluid dynamics of her forms. In one painting (p. 97) a river of scraped paint gently snakes its way down the canvas, playing hide-and-seek with a swath of pink-colored paint and a black-and-white checkboard pattern before precipitously turning upwards and fading into a veil of fog suggestive of the edge of a French curve. In another work (p. 110) these gestures present themselves more like dense braids that seem to take on the viscous, taffy-like consistency of some kind of unknown organic life-form as they wind their way on and around the serifs of an unknown typographic entity. In yet another painting (fig. 7; p. 107), flowing and wavelike bands of brown and black, of varying degrees of density, weave their way across the canvas as they promiscuously intermingle with a series of Medusa-like tentacles rendered as an almost incorporeal chiaroscuro wash. It is interesting to think of this painting in the

Fogle, Douglas, “Medusa’s Hair,” *Lesley Vance*, designed by Purtill Family Business, New York, London, Brussels, and Los Angeles: Gregory R. Miller & Co., Herald St., Xavier Hufkens, and David Kordansky Gallery, 2019, pp. 50-58

context of the mythological Medusa, the Gorgon who was cursed with snakes for hair and a gaze that turned onlookers into stone. Italo Calvino writes beautifully about the relationship of Medusa to her slayer, Perseus, in his collection *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (1988), in an essay devoted to the poetic quality of “lightness.” Calvino speaks about the necessity of escaping “the weight, the inertia, the opacity of the world.” In his words: “At certain moments I felt that the entire world was turning into stone: a slow petrification, more or less advanced depending on people and places but one that spared no aspects of life. It was as if no one could escape the inexorable stare of the Medusa.”[5] He goes on to describe the paradoxical relationship between the stony gaze of the Medusa, whose decapitated head is wielded by Perseus as a weapon, and the care with which the hero delicately handles this monstrous yet fragile treasure. As described in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, after vanquishing a sea monster Perseus makes a soft bed of leaves and seaweed on which to gently place Medusa’s head in order to protect it from the rough sand of the beach. Unexpectedly, the sea plants that come into contact with the Gorgon’s hair are miraculously turned into beautiful pieces of coral. Although Calvino draws our attention to Perseus’s tender treatment of the head of Medusa (which, let’s face it, the “hero” violently removed from her body) as exemplifying his desired quality of “lightness,” the paradox here is that while she was cursed by the gods with a gaze that added to the weight, inertia, and opacity of the world, her touch produces structures of delicacy, beauty, and weightlessness.

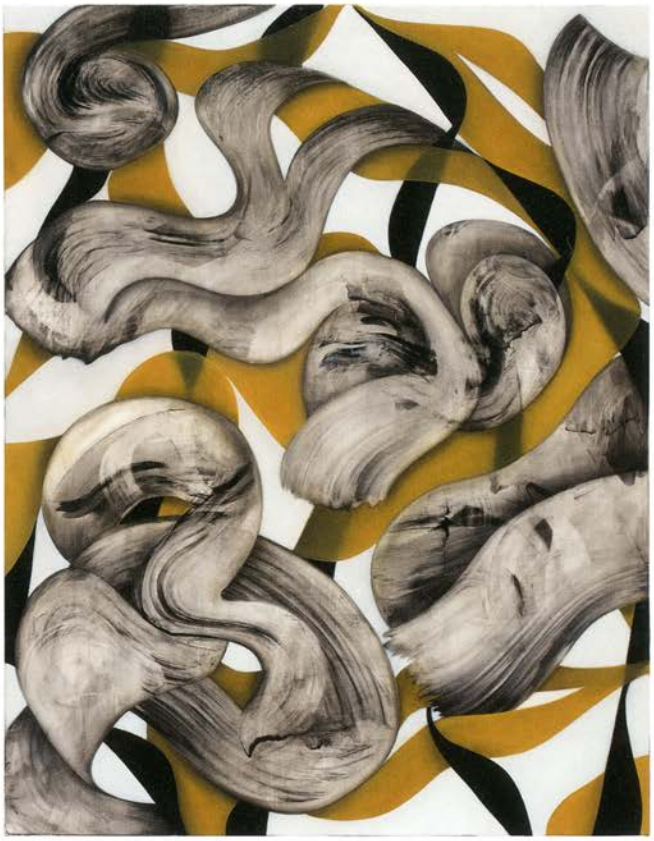


Fig. 7
Lesley Vance, *Untitled*, 2018
Oil on linen
31 x 24 inches (78.7 x 61 cm)

Vance’s paintings share the same complicated interplay between the density and lightness of the world that is found in the myth of the misunderstood Medusa. This is in no small part due to the artist’s iterative use of multivalent skeins of painterly hair which envelop the nonobjective bodies that populate her canvases. This formal device is caught somewhere between the organic and the inorganic, the figurative and the abstract, while causing the worlds depicted in her canvases to defy gravity and even the confinement of the edges of the paintings themselves. While hair is unruly and can become monstrous, it can also produce liberating new forms and alternative new worlds.

Looking at Vance’s use of this device brings to mind the artist Christina Ramberg, whose highly stylized figurative paintings of the 1970s depict graphically abstracted female torsos often adorned with decorative areas of textured hair. In *Istrian River Lady* (1974; fig. 8), for example, a profile of a woman from neck to hips is rendered with the economy of a graphic novelist. This minimal suggestion of a female body is encased in a set of tight-fitting garments that sport areas of hairlike fabrics and appendages. One could be looking at a sketch of avant-garde haute couture or a design for a costume in a science fiction opera. The fashion of S&M attire also comes to mind. What is interesting about this work in relation to Vance’s is its embrace of the strangeness

Fogle, Douglas, “Medusa’s Hair,” *Lesley Vance*, designed by Purtill Family Business, New York, London, Brussels, and Los Angeles: Gregory R. Miller & Co., Herald St., Xavier Hufkens, and David Kordansky Gallery, 2019, pp. 50-58

of the figurative world, which in Ramberg’s case borders on dissolution into an abstract realm of pattern and decoration with a hint of surrealism. A big part of this playfulness is Ramberg’s repeated and deliberate use and misuse of hair as a motif that at times is strictly figurative but more often functions as a formal device that “defamiliarizes” us from our habitual ways of seeing by making the world strange.[6] Ramberg taught for many years at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and attempted to get her students to see the world with fresh eyes by asking them questions such as, “How would a comb that cannot untangle hair look?”[7] A similar question seems to lie at the center of Lesley Vance’s practice.

In an untitled work by Vance from 2018 (p. 113), thick Lissajous curves of solid green or pink pigment loop their way up and down the canvas in a circular movement forming an ovoid shape that trails a veritable Rapunzel-like waterfall of striated paint from its apogee. At times these chromatic pathways dynamically fold back on themselves, twisting in a dark void. Although seemingly more abstract than the images of Ramberg, this work (like all of Vance’s paintings) seems to short-circuit any attempt to resolve the dichotomy between figuration and abstraction. While it is a highly refined painting with colors and shapes reminiscent of Phoebe Philo’s ultra-elegant palette and designs for the fashion

Fig. 8
Christina Ramberg, *Istrian River Lady*, 1974
Acrylic on composition board, with wood frame
35 3/8 x 31 1/4 x 1 5/8 inches (89.9 x 79.4 x 4.1 cm)
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Purchase with funds from Mr. and Mrs. Frederic M. Roberts in memory of their son, James Reed Roberts. 74.12a–b
Courtesy of Corbett vs. Dempsey / The Estate of Christina Ramberg © The Estate of Christina Ramberg

Fogle, Douglas, “Medusa’s Hair,” *Lesley Vance*, designed by Purtill Family Business, New York, London, Brussels, and Los Angeles: Gregory R. Miller & Co., Herald St., Xavier Hufkens, and David Kordansky Gallery, 2019, pp. 50-58

house Celine, it is also, in effect, a comb that cannot untangle hair. Winding our way along the pathways of its forms we are unable to resolve the push and pull between the objective and the nonobjective. Instead, this painting's formal qualities—its Möbius strip–like loops and lithe cascade of scraped paint—bring us back to the infinite tangled worlds opened up by Madeleine's hair in *Vertigo*.

As we pull out of the imagined extreme close-up of the back of Kim Novak's head with which we began this discussion, the barely constrained tempest of her golden hair comes into view. At a crucial moment in the film's narrative, believing Madeleine to be dead, Scottie brings her back to life by forcing Judy (Novak's other character) to adopt the lamented woman's look and hairstyle. This attempt at masculine control is telling. If Madeleine is Medusa in this Hitchcockian narrative, and the glamorous allure of her hair ruins Scotty's masculinity by making him catatonic (literally paralyzing him at one point, à la Medusa), what Hitchcock doesn't show us are the endless possibilities opened up by her hair and the potential lightness of the Gorgon's touch. (Let's face it, both Madeleine and Medusa were framed.) No matter how it is contained, coiffed, or cut, hair is an infinitely malleable medium that is attuned to the qualities of lightness described by Calvino and the liberating flourishes of late de Kooning. It is singular and legion at one and the same time. It is both a living organism and the inanimate detritus of animal life. The paintings of Lesley Vance revel in the positive potential of these unresolved qualities as they create multiplicities of imagined worlds inhabited by new painterly ways of being. In their rejection of any kind of formal categorization and their conjuring of the quality of weightlessness, Vance's paintings seem to offer an answer to Christina Ramberg's paradoxical question. What would a comb that could not untangle look like? Something like these paintings.

Notes

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Cézanne's Doubt," in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia A. Dreyfus (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 15.
2. Barry Schwabsky, "Abolished Still Life," in *Lesley Vance* (Los Angeles: David Kordansky Gallery, 2013), 4.
3. Gary Garrels, "Three Toads in the Garden: Line, Color, and Form," in *Willem de Kooning: The Late Paintings, the 1980s*, ed. Gary Garrels (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1995), 9.
4. Peter Schjeldahl, "Delights by de Kooning," *The Village Voice*, April 13, 1982.
5. Italo Calvino, "Lightness," in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, trans. Patrick Creagh (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 4.
6. "Defamiliarization" or "making strange" was a literary technique advocated by the revolutionary Russian literary critic Viktor Shklovsky in his 1917 essay "Art as Technique."
7. Quoted in Dan Nadel, "How Would a Comb that Cannot Untangle Hair Look?," *Artforum*, February 2018, 149.

Douglas Fogle is a curator and writer based in Los Angeles. He spent over two decades as a curator at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, and the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, where he organized exhibitions such as *Painting at the Edge of the World* (2001), *The Last Picture Show: Artists Using Photography, 1960–1982* (2003), and *Life on Mars: 55th Carnegie International* (2009). Among his most recent exhibitions are *Andy Warhol: Dark Star* (2017), Museo Jumex, Mexico City; *Mike Kelley: Fortress of Solitude* (2017), NEON Foundation at the Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens; and *BLESS No. 63 Neutra Dasein* (2018), Neutra VDL Studio and Residences, Los Angeles. His writings have been published widely in exhibition catalogues, artist monographs, and journals including *Artforum*, *Parkett*, and *frieze*.

Ebony, David, "Lesley Vance," *Art in America*, June/July 2019, pp. 103-104

Art in America

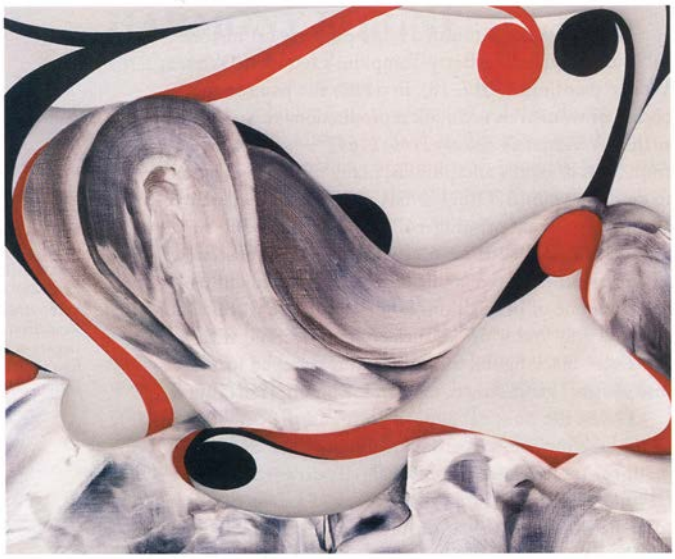
LESLEY VANCE
Bortolami

The nine new paintings in Lesley Vance's show (all untitled and 2019) were a dramatic departure from the works she exhibited in her previous New York solo presentation, at the FLAG Art Foundation in 2012, and at the 2010 Whitney Biennial. Vance, who was born in Milwaukee in 1977 and lives in Los Angeles, first gained national attention for intimately scaled oil-on-canvas abstractions based on photographs of still life arrangements that she made in her studio with materials like leaves, seashells, and tree branches. Featuring interlocking patches of muted, earthy color applied with richly textured, bravura brushstrokes on dark backgrounds, the paintings often resembled deconstructed Chardin still lifes, albeit with a Cubist flair. In recent years, Vance has turned toward an almost trompe l'oeil kind of imagery, with flatter surfaces and more brilliant color.

The latest works are notably large—up to 36 by 28 inches, epic by her previous standards—and wholly abstract, with few, if any, allusions to the empirical world. Tightly composed and displaying a heightened, luminous palette, they contain compressed networks of hard-edge curvilinear shapes that often resemble Möbius strips or undulating tubes. Drop shadows lend a three-dimensional effect to the shapes, which appear to writhe in a shallow, subtly illusionistic space. In one of the most outstanding works, thick bands of bright yellow outlined with ribbons of searing vermilion pulsate against a field of teal. The sumptuous, ambiguous space thwarts any definitive sense of foreground and background, and the swirling motion is almost dizzying. The composition puts forth a visual puzzle comparable to Bridget Riley's Op works of the 1960s or Karin Davie's looping gestural abstractions of the '90s.

While optical games are clearly an important aspect of Vance's work, they are not her primary endeavor. In interviews she credits the landscapes and nature-inspired abstractions of Georgia O'Keeffe and the process-oriented work of Carla Accardi as major inspirations. This show, in fact, coincided with "Aftereffect: Georgia O'Keeffe and Contemporary Painting," an exhibition at the Museum of

Lesley Vance: Untitled, 2019, oil on linen, 19 by 23 inches; at Bortolami.



Contemporary Art Denver that paired O'Keeffe's work with that of Vance and several other young artists. Vance also takes up the sort of abstract illusionism established in the 1970s and '80s by artists like James Havard and Jack Lembeck—a genre that made regular use of drop shadows—sharing common ground with contemporary painters like Laura Owens and younger colleagues such as Josh Reames and Jan-Ole Schiemann.

Vance's paintings offer an almost topological space—a rather disorienting realm in which indeterminate, mutable elements counter flat planes and solid shapes. In one work, yellow and blue snaking forms interact witha blue rectangle on the left and a yellow L shape that overlaps it on the right, producing a rhythmic movement. Resembling a sculptural relief, a large vertical painting features a subtly shaded orange-and-turquoise teardrop shape in the upper right that appears, by turns, concave and convex. Vance builds a durational element into such paintings, creating mesmerizing compositions that seem to shift and change as one views them.

—David Ebony

Heinrich, Will, “Lesley Vance and Aki Sasamoto,” *NYTimes.com*, April 10, 2019

The New York Times

New York Art Galleries: What to See Right Now

Will Heinrich | April 10, 2019

Lesley Vance and Aki Sasamoto

Through April 20. Bortolami, 39 Walker Street, Manhattan

Lesley Vance’s “Untitled,” from 2019, oil on linen, at her new show at Bortolami. Courtesy Lesley Vance and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles; Bortolami, New York

I’d like to write the way Lesley Vance makes paintings — or at least the way this Los Angeles-based painter made the nine nearly perfect small canvases in her current show at Bortolami. Each depicts a dense bundle of brightly colored loops and whorls, something like what M.C. Escher might have come up with if he’d ever taken ayahuasca. Some loops cast shadows on others, and some are subtly graded to suggest a twisting motion, though the pictures overall are as static as candy apples. They’re also so crisp that the imagery almost seems to get bigger when viewed from a distance. Unlike most work this graphic, though, Ms. Vance’s paintings are so exactingly rendered that there’s just as much to look at from an inch or two away.

In the gallery’s viewing room, as part of Aki Sasamoto’s concurrent show “Past in a future tense,” the Japanese-born performance and installation artist has built a long, narrow bar, complete with brass foot rail and a lone pocket umbrella hanging bravely from its coat hook, and two high bar tables with heavy iron feet. On each of these three surfaces — table, table, bar — is a bulbous glass vessel in which an ocher-tinged whiskey glass spins on its side. They’re spun by compressed air, shot through a hole in the vessel from a bottle connected to a long, ungainly silver tube. The whole silly, elegant setup works equally well as a metaphor for life, love, or even the process of art-making. But I prefer to see in it the mystery of consciousness, that other delicate movement sitting atop a miraculous, ramshackle machine.

Adam, Alfred Mac, "Lesley Vance," *BrooklynRail.org*, March 7, 2019

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

Lesley Vance

by Alfred Mac Adam | March 7, 2019

Lesley Vance swirls her powerful colors over the canvas until she dominates the entire surface. Horror vacui or will-to power? Probably equal doses of both, but the utter assertiveness of her ribbons of color in these nine oils on canvas mark her as a conquistador. Enfolded in this desire to dominate painterly space is a sexual component, but a sexuality that sets Vance apart from the covert sexuality found, say, in Georgia O'Keefe's flower paintings or Turner's river views, images that set off the Freudian sex detectors hidden in all of us. The erotic in a painting like Untitled (2019) is overt, not coy. A furious, folded yellow enfolds an equally potent, very phallic green shape, but the painting begs the question: how can abstraction attain this level of eroticism?

Lesley Vance, *Untitled*, 2019. Oil on linen, 36 x 28 inches. Courtesy Bortolami, New York.

This sensual energy may ultimately derive from an unlikely source: landscape painting. Transforming nature into art is an act of will, the imposition of order on chaos. But the act of creating harmony out of disorder is fraught with danger: by idealizing nature we engage in an idolatry that renders nature a function of our subjectivity. Narcissus' reflecting pool written large is nature itself, the contemplation of which is a bewitching auto-eroticism. Untitled (2019), a 19 × 23 painting, is a landscape metamorphosed into an erotic looking glass. Here Vance incorporates a series of dots reminiscent of musical notes, and this music in turn links her landscape to the pastoral tradition. Her scattered notes evoke related ideas like synchronization, rhythm, and time, ultimately leading to Poussin's melancholy Et in Arcadia Ego. This dark side of eroticism, its link to death, manifests itself in Untitled (2019), a large 36 × 28 piece where Vance's sensuous swirls surround blackness.

Lesley Vance, *Untitled*, 2019. Oil on linen, 19 x 23 inches. Courtesy Bortolami, New York.

So Vance's exuberance, while strongly erotic, is also utopian in that it expresses a longing for a world of passion free of time. Attainable only in the Arcadia of the work of art, this Never-Never Land can only express itself in terms of negation. Thus Untitled (2019) [LV8904] reduces the wide swirls of her other painting to conflicting, abbreviated gestures, a dramatization of Vance's struggle to transform the empty canvas into her own territory.

Two other paintings, Untitled (2019) and Untitled (2019) confirm Vance's aggressive dominion over the canvas. In the former her orange ribbon delicately threads its way around a white structure, subtly but surely tying it down. In the latter, the orange ribbon becomes vectors of force riveting the structure, controlling it absolutely. In nine modestly sized paintings Lesley Vance performs a ritual of artistic power: there can be no question about who the boss is.

Judah, Hettie, "Lesley Vance," *frieze*, September 2018, p. 181

LESLEY VANCE
Herald St, London, UK

Lesley Vance prefers breathing space for her work. The 11 paintings in her solo exhibition at Herald St (all *Untitled*, 2018) are sparely hung across both of the gallery's venues. Vance's instinct is just: these paintings have a tight, interiorized logic that would be too easy to skim past were they crowded together. It takes time and attention for them to start revealing their oddness.

Each work in this series carries its own restrained palette, often of three colours – deep cobalt, scarlet and ash; lemon, pewter and ultramarine; ochre, black and white – with the paint engaged in two distinct processes. A loose, gestural undercoat, scraped and wiped back until the colours are smushed and streaky, appears in the finished compositions as areas of dynamic movement worming between more solidly painted shapes and structures. These, at first, read as hard-edge flat but are, instead, subtly descriptive of three-dimensional forms. Like still life or even landscape paintings conducted on an alien plane, the works offer physical shapes responding to a light source.

These suggestions of land- or dreamscapes are in keeping with Vance's earlier concerns. The fleshy, vegetal romanticism of her works from the early 2000s took the overheated bucolic colours of the pre-Raphaelites into the humid territory of adult fairytale: body parts and buds mingled among the drippy paint. Her 'Finer Days' show at David Kordansky Gallery in 2007 was of feathery, nocturnal still-life painting – urchin shells and anemones, dying poppies, a faun's horn – isolated in the darkness (at the time, the artist cited Juan Sánchez Cotán and Francisco de Zurbarán as influences). Their crepuscular mood and suggestion of subject was carried over into Vance's subsequent abstractions, among them a gothy-toned untitled painting shown in the 2010 Whitney Biennial.

Perhaps it is the heat blistering London during the show, but Vance's latest series feels distinctly summery. In place of the doomy colouration of a 17th-century *vanitas*, these works share tonal kinship with René Magritte and Giorgio de Chirico – Vance's paintbrush has dipped into their clear blue skies, apple greens, salary-man monochromes, marble and sandstone. From De Chirico's sunset porticos, blank heads and strong, diagonal shadows, Vance has drawn arcs and loops, smooth ovoid forms and the suggestion of a single, otherworldly light source.

Compositionally, they bust spatial logic: there are small and very precisely painted points of overlap between planes within each picture that create M.C. Escher-like illusion. In the most exciting pieces, Vance plays with translucence as if faithfully portraying sheets of milky or coloured acrylic.

The effect, in what I have come to think of as her 'clean' works, is of the artist creating, first, a collaged relief from painted paper and then recording it in oils. I've not seen Vance work in collage or, indeed, sculpture. These works certainly suggest a flirtation with both – I wonder what would happen if she leapt off the canvas into three dimensions? Is she ever tempted? Certainly she thinks sculpturally.

There are also 'dirty' works, in which those smeared, underlying gestural portions dominate. In the most striking, ribbons of solid black and clear ochre occupy a whitish ground: between them boil residual streaks of black paint, like toxic fumes from a factory chimney in an environmental fable.

While each has reached it from a different trajectory, the territory Vance is exploring – gesture, dirt and kinesis providing a seamy underlayer to clean, frictionless abstract form – is one also visited by Tomma Abts in a concurrent show at London's Serpentine Gallery. The works, of course, are very different: Abts's tight, geometrical abstractions show flashes of a sprayed and spattered surface beneath the crisply painted oil. The suggestion in both series of chaos beneath the control – dirt underlying the clean surface, softness beyond the hard edge – seems unpleasantly timely.

Hettie Judah

This page
Lesley Vance, *Untitled*, 2018, oil on linen, 79 × 61 cm

Eberstein, Amanda, Johathan, Kendall, Jaffe Tali, Minor and Michael, Slenske, “The LALA List,” *LALA*, Premiere Issue, 2017, pp. 49-53

LALA

With Los Angeles quickly becoming the cultural capital of the country, there is no shortage of must-see openings, events and happenings occurring throughout the city at any given moment. So where to turn your attention first? We've put together our cheat sheet of the people, places and things to have on your radar right now.

BY **AMANDA EBERSTEIN, JONATHAN KENDALL, TALI JAFFE MINOR AND MICHAEL SLENSKE**

Lesley Vance's *Untitled*, 2017

Los Angeles-based artist Lesley Vance, one of the founding artists of David Kordansky Gallery, is preparing for her fifth solo show there, which opens May 19. In "12 paintings," her abstract language will speak across oil paintings and watercolor collages on her largest canvases to date. davidkordanskygallery.com

Ellis, Ryan E., “Curiosities of light and sight: a survey of five artists’ application of color and form,” *Malibu Magazine*, December 2017, pp. 72-83

MALIBU
MAGAZINE

curiosities of light and sight

A SURVEY OF FIVE ARTISTS' APPLICATION OF COLOR AND FORM

Written by
E. Ryan Ellis

Presently, the sun's setting in Malibu. The city is being blanketed in coolness and I'm writing about art. The framed photographs on the wall are slashing violent angles of shadow across the wall. And I'm writing about art. There is a misconception that to be able to write about art you must know all of art's history. That you must have a degree in art or you must be some hifalutin critic using hifalutin words. It's not true. To write about art you need to be capable of engaging a piece of art; to be present with a piece of art; to feel your feelings; to try to understand the person who made it. Then you have to take those feelings and mold them into words on a page. This is what's hard. Not everyone wants to be brought down into the depths of hell with a painful piece of art, then drag themselves out to do the work of writing about it. Not everyone wants to take the time to stare, for long periods of time, at something that can quickly come off simplistically. Rothko used two or three colors shaded together, but what Rothko *really* uses is the harmony of color and size. His work is meant to overwhelm you with emotion from the size and the natural human reaction to color. Certain colors, and certain colors combined, can wage war against our sympathies.

Featured herein we've chosen a combination of five artists who use color to assail the senses of the viewer. The differences between the artists are stark but all are adept at casting different hues through their work, at the aim of translating emotions.

Christina Quarles
Claire Tabouret
Lesley Vance
Monica Kim Garza
Whitney Hubbs

Ellis, Ryan E., “Curiosities of light and sight: a survey of five artists’ application of color and form,” *Malibu Magazine*, December 2017, pp. 72-83

lesley vance

los angeles

■ OPPOSITE "Untitled," (2017). Oil on linen. 31 x 24 x 3/4 inches. Courtesy the artist and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen

■ BELOW "Untitled," (2017). Oil on linen. 31 x 24 x 3/4 inches. Courtesy the artist and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo: Fredrik Nilsen

Lesley Vance is an artist that lives and works in Los Angeles. Vance's art ranges from floristic leaves of color to cursive abstraction—but her works always show an incredible ability consideration for color, lines and form.

MM In many of your paintings there is almost a material difference between colors. Do you consider this when creating a work?

LV Yes, I hadn't thought about it that way but I seem to. I am a lover of ceramics, and a big part of my attraction to that medium has to do with the fact that color is literally a material. Color is a force: it just *is*.

MM What criteria do you use to critique your work?

LV I am waiting for the work to feel like its existence was inevitable, but I also want it to feel mysterious even to myself. I could never remake any of my paintings - the compositions come from the act of painting itself so that the entire life of the painting, up to that point, exists there.

MM Do you consider the specific space that you're filling when you're creating an artwork?

LV I have been working in primarily one size lately—31 x 24 inches—so I am aware by now the dimensions of the space I'm filling. But I don't really consider that consciously when I'm creating an artwork.

MM Do you have a routine of preparation that you go through each time you paint? If yes, can you describe it?

LV I don't have a routine, but I like to have a full working day of, ideally, eight or more hours to devote to painting. If the studio day is shorter for whatever reason I will work on watercolors.

MM Have you ever broken a work, and used it to make something new?

LV I haven't 'broken' a work, but I often intentionally wreck what I've been working on if the painting is just not coming together how I'd like, or if the composition is boring to me - messing things up usually solves the problem and opens up possibilities I could have never gotten to otherwise. I definitely believe that creation comes from destruction.

MM Are your works inspired by the environment of Los Angeles?

LV The feeling of light and the momentum that turns inward in my compositions, as well as the vertical orientation, are probably influenced subconsciously by Los Angeles.

MM What has inspired you recently?

LV This is ever changing. I was just in London and saw the fantastic Matisse in the Studio show at the Royal Academy, and then walked 2 blocks to see a gallery show of late De Kooning paintings—the way these paintings make me think about time and speed spins my head around. And the Magritte Museum in Brussels is always fantastic—the longer I spend looking at those paintings the weirder they get. I get a lot of pleasure out of how impossible they are to figure out. **MM**

Ellis, Ryan E., “Curiosities of light and sight: a survey of five artists’ application of color and form,” *Malibu Magazine*, December 2017, pp. 72-83

Griffin, Jonathan, “Zusammen Für Sich,” *Blau*, October 2017, pp. 54-61

BLAU

ZUSAMMEN

Griffin, Jonathan, “Zusammen Für Sich,” *Blau*, October 2017, pp. 54-61

Griffin, Jonathan, “Zusammen Für Sich,” *Blau*, October 2017, pp. 54-61

Bitte sag jetzt nichts!

Die Malerin LESLEY VANCE und der Bildhauer RICKY SWALLOW teilen sich Haus, Bett, Kind und Kunstsammlung. Selbst im gemeinsamen Studio herrscht Harmonie – solange sich beide an die Regeln halten. Ein Besuch bei einem Paar, das den Schlüssel zur perfekten Künstlerbeziehung kennt.

Von *Jonathan Griffin*

Direkt vor dem neuen Atelier von Ricky Swallow und Lesley Vance im kalifornischen Burbank steht die größte Ikea-Filiale der USA. Der blau-gelbe Gigant war im Oktober 2015, als die Künstler die ehemalige Greenscreen-Fabrik kauften, noch nicht da – aber jetzt, wo die beiden endlich die Renovierungsarbeiten beendet haben und die Kisten voller Werkzeuge, Materialien und Kunstwerke ausgepackt sind, zieht das Möbelhaus die Massen an.

Vance ist Malerin. Sie kocht, wenn sie Zeit hat, am liebsten ihr eigenes Mittagessen. „Aber nun“, erzählt sie, „laufen unsere Mitarbeiter rüber zu Ikea und kaufen diese billigen Fleischbällchen.“ Swallows Bronzeskulpturen leiten sich von Tassen, Krügen, Uhren, Stühlen, Lampen und allerlei Alltagszeugs wie Stöcken, Seilen und Pappverpackungen ab – auch das gibt es bei Ikea im Überfluss. Doch der Künstler hat sich geschworen, nie auch nur einen Fuß in den Megastore zu setzen. „Es wäre doch viel zu einfach, alles mit Ikea auszustatten.“

RICKY SWALLOW, *DOUBLE ZERO WITH ROPE (DOUBLED)*, 2016, PATINIERTE BRONZE UND ÖLFARBE, 41 × 23 × 6 CM

Auftaktseite: LESLEY VANCE und RICKY SWALLOW, FOTOGRAFIERT VON EWAN TELFORD; SKULPTUR: RICKY SWALLOW, *SPLIT #1, PATINIERTE BRONZE UND ÖLFARBE*, 27 × 38 × 29 CM

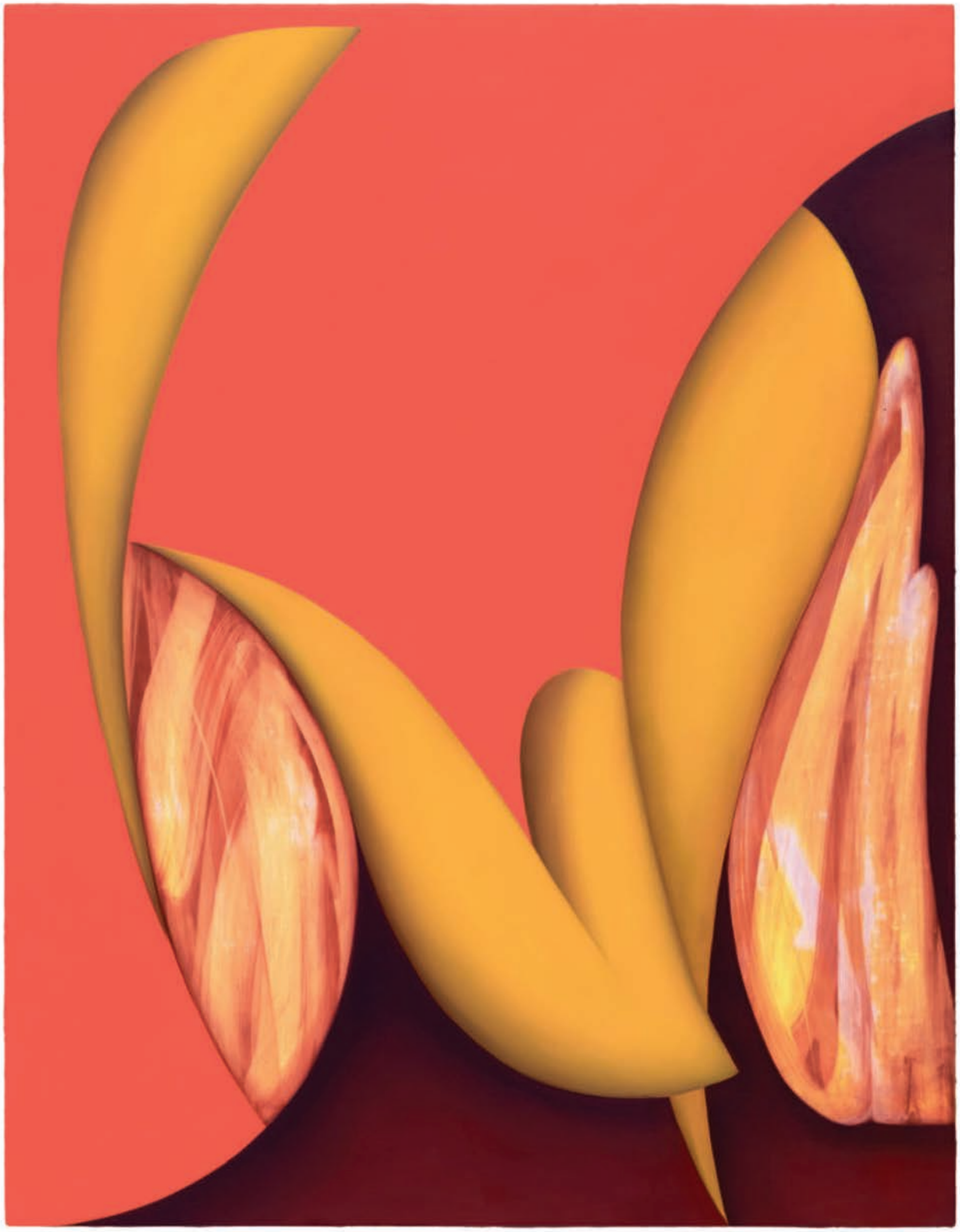
Rechte Seite: LESLEY VANCE, *UNTITLED*, 2017, ÖL AUF LEINWAND, 79 × 61 × 2 CM

RICKY SWALLOW, *SPLIT CONE WITH BALLS*, 2015, PATINIERTE BRONZE, 27 × 19 × 13 CM

Besucht man die beiden in ihrem Wohnhaus im Laurel Canyon mitten in den Hollywood Hills, wird klar, dass sie dem Design ihrer häuslichen Umgebung genauso viel Aufmerksamkeit und Sorgfalt widmen wie ihrer Kunst. Das klassische Holzhaus, das sie 2009 als „Wrack“ kauften und weitgehend selbst renovierten, sitzt auf einem steilen Hügel an einer gewundenen Sackgasse. Durch eine lange Fensterreihe geht der Blick auf ein Meer aus Eukalyptusbäumen und Eichen. Kolibris schwirren im Garten, Falken kreisen unter dem klaren, blauen Himmel. Das Haus ist einfach eingerichtet, voller Bücher, Kunst und mit all den Dingen, die die beiden seit ihrer ersten gemeinsamen Wohnung angehäuft haben.

Ricky Swallow und Lesley Vance arbeiten seit gut zehn Jahren Seite an Seite. Kennengelernt haben sie sich 2002, als

Griffin, Jonathan, “Zusammen Für Sich,” *Blau*, October 2017, pp. 54-61



Griffin, Jonathan, “Zusammen Für Sich,” *Blau*, October 2017, pp. 54-61

Der Weg vom kreativen Chaos zum Denkmuster an der Wand führt über einen akribischen Auswahlprozess: Ricky Swallows Seile, Bleche und Farbtöpfe bilden das Fundament für seine bunt leuchtenden Skulpturen. Deren spielerische Abstraktion passt ziemlich gut zu den Bildern seiner Frau – und zum handlichen Kunsthandwerk, das die beiden zu Hause sammeln

Vance, die damals am CalArts studierte, Swallow zu einem Vortrag über seine Arbeit einlud. Sie blieben in Kontakt, auch als Swallow von Los Angeles nach London zog. Im Jahr 2005 erhielt Vance eine Künstlerresidenz im französischen Giverny, wo Claude Monets Haus und Garten stehen. Und Swallow nahm den Eurostar nach Paris, um sie zu treffen. „Das war ein guter Anfang für eine Liebesgeschichte“, sagt Vance. Sie hatte einen Schlüssel zum Garten – und die Frischverliebten konnten hinein, wenn die vielen Touristen abends verschwunden waren. 2008 heirateten sie.

Auch beruflich war 2005 für beide ein bedeutendes Jahr: Swallow repräsentierte sein Heimatland Australien auf der Biennale von Venedig, mit 30 Jahren war er der Jüngste, dem diese Ehre jemals zuteil wurde. Und Vance zeigte in Los Angeles ihre erste Einzelausstellung bei der aufstrebenden Galerie David Kordansky. Sie wurde die erste offizielle Künstlerin im Programm. Swallow folgte ihr 2014.

Als Swallow ein Jahr später von London nach Los Angeles zurückkehrte, zogen die beiden sofort zusammen. Ihre erste Wohnung lag im Highland Park im Osten der Stadt und war zugleich Atelier, sodass die beiden sich schnell daran gewöhnten, nah beieinander zu arbeiten. Doch auch die engste Partnerschaft hat ihre Grenzen. Jahrelang teilten Swallow und Vance ein Atelier, in das sie eine Wand eingezogen hatten – wenn auch nur etwa so hoch wie ein Tennisnetz –, über die sie einander Kommentare und Fragen zuspielten. „Lesley musste durch mein Atelier, um in ihres zu gelangen“, sagt Swallow. „Es fühlte sich ein bisschen an wie in einer WG.“

Als Vance und Swallow dann Pläne für ihr neues Domizil in Burbank mit einem Architekten besprachen, war Vances erste Frage, wie es sich wohl mit zwei getrennten Atelierräumen lebe. Heute hat jeder einen

Griffin, Jonathan, “Zusammen Für Sich,” *Blau*, October 2017, pp. 54-61

eigenen Eingang, und da die Studios durch einen Flur getrennt sind, können sie einander weder sehen noch hören. Sie haben sogar getrennte Waschbecken für die Reinigung ihrer Arbeitsutensilien.

„Es dauerte Jahre, bis wir wussten, wie wir miteinander im Atelier leben wollen“, sagt Lesley Vance. Als Erstes erließ sie die Regel, dass Ricky ihre Arbeit nicht kommentieren darf, außer sie bat ihn darum. „Ich weiß, in welche Richtung ein Bild geht“, sagt sie. „Aber er nicht.“ Früher begann sie ein Bild, indem sie ein Stillleben komponierte, das sie dann immer weiter abstrahierte, bis nur noch das Gefühl räumlicher Tiefe und atmosphärischer Leuchtkraft blieb.

Vance ist stark beeinflusst von Barockmalern des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts wie Francisco de Zurbarán und Juan Sánchez Cotán, auch wenn ihre abstrakten Bilder in ihrer grafischen, zeitgenössischen Schärfe am Ende mehr mit Kubismus oder dem Bauhaus gemein haben. Neuerdings durchlaufen sie eine Reihe mehr intuitiver Transformationen: Improvisierte Gesten und Texturen sind in die Bilder hineingearbeitet, die nun aussehen, als seien sie in- und übereinandergefaltet.

Hinzu kommt, erzählt Vance, dass die Kommentare ihres Mannes eigentlich immer ermunternd waren – was bedeutete es aber, wenn er zufällig vorbeikam und nichts sagte? „Heute frage ich ihn nur nach seiner Meinung, wenn ich das Gefühl habe, etwas in einem Gemälde funktioniert nicht.“ Swallow erwidert: „Sobald ich meine, dass eine bestimmte Ecke falsch oder unnötig ist, antwortet Lesley sofort: ‚Ich wusste es! Ich wollte es nur noch mal prüfen!‘“ Vance nickt: „Das passiert oft.“

Ihre Arbeitsweisen sind total verschieden. Während Vance in dünnen Schichten Ölfarbe aufträgt, die innerhalb von ein oder zwei Tagen trocknet, also unter Zeitdruck zahllose Entscheidungen treffen muss, sind Swallows Skulpturen meist aus Pappe, Seil oder Holz geformt, die er dann in einzelne Bronzestücke gießt und mit Farbe überzieht. „Ich fertige meine Konstruktionen sehr schnell und intuitiv an“, sagt Swallow, „wenn etwas nicht funktioniert, wird eben keine Skulptur daraus.“

„Wenn Lesley im Atelier abtaucht, freut sie sich, wenn jemand das Essen unter der Tür durchschiebt“, sagt Swallow. „Ich lasse mich schneller ablenken“

Auch im Temperament unterscheiden sich die beiden Künstler. „Wenn Lesley im Atelier abtaucht, freut sie sich, wenn jemand das Essen einfach unter der Tür durchschiebt“, sagt Swallow. „Sie kann locker zwölf Stunden arbeiten, ohne den Raum zu verlassen. Ich lasse mich schneller ablenken.“ Allein der akribische technische Prozess des Gießens und Lasierens seiner Skulpturen in der Gießerei, die einige Kilometer vom Atelier entfernt liegt, zwinge ihn zur Konzentration.

Bekannt wurde er mit sorgsam geschnitzten Holzskulpturen, darunter jener großen Arbeit, die er in Venedig zeigte – *Killing Time* (2003/04), ein Esstisch, auf dem Fische und andere Meerestiere arrangiert waren. Alles aus Jelutong, einer Art Oleanderholz, und aus Ahorn geschnitzt. Als das Paar 2009 das Haus im Laurel Canyon kaufte, gab Swallow seine Arbeit für ein paar Monate auf, um sich der Renovierung zu widmen. Das aufwendige Schnitzen erschien ihm plötzlich wie eine Einschränkung, und die Pause erlaubte es ihm, in eine neue Richtung zu denken. Neidvoll blickte er auf die Maler, die er kannte. „Ich wusste nicht, dass ich meine Kunst verändern will“, sagt Swallow. „Aber ich merkte, dass ich mich im Atelier anders verhalten und glücklicher sein wollte. Es ist wie bei einem Tennisspieler, der sich verletzt und dann fitter als vorher zurückkommt.“

Zu behaupten, Swallow verwirkliche seine künstlerischen Interessen nun in ehrgeizigen Bauprojekten, klingt

RICKY SWALLOW, *RECLINING SCULPTURE (OPEN) #4*, 2016, PATINIERTE BRONZE, 12 × 42 × 23 CM

Griffin, Jonathan, “Zusammen Für Sich,” *Blau*, October 2017, pp. 54-61

LESLEY VANCE, *UNTITLED (AFTER GELBE FORM)*, 2010, ÖL AUF LEINWAND, 31 × 23 CM

LESLEY VANCE, *UNTITLED*, 2017, ÖL AUF LEINWAND, 79 × 61 × 2 CM

vielleicht ein wenig platt. „Aber ich sehe das neue Atelier tatsächlich als Verlängerung meiner bildhauerischen Praxis. Es ist, was die Baustoffe angeht, ein sehr lebendiger Raum“, sagt er und deutet auf die geriffelten Stahldächer, das Sperrholz, die polierten Betonböden und die frei stehenden Stahlbalken des alten Industrielofts. „Das Gebäude verändert unsere Arbeitsweise. Daran führt kein Weg vorbei.“

Und es beeinflusst die Größe ihrer Arbeiten, die Ateliers sind dreimal größer als ihre Vorgänger. „Es gibt diese Erwartungshaltung der Kunstwelt, dass dein Werk immer größer werden muss“, sagt Swallow. „Ich glaube, ich habe das unbewusst immer vermieden. Es muss schließlich einen guten Grund geben, etwas auszudehnen. Nicht jede Skulptur ist für Innenräume gedacht, aber alles, was ich mache, so hoffe ich zumindest, hat einen häuslichen Bezug – in seiner Materialität geradeso wie in seiner Maßstäblichkeit.“ Auch Vance hielt ihre Leinwände früher stets in bescheidenen Formaten, selten wurden sie größer als 40 mal 60 Zentimeter. Dieses Jahr haben beide Künstler in größeren Galerien ausgestellt – Swallow erstmals bei Maccarone in New York, Vance in David Kordanskys neuen Räumen in Los Angeles. Prompt wurden auch ihre Arbeiten größer.

Die Frage des Maßstabs ist für Vance gekoppelt an den Blick auf ein Gemälde oder ein Objekt. Je größer es ist, desto weiter geht der Betrachter zurück; je kleiner, umso einladender wirkt es. „Ricky und ich fühlen uns von Dingen angezogen, die man in der Hand halten oder in die man hineinbeißen kann.“ Nirgendwo sonst wird das deutlicher als zu Hause, wo überall Keramiken, Webarbeiten und Designstücke stehen, zum Beispiel Bronzen des österreichischen Kunsthandwerkers Carl Auböck. Auch eine große Kollektion von „Grastöpfen“ des afroamerikanischen Keramikers Doyle Lane zählt dazu, der bis 2002 im Osten von Los Angeles arbeitete. Diese Töpfe – meist kaum größer als eine

Griffin, Jonathan, “Zusammen Für Sich,” *Blau*, October 2017, pp. 54-61

Mandarine – sind mit ganz verschiedenen Farben und Texturen überzogen und wie eine Ansammlung seltsamer Steine auf einer Kommode drapiert.

Swallow und Vance sind auch große Enthusiasten von Magdalena Suarez und Michael Frimkess – ein Ehepaar in seinen Achtzigern, das in Venice Beach Keramiken herstellt. Michael töpfert und Magdalena überzieht seine Gefäße mit wilden Zeichnungen, deren Muster von präkolumbischen und indigenen Traditionen inspiriert sind, aber auch von Werbung und Cartoons (vor allem von Popeye und Olive Oyl). Um den Kamin im Wohnzimmer haben Swallow und Vance Kacheln ausgelegt, die Magdalena gestaltet hat.

„Wir lieben eigentümliche, idiosynkratische Dinge mit persönlicher Ausstrahlung“, sagt Vance. Tatsächlich fühlt es sich so an, als gehörte zu jedem Stück im Haus eine eigene Geschichte, sei es eine Gruppe Keramikkameras des blinden Melbourner Künstlers Alan Constable oder das winzige gedrehte Bündel aus Plastik und Metall des rätselhaften Outsiderkünstlers Philadelphia Wireman. Auf Marmor montiert ist eine Bronze, aus der hölzerne Eisstiele herausstechen – Vances and Swallows Sohn Marsden fertigte sie mit zwei Jahren aus Knete, der stolze Vater goss sie in Bronze. Inzwischen ist Marsden drei, und seine künstlerischen Fähigkeiten seien den Bach runtergegangen, konstatiert Vance trocken.

RICKY SWALLOW, *SKEWED OPEN STRUCTURE WITH ROPE #3 (TURQUOISE)*, 2015, PATINIERTE BRONZE UND ÖLFARBE, 17 × 36 × 23 CM

Der Sammeldrang der beiden nahm eine entscheidende Wende, als sie begannen, weniger und dafür bedeutendere Dinge zu sammeln. Eine Konstruktion aus Pappe, Holz und Draht von Richard Tuttle mit dem Titel *Tiger Tail* von 1983 ist die wertvollste Anschaffung. „Es ist nicht nur das teuerste Teil im Haus, sondern auch das zerbrechlichste!“, sagt Swallow und meint die Fragilität der Konstruktion. Laut Tuttle soll die Arbeit niedrig hängen, etwa auf Brusthöhe. Das gefiel den Künstlern, die von ihrer Statur her beide kleiner als der Durchschnitt sind.

„Wenn ein Sammler sagt, er wusste nicht, dass wir verheiratet sind, ist das das beste Kompliment“, sagt Swallow

„Ich glaube, dass sich *Tiger Tail* auf unsere Arbeit ausgewirkt hat“, sagt Vance über das räumliche Rätsel, das sich wie die Spirale einer Orangenschale windet. „Ein Kunstwerk hat eine unglaublich kraftvolle Wirkung in einem Haus. Schließlich sieht man es jeden Tag.“ Vielleicht ist es das, was die Künstler am ehesten verbindet: die Art, wie sie die Einflüsse ihrer alltäglichen Umgebung miteinander teilen. Und das gilt auch, wenn sie es stets abgelehnt haben, im Doppel aufzutreten, und sich zu diesem Gespräch entsprechend durchringen mussten. „Wenn ein Sammler zu uns sagt, er wusste gar nicht, dass wir verheiratet sind, dann ist das das beste Kompliment“, sagt Swallow. Vance lächelt ihm zu und nickt.

ÜBERSETZUNG: GESINE BORCHERDT

LESLEY VANCE, XAVIER HUFKENS, BRÜSSEL, 27.10.-16.12.2017

RICKY SWALLOW, STUART SHAVE/MODERN ART, LONDON, MÄRZ 2018

Kostarias, Yannis, “Lesley Vance, A Kind of Painting” *The Steidz Magazine*, September 21, 2017, pp. 6-12

LESLEY VANCE

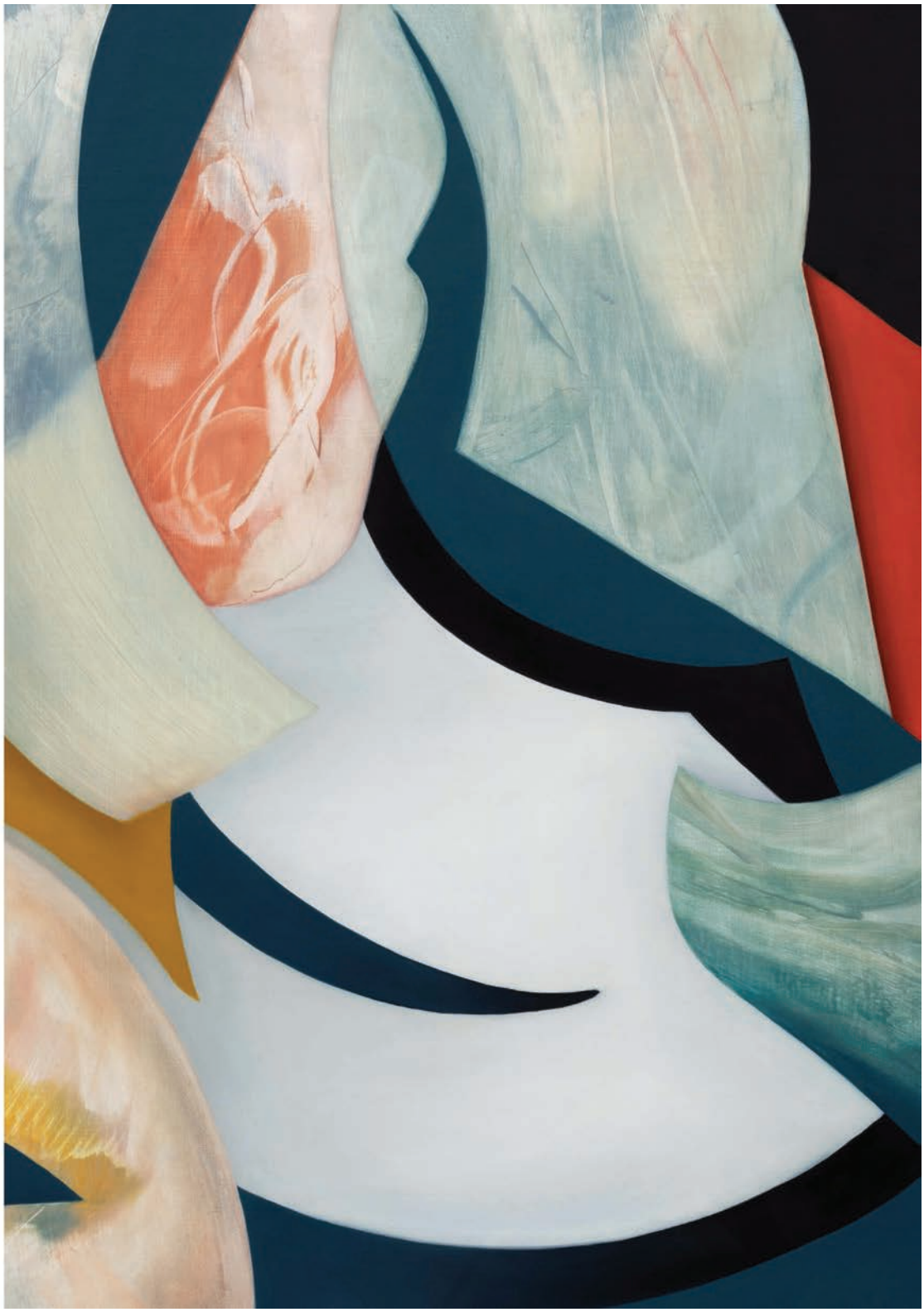
A KIND OF PAINTING

BY YANNIS KOSTARIAS

→

Lesley Vance, detail of *Untitled*, 2016,
oil on linen, 50.8 x 40.6 x 2.5 cm,
courtesy of the artist & David Kordansky Gallery,
Los Angeles, Photo © Fredrik Nilsen

Kostarias, Yannis, “Lesley Vance, A Kind of Painting” *The Steidz Magazine*, September 21, 2017, pp. 6-12



Kostarias, Yannis, “Lesley Vance, A Kind of Painting” *The Steidz Magazine*, September 21, 2017, pp. 6-12

ON THE PATH TO NEW ABSTRACT EXPRESSION,
LESLEY VANCE BYPASSES THE BOUNDARIES OF THE CANVAS,
GIVING FREE REIGN TO BRUSHSTROKES IN MOTION_

Lesley Vance, *Untitled*, 2014, oil on linen, 68.5 x 53.4 x 2.5 cm, courtesy of the artist & Xavier Hufkens Gallery, Brussels, Photo © Fredrik Nilsen

Lesley Vance demonstrates a relentless commitment to the conception, abstraction and deconstruction of a painted canvas. Her body of work remarkably implements diligent brushwork that highlights erased and obscured compositions. Vance lives and works in Los Angeles and her artworks have been exhibited internationally; from Unites States to Germany, Italy, United Kingdom and the Netherlands. From still life creations to abstract paintings and sculptures, the L.A. based artist features a wide variety. Actually, she has also been rather successful with ceramics. Her still life painting period was succeeded by abstraction, introducing a new era in her career via a series of aesthetically blurry abstract visualisations. At the same time, she takes her artistic technique significantly forward due to her personal need to modify her communication with the viewers through a new form of creative expression on canvas.

Beautiful examples of erasure characterize her work in the last several years. With her painting technique, the artist aims to obscure or to artificially introduce an abstract representation. Hand movements reflect rhythmic paint applications on canvas rendering abstract geometric compositions and other elusively amorphous depictions. Vance's techniques embrace a hidden visual vocabulary that conveys notions of mystery, dynamism and disillusion. Dynamic curves painted by a various range of contradictory angles and colours consist an interesting interplay of stroke arrangements on canvas; they potentially unveil more personal traces of her memories.

Still, what is delightful about her art is a continuous contrast between deliberately ethereal forms of abstract visualizations and her zeal for darker backgrounds. Using warm vibrant colours and fragmented configurations on the canvas, she successfully manages to bring out motion and sensation. On one hand, her depictions demonstrate a sort of slight illusion which create confusion at the first glance. On the other hand, this creative tension generates a wake-up call or a creative exercise for the mind, which finally ends up in something intimate and meaningful.

Vance's work seems to embody some art references to artists, such as Francis Picabia's abstract period. She re-introduces these abstract compositions into contemporary depictions and conversations with her audience. Executed in oil on linen and watercolours, Vance employs a palette that creates a dynamic fusion of luminous shapes in contradiction with darkened backgrounds. Her paintings serve as serial explorations into creative temperament, dynamic flow and spatial movement. Challenging the geometrical forms of her amorphous arrangements on canvas, the artist manages to methodically experiment the wide range of visual effects' interactions that can be captured by her spatial interpretation and engaging use of colours. //

LESLEY VANCE

Los Angeles, USA
born in 1977
-
represented by
Xavier Hufkens
Gallery, Brussels
and David
Kordansky
Gallery,
Los Angeles

Kostarias, Yannis, “Lesley Vance, A Kind of Painting” *The Steidz Magazine*, September 21, 2017, pp. 6-12

Kostarias, Yannis, “Lesley Vance, A Kind of Painting” *The Steidz Magazine*, September 21, 2017, pp. 6-12

Kostarias, Yannis, “Lesley Vance, A Kind of Painting” *The Steidz Magazine*, September 21, 2017, pp. 6-12

Kostarias, Yannis, “Lesley Vance, A Kind of Painting” *The Steidz Magazine*, September 21, 2017, pp. 6-12

« Vance's techniques

embrace a hidden visual vocabulary »

“David Kordansky Gallery – Lesley Vance: 12 Paintings,” *Fabrik*, July 2017, pp. 69-71

Lesley Vance, *Untitled*, 2017. Oil on Linen. On view at David Kordansky Gallery.

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY
Lesley Vance: 12 Paintings
(May 19-July 1, 2017)
Words Shana Nys Dambrot

Oxblood, indigo, eggshell; sky blue, canary yellow, blood orange; the smooth knots of innards, the unfurling of silky banners, the gently impossible curves of Mobius strips, the drybrush gesturalism of calligraphy; saturated color blocks and flatly contoured sky ribbons; wet textures of ink and enamel, shadows falling like a trompe l'oeil vignette. All of this and more lives and breathes, writhes and wriggles, loves and laughs in this captivating and compelling suite of new, untitled oil on linen paintings by Lesley Vance. Though each individual work expresses an individual soul (all measure 31 x 24 inches), a connective motif of serpentine interruptions arrays itself throughout the collection, where variations in the lexicon of chromatics and made marks rearrange themselves like conjugated verbs.

Pictorially eccentric—something like Twombly mimicking the Futurists—active and unsentimental, compressed like a botanical or geological cross-section lab sample, these works are demonstrably, objectively, assuredly non-figurative, and yet possess the emotionally evocative organic detail of familiar imagery. At times, the compositions read like enlarged microscopics, extreme close-ups on cursive writing or distressed cellular walls. Vance's confident deployment of a range of brushwork techniques and surface treatments into optical and graphic puzzles creates strange versions of pictorial space, not unlike O'Keefe in the way abstraction and imagery flagrantly fungibly commingle in their atmospheres.

One quality which makes these works a triumph of formalism ensconced in vibrant aesthetics is the surety and clarity of Vance's compositional elements, when juxtaposed with the paradoxical dynamism of their own seafaring motion. They are both fast and slow, meditative and gyroscopic, clean and rough, managing to fuse divergent threads of modern abstraction into singular hybrid visions that demonstrate rather than merely illustrate their ideas.

“LESLEY VANCE, ‘12 PAINTINGS’ @ DAVID KORDANSKY,” *2-Times.com*, June 8, 2017

2-TIMES[×]

Untitled, 2017. PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF THE ARTIST & DAVID KORDANKSYGALLERY, LOS ANGELES, INSTALLATION & INDIVIDUAL VIEWS, FREDRIK NILSEN

2-TIMES · ART · LESLEY VANCE,
‘12 PAINTINGS’ @ DAVID KORDANSKY
—

“SOMETHING THAT OCCURS QUICKLY, WITHOUT PREMEDITATION, IS PATIENTLY GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO SOLIDIFY AS A COMPLETE IDEA, A PROCESS THAT SPEAKS TO THE MIND’S CAPACITY TO SUBSEQUENTLY MAKE SENSE OF SUDDEN EVENTS...”

THE EXHIBITION: IS MILWAUKEE BORN / LOS ANGELES-BASED VANCE’S FIRST SOLO WITH DAVID KORDANSKY IN THREE YEARS, FOR WHICH THE ARTIST PRESENTS 12 NEW PAINTINGS THAT SHARE THE SAME DIMENSIONS AND VERTICAL FORMAT, ALLOWING FOR A PARTICULARLY NUANCED EXPERIENCE OF THEIRINTERIOR SHAPES AND BOLD, PRIMARY HUES.

COMPOSITION: ALL 12 WORKS, FEATURE OIL ON LINEN.

FOR VANCE’S 12 PAINTINGS: “SUCH TENSION BETWEEN THE KNOWN AND THE UNKNOWN DRIVES BOTH THE MAKING OF THE WORK AND THE STATES OF LOOKING IT ENGENDERS, PROVIDING AN ANALOGUE FOR THE PARADOXICAL ACTION OF EXPERIENCE, WHICH REVEALS A WORLD THAT ONLY GETS STRANGER THE LONGER ONE LIVES IN IT.”

ON VIEW AT: DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY, 5130 W EDGEWOOD PL, LOS ANGELES, CA 90019, UNITED STATES.

Tauer, Kristen, “Lesley Vance Mounts New Work at David Kordansky Gallery,” *WWD.com*, May 24, 2017

WWD

Lesley Vance Mounts New Work at David Kordansky Gallery

The abstract artist has 12 recent paintings on display.

By Kristen Tauer on May 24, 2017

Lesley Vance’s new paintings, now on exhibit at David Kordansky Gallery, are all about speed.

“With this body of painting, I’ve been thinking a lot about pace and speed. Some things moving fast, and some things that are moving slow,” the L.A.-based abstract artist explains of her 12 latest works. “I think because the original gesture from where [the painting] starts is very fast, there’s a lot of speed in them,” she continues. “They start in this kind of chaotic speedy way, and then within the painting it gets slower and slower each stage of the painting.”

Whether she’s building a painting from an exploration of gesture and speed, or a concrete object, Vance describes herself as a process-based artist. “I never know what I’m going to do when I start a painting. I’m not someone who has an abstract vision in my head and then I put that down,” she says. “I’m not really thinking about anything I’m doing, I’m just sort of waiting for something to happen that inspires me or excites me, that I think I want to exist, that I think is a good beginning to a painting. You have to pay enough attention where you realize that something good is happening, but not too much attention that you’re forcing something to happen. Then the painting builds itself that way.”

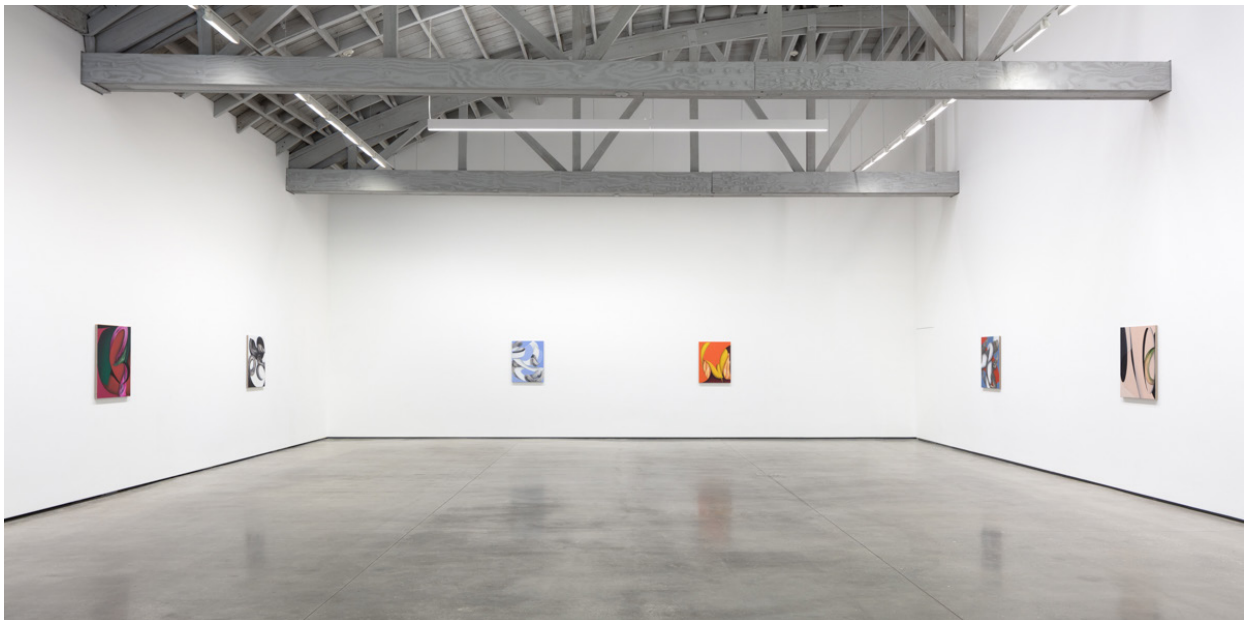
Vance offers no simple literary clues into her work; each painting is “Untitled.” “I’d rather it be kind of an open-ended experience of just looking at what’s happening in the painting,” she says. “Whatever I called it, someone would try to find that in the painting.”

Known for her small canvases, Vance’s latest paintings also represent a scaling-up — although at 31 by 24 inches, they are still much smaller than most contemporary paintings. “I think I wanted to move away from a certain preciousness. And also because I’ve been getting more interested in the idea of movement and different speeds happening, it just started to feel right,” Vance says of working with the larger canvas size. Although slightly larger, they retain a quality of intimacy, reflective of her approach. “I like the kind of paintings that are scaled for domestic space, like a real living space,” she says. “Something that you could see in someone’s house, not in like a corporate office lobby.” Despite the scale, her work is spaced out within the gallery, which allows the paintings to expand beyond the canvas borders and into the gallery’s white space. “It’s almost like they’re magnets, if you have two of the same charge. If you

hang [the paintings] too close together, they really fight. hey don’t want to be hung close together,” Vance says of the installation. “Which is the instinct with small paintings all the time — people want to hang them close together.”

 he exhibit also marks a continuation of Vance’s relationship with David Kordansky. She was one of the gallery’s first artists, and her work was shown in its inaugural exhibition in 2003. “[Kordansky] is doing his own thing, he’s not paying attention to what I’m doing in here and letting it affect him, but I do feel like we’ve grown up together,” Vance offers. “ here’s a feeling of we’ve done this together.”

On view at David Kordansky Gallery through July 1.



Jeppesen, Travis, “Lesley Vance,” *Artforum.com*, Critics’ Picks, July 14, 2016

ARTFORUM

Lesley Vance

MEYER RIEGGER I BERLIN
Friedrichstrasse 235
June 30–July 30

To judge by size alone, you’d think these watercolors on paper were what is often described as modest, but they’re actually not. Gesture plays too great a role; instead, there is a dazzling viscosity—a sexiness, even. In one blue-and-yellow piece (all works untitled and 2016), the yellow is deployed sparingly, articulating petal and stem shapes against the blue background. The bumblebee shade stays true to the liquid nature of the medium, congealing and swimming in the center of the composition, while the cerulean that allows it to flourish has been disciplined into strict swaths.

In other paintings, it is the line that dominates the plane—one motif is a series of thin black snakes calligraphically moving through the scene, with a wildness, speed, and recklessness. It’s all abstract, but, as in the best abstractions, it is fun to tease out shapes that replicate the real world, such as a tangle of bloodred branches seeming to emerge from a mass of indiscernible green foliage. These works will certainly be recognizable to fans of Lesley Vance’s oil paintings, though perhaps here the concerns are just as plastic as they are floral. They are contained by the glass and the frame, maybe, but they are also limitless in their vine-like grabbing toward implications unknown.

Lesley Vance, untitled, 2016, watercolor on paper, 16 x 13 x 1".

— *Travis Jeppesen*

Ollman, Leah, “Lesley Vance, David Kordansky,” *Art in America*, Exhibition reviews, February 2014, p. 104

Art in America
FEBRUARY 2014
EXHIBITION REVIEWS

Lesley Vance: Untitled, 2013, oil on linen, 10 by 12 inches; at David Kordansky.

LESLEY VANCE
David Kordansky

With no apparent fronts or backs, the forms in Lesley Vance’s paintings are slippery as Möbius strips. Edge becomes plane, plane dissolves. Broad ribbons fold over and peel away. Inner elides into outer, outer into inner. Bulges flatten, and flat planes swell. The impenetrable turns permeable before dissipating entirely.

Six or seven years ago, Vance, based in Los Angeles, was painting still lifes haunted by Zurburán and Cotán. She continues to work from studio arrangements of rocks, shells, horns and ceramic objects that she sets up inside a cardboard box, lights dramatically and photographs. Her Spanish forebears have receded somewhat; they are traceable mostly in the exquisite play of sheer luminosity emerging from deep dark ground. The legibility and palpability of her subjects have markedly diminished. What remains might be read as time performing itself in space. Slippery.

The oil paintings (all 2013) are modest in size, many as small as 9 by 11 inches, making for intimate encounters. Vance paints wet on wet, finishing each piece in one or two days. They are less meditations on than responses to the history of potent, mysterious image-making (she counts Magritte and de Chirico as formative) and, more directly, to the kind of still-life photography in which the image is rendered as a matter of light and dark tonal passages on a single plane. What she conceives is a distinctive sort of illusionistic abstraction, its visual presence a balance between elusive secret and seductive fact.

The work has an uncannily strong kinship with Francis Bruguière’s 1920s photographs of cut paper, similar in their spatial ambiguity, and in the way tangible forms lose substantiality and become pure light, shadow and motion. The lyrical accretion of fragments in Vance’s recent endeavors invokes collage, while their rhythmic interplay of solid and void conjures the sculptural space of, for example, works by Archipenko.

For all this cross-disciplinary affinity, Vance’s practice is fundamentally rooted in the liquidity of paint and the balletic, improvisational movements of the hand. Scraping with a palette knife, Vance thins her strokes to a gleaming translucency, occasionally baring the weave of the supporting canvas. As she invests the linear forms with directional energy, she brings notions of pace and duration to the fore. Shapes overlap and interpenetrate, viscous plumes stretch, curl and bend. Some have firm contours and blurred interiors, some are rimmed by light and some made weighty by shadow. Gravity may be alluded to, but is moot. Landscape suggests itself, as do bodily curves, angles and depressions. One area of a canvas might grant the traction of comprehension, in terms of spatial logic and coherence, but others will fruitfully contradict it. These paintings are not, in any case, maps serving destinations as much as promising roads, drawing themselves as they go.

—Leah Ollman

Fried, Laura, “Lesley Vance,” *Flash Art*, Reviews, January / February 2014, p. 99

Lesley Vance

David Kordansky, Los Angeles

Despite their compact scale, Lesley Vance's abstractions are charged with an oppositional logic, at once molten and concrete, muscular and fine. In a characteristically spare installation at David Kordansky, the artist presents a dozen new untitled paintings and watercolors that continue her exploration of suspended abstraction. Here Vance further advances her bold palette: the push toward saturated blues, deep and verdant greens, and diaphanous whites congruently marshal light and refuse it, allowing her to lift large surfaces while emphasizing the voids beneath. Wide, fluid brushstrokes warp and weft within denser forms, tucking and shouldering to create the specter of a still life unmoored, reset within a new visual logic.

For those who have been looking closely these last years, one can't help but see that Vance has shifted to the landscape format in some of these newest pictures. In the past, the fixed scale and portrait orientation of her paintings had taken on a Morandi-like commitment to the possibilities that can emerge among the semblance of uniformity. Now this (only occasional) horizontal shift feels rather radical and refreshing. In each tableau, slivers of shadow buoy her figures forward, and discrete shapes emerge and collapse simultaneously. In a practice so studied, so measured and slow, these subtle maneuvers in color, light and line assert themselves palpably.

The watercolors, in contrast, seem a wholly different experiment. Figure and ground naturally operate with less clear distinction, as shapes coalesce and intersect into liquid gesture. For Vance, who would paint from still lives composed in the studio, these abstractions appear ever more ethereal. Happily, the artist remains dedicated to an intimate scale. The generous spacing and rhythm between works compels close looking, and yet each picture at once reaffirms and challenges the next. As ever, these calculations allow Vance to propose a paced experience of color and light, while pulling our gaze into the contained space of the small frame, into her strange and permeable world.

by LAURA FRIED

Lesley Vance, Untitled, *2013. Photo by Fredrik Nilsen. Courtesy of David Kordansky, Los Angeles*

Hudson, Suzanne, “Lesley Vance, David Kordansky Gallery,” *Artforum*, Reviews, January 2014, p. 219

LOS ANGELES

Lesley Vance

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

Still life has long occupied a lowly position relative to more noble pursuits of, above all, painting historical subjects, though even the portrayal of someone's face would do. To depict flowers, foods, and tabletops is to look at the overlooked, as Norman Bryson puts it in his brilliant revisionist account, or to redress a historical inequity predicated on the format's modesty and domesticity. Though the genre is often belittled, many scholars have explored the strangeness of the still life's equal and opposite claims for symbolic meaning as well as for a resolutely material representational order. The same contradiction, in fact, underlies the very task of art history, as does a similar attention to minute aspects of surface and of the world that is caught there. Lesley Vance's latest show at David Kordansky, a well-curated hang of a dozen small paintings, elicits such thinking. Vance's works of recent years are essentially abstracted still lifes—stripped of the naturalism and artifice maintained in her earlier reproductions of bivalves and fruit, yet still rooted in close observation and reveling in the illusionistic abilities of the medium. These untitled oil-on-linen panels and watercolors ask what the job of painting might still be apart from mimesis and signification.

Each of Vance's exhibited canvases reveals itself slowly and partakes liberally of passages in which light bends in color, background pushes through, or planes inconceivably warp. Unlike earlier paintings in which Vance hewed closer to sketches or photographs of items—shells, horns, a piece of coral, a ceramic jar retrieved from a studio cache—placed in a specially lit cardboard box, these new paintings stray considerably farther from their referents. The artist now uses models as but a jumping-off point for her painterly elaborations, and the works are sphinxlike in that they reveal neither the implements nor the procedures through which they came to be. Her watercolors are especially prepossessing in this vein, tracing as they do the movements of Vance's hand, without revealing the sequence by which the image appeared. They, like the oils, are nonetheless far from ready-made, with paint deftly manipulated, often wet into wet.

Lesley Vance, *Untitled*, 2013, oil on linen, 21 x 26".

Even if Vance's works remain constructed, she now seems to relish the painting process far more than the setup, ditching the latter once under way with the former, such that even oblique representational capabilities cede to ever more fully attenuated formal play. This results in further ambiguity, not only about what she has chosen as foundational objects, but regarding what might be their dimensions, contours, properties, textures, or colors—all of which remain subject to the incursion of gestures that make and erase, often in the same stroke. This is to suggest that in pairing observation and formal experimentation, Vance's paintings have become more autonomous, and they are beholden, to a larger degree, to their own internal dynamics. Although emerald greens and deep navy and cobalt blues appear in more than one painting, as do bone whites and some lush peaches and pinks, each palette is far from selfsame, just as each picture takes its own unique shape. The paintings are also decidedly provisional. For Vance's compositions appear caught in one arrangement, when they could be dispensed in so many others. Without rendering the analogy too pat, Vance still trades on the precariousness at the heart of still life's claims for aesthetic permanence in the face of mortality, not as defensive emblem but as liberating conceit.

—*Suzanne Hudson*

Schwabsky, Barry, “Abolished Still Life,” *Lesley Vance*, Los Angeles: David Kordansky Gallery, 2013, pp. 3-5

Barry Schwabsky

ABOLISHED STILL LIFE

Someone who hadn’t seen it asked me what Lesley Vance’s work is like and I explained that she makes dense, dark paintings that in one way might remind you of analytic cubism and in another way might remind you of seventeenth-century Spanish still life—the *bodegónes* of Juan Sánchez Cotán, Francisco de Zurbarán, artists she refers to often—only abstract. But while it’s nice to be able to give a concise explanation of what someone’s paintings look like, that doesn’t necessarily explain what they are. Usually, what they are tends to be a bit harder to articulate than what they look like, despite or perhaps because of the fact that in painting, essence and appearance are so intertwined. What paintings are has a lot to do with matters of but not on the surface—with how and why the paintings came to appear as they do, and with the kinds of feelings those appearances evoke in someone who gives time to look and think about them. A paradox: paintings are all about the surface, but the surface points somewhere else beyond itself.

In any case, despite being separated by 300 years of art history, Cubism and *bodegónes* hardly make an unlikely pair. Although there are Cubist portraits and landscapes, still life is the prototypical subject matter of analytic cubism; it’s often said of cubist portraits that the artist has treated the person with the same cool neutrality that he’d approach a wine bottle or a guitar. And both kinds of painting downplay color, treating it austerely, as something to be used only with caution and the utmost seriousness. But they do this in different ways; early cubist paintings tend toward an allover evenness of chromatic intensity—they don’t typically reach the dramatic extremes of dark and light that seventeenth-century Spanish painting cultivates. In this, then, Vance reaches back beyond her Parisian precursors to her sources in the Baroque. On the other hand, she renounces the volumetric plenitude of the *bodegónes*, the way in which simple, unassuming objects such as fruits, vegetables, pottery, and slaughtered game could stand out with such preternatural intensity and concreteness amidst dark, featureless backgrounds. In Vance’s paintings, there are no objects—or anyway, no whole objects. As in cubist paintings where fragmentary signs conjure objects that never quite complete themselves—the painting must manifest its own concrete presence, not that of whatever it happens to picture; there are edges of things, aspects and facets, but never or rarely any closure. At best, the viewer must reconstruct the object on a speculative basis.

Schwabsky, Barry, “Abolished Still Life,” *Lesley Vance*, Los Angeles: David Kordansky Gallery, 2013, pp. 3-5

Given these resonances with the history of still life painting, it may seem paradoxical to say that it came as a surprise to me to learn that Vance actually does work from still life set-ups that she constructs in her studio. (She photographs them, then uses the photos as starting points for her painting process.) I found it surprising because, in effect, Vance seems so profoundly immersed in the history of still life painting that she would hardly need to bother setting up an actual still life; you’d think it was just a matter of riffling through her memory to find the right launch pad. And then, of course, there’s the matter of that crucial little proviso that I appended to my very first sentence: “only abstract.” In the end, these are not still lifes, even abstracted still lifes, but abstract paintings that might remind you of still life. In other words, no matter what the nature of the original set-ups, or of the photographs the artist makes of them, once she starts pushing the paint around, anything goes, and the objects, whatever they are, become little more than a memory.

Probably this is precisely the function of the photograph—to put the object at a distance. But that still begs the question: why does this artist need the object if it is only there to be effaced? If she wants to make an abstract painting, why all that preparation? Why not just start painting freely, albeit with the idea of still life in mind? I think the answer has something to do with this: that painting is not only about making but unmaking. It is about hiding as much as showing. Picasso himself famously defined his art as “a sum of destructions.” In Vance’s case, it seems she requires of herself a very concrete acquaintance with what it is that she is going to expunge or take apart. But it is not incumbent on the viewer to imagine what this might have been. The painting stands or falls on its own without reference to this hidden something—the painting’s MacGuffin, to borrow Alfred Hitchcock’s term for the finally irrelevant object around which the constellation of a plot may form, though one could also advert to Mallarmé and call this object a *ptyx*, “*aboli bibelot d’inanité sonore... ce seul objet dont le Néant s’honore*” (abolished knickknack of resonant vacancy... the sole object through which Nothing praises itself). It is at most as a sort of ghostly remainder, perhaps an aroma, like that whiff of sulfur that is supposed to linger in the air when a supernatural visitor has passed by. For the viewer, there is simply the feeling that something else must once have been there.

In a way, it might be better not to know what the starting point for these paintings is. And because Vance has not spoken in detail about what happens before she actually starts painting—“there are some objects I really enjoy painting,” she has said, “and I will pick these out to become part of new still lifes over and over,” without indicating what those objects might be—and she has not, to my knowledge, exhibited or published any of the photographs that are the intermediate stage in the process. We pretty much don’t know. We’re in the dark. And no wonder. The manifold guises of darkness in these paintings could be the subject of a separate

Schwabsky, Barry, “Abolished Still Life,” *Lesley Vance*, Los Angeles: David Kordansky Gallery, 2013, pp. 3-5

essay. How can darkness become translucent? I don’t know, but Vance makes it so. And like quarks and ice cream, her darkness comes in different flavors. In any case, the darkness that envelops Vance’s abstract used-to-be-still-lifes is not just a stylistic choice. It communicates something of how the paintings work. This darkness tells us that whatever it is that the paintings present to us is not a thing seen clearly. Rather, it is something glimpsed in flashes but otherwise taken in, not as a whole gestalt as it typically happens through the sense of sight, but rather in separate bits and pieces only painstakingly and in afterthought synthesized in the mind, as would be the case with an object one had explored primarily through the sense of touch. (Remember the perennial parable of the blind men and the elephant.) Vance’s paintings evoke haptic sensations as much as they do visual ones.

In any of them, one will perceive a multiplicity of planes, but they keep changing places or torqueing around each other. What seemed to be in front will suddenly shift back, and vice versa. She seems at times to build forms by wiping them away and to break shapes up by adding to them. There is a degree of illusionism, but the illusion tends to deconstruct itself. Yet the end of one illusion is always the beginning of another, so that the paintings, for all their intense stillness and inwardness, are always also in movement and therefore full of energy and life. Everything’s in transition. And there’s always a sort of enlivening awkwardness about how the various forms support and at the same time undermine each other; the paint surface itself is so suave, so “cool” that you could almost overlook the searching quality of Vance’s art were it not for this strange way the various mercurial fragments of form have of falling over and under each other—almost getting in their own way yet finally lending each other mutual support.

Finally, a word should be said about Vance’s watercolors. They don’t look like other people’s watercolors; she doesn’t handle the medium the way other artists do. She has remarked that the watercolors are endlessly reworkable, in contrast to the oil colors which she must resolve in a day or at most two because her technique is based on painting wet into wet. (This need to finish a painting in a single day is something she shares with colleagues as different from one another and from her as Alex Katz and Luc Tuymans.) There is an unusual density to Vance’s watercolors—similar to the density of her paintings but achieved in a different way. Here she eschews the dramatic contrasts of light and dark in favor of a more even overall luminosity, a sort of intangible smoldering glow. Compositionally, they can sometimes be more complex—or rather, more intricate—than the paintings, because the velvety darkness of the surrounds in the paintings can take on so many roles, so many guises, that need to be shared out among distinct elements in the watercolors. But the two groups of work are instantly recognizable as products of the same intensified intuition of space and form: mundane reality (which is, I think, what the “abolished” still life referent is always about) in a state of rapture.

Mizota, Sharon, "Minute, with muscular lines," *Los Angeles Times*, Art Review, November 13, 2013, p. D3

Los Angeles Times

ART REVIEW

Minute, with muscular lines

BY SHARON MIZOTA

Lesley Vance makes the kind of small, abstract paintings that would be easy to dismiss if they weren't so solid, so alive. The large main space at David Kordansky has been divided to better suit the work's intimate dimensions — the largest is 26 inches wide, but most are closer to letter size.

At this scale, Vance uses surprisingly large brushes, confidently creating swirls and swipes of striated color that weave in and around flatter, more solid masses. The paintings continually flirt with recognition, suggesting a body part here, a wisp of smoke there, but these references flit by as if animated and the works continue to elude apprehension. They seem to be endlessly interesting.

This is due in part to their engagement with art history. Many of Vance's curvilinear forms recall the heft and creaminess of a Georgia O'Keeffe skull, as well as her fine understanding of its brittle edges. Cubism, with its cacophony of irresolvable visual angles is also a touchstone, as are the dreamy, liquid spaces of Surrealism.

Vance's work also oddly recalls the bodily abstractions of Amy Sillman, albeit without the struggle. If Sillman lets it all hang out in the Abstract Expressionist manner, Vance is more decorous and sly. But their very different bodies of work both occupy the same space between representation and abstraction, continually breaking down the scaffolding of what we think we see.

David Kordansky Gallery

CONFIDENT swirls of color mark the abstractions of Lesley Vance.

Lesley Vance

Where: David Kordansky Gallery, 3143 S. La Cienega Blvd., Unit A

When: Through Jan. 4. Closed Sunday-Monday.

Contact: (310) 558-3030, *www.davidkordanskygallery.com*

calendar@latimes.com

Day, Charlotte, “A Secret Life of Paintings: Lesley Vance,” *Art and Australia*, Issue 51.2, November / December 2013, pp. 286-291

Day, Charlotte, "A Secret Life of Paintings: Lesley Vance," *Art and Australia*, Issue 51.2, November / December 2013, pp. 286-291

Untitled, 2012
Oil on linen, 43.2 x 34.3 x 2.5 cm
Courtesy the artist and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles
Photograph Fredrik Nilsen

A SECRET LIFE OF PAINTINGS: LESLEY VANCE

CHARLOTTE DAY

One thing that you may miss in reproductions of Lesley Vance's abstract paintings is their size. They are noticeably smaller, of a more domestic and intimate scale, than much spectacular and monumental contemporary painting. But Vance's paintings have presence. They invite close attention from the viewer, enticing you with their velveteen darkness, rich jewel-like colours, sensual brushstrokes and general mysteriousness.

Milwaukee-born Vance completed her Master of Fine Arts at the California Institute of the Arts, Los Angeles, in 2003 and has lived and worked in LA for many years. She came to prominence through the 2010 Whitney Biennial where her work was recognised for its distinctive combination of old worldliness and contemporaneity. Steeped in art history, Vance's compact, curious paintings are not the kind of artwork that immediately springs to mind when thinking about contemporary art made in LA. While European in feel, Vance's work also connects with a younger generation of LA-based artists interested in early modernism and crafts and design, who are firmly grounded in a studio-orientated practice.

Over 2012–13 Vance exhibited for the first time with her husband, Australian-born artist Ricky Swallow, in a two-person exhibition at LA's Huntington Art Gallery.[1] This exhibition afforded the opportunity to observe the way each artist draws on the still-life tradition, and has developed very particular responses to it. As a house museum with an eclectic collection of painting and decorative arts, the Huntington was a perfect location and context for Vance and Swallow: both work on a domestic scale; both often reference familiar household objects. While clearly dedicated to and immersed in their individual disciplines, Vance in painting and Swallow in sculpture, the exhibition revealed the ways in which their works slip between artforms, with the impression of three-dimensionality in Vance's paintings and flattening out of form in Swallow's patinated bronze sculptures cast from cardboard 'bootlegs'. It also revealed the very particular sense of temporality that is the hallmark of each artist's work.

Vance's paintings begin their life in the studio. Taking objects such as rocks, shells, horns and ceramic fragments as inspiration, Vance arranges and rearranges these collections into still-life compositions, which are then lit and photographed. The resulting photographic studies are the starting point for paintings that are produced under specific time constraints. Keeping the oil paint wet, Vance works over the surface of each painting with palette knife and big brushstrokes for a day or two at the most. This ensures that the painted surface is imbued with liveliness and the possibility of spontaneity. As Vance described: 'I do each painting in a day, so [the paint] all sits as one layer ... I want the image to all be in one layer, so you can't trace the steps backward to the original still life.'[2]

Whether aware or not of Vance's process, the viewer is likely tempted to relate to her untitled compositions, in the first instance, by looking for representational forms in them – like the edge of a table or shelf, or a plate or lemon, in one work; or in another, a silhouette, mask or face; or perhaps a rock in a landscape, or botanical specimens. The viewer may even be tempted to look sideways at a painting, as if to make more sense of it from this different vantage point.

Vance would, of course, be well aware of the viewer's habitual desire to seek out the recognisable in images. But, although grounded in studies of actual things, her paintings occupy a state of suspension between what is observed and what is evoked by what is observed – the *feeling* of objects in space and time. It is only when the viewer releases herself from the desire to relate forms to specific things that a greater world of possibilities begins to open up in the experience of looking at Vance's paintings.

Vance's earlier larger and more conventional representational paintings (pre-2009) appropriated key elements from the traditional

Day, Charlotte, “A Secret Life of Paintings: Lesley Vance,” *Art and Australia*, Issue 51.2, November / December 2013, pp. 286-291

Untitled, 2011
Oil on linen, 45.7 x 35.6 cm
Courtesy the artist and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles
Photograph Fredrik Nilsen

Day, Charlotte, “A Secret Life of Paintings: Lesley Vance,” *Art and Australia*, Issue 51.2, November / December 2013, pp. 286-291

Untitled, 2013
Oil in linen, 43.2 x 33 cm
Courtesy the artist and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles
Photograph Fredrik Nilsen

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still life, such as flowers or a collection of mussel shells, focusing in on the organic forms themselves rather than their symbolic role within a larger composition. The austerity and occasional flashes of brilliant colour in still-life paintings of seventeenth-century Spanish artists like Juan Sánchez Cotán and Francisco de Zurbarán have continued to be an important influence and point of reference for her artwork. And while her relationship to her still-life source material has shifted over time, becoming increasingly more peripheral, it is still possible to recognise how the quality of the still life as a record of a heightened and fleeting state of awareness continues to propel the production of her work.

VANCE WOULD, OF COURSE, BE WELL AWARE OF THE VIEWER'S HABITUAL DESIRE TO SEEK OUT THE RECOGNISABLE IN IMAGES. BUT, ALTHOUGH GROUNDED IN STUDIES OF ACTUAL THINGS, HER PAINTINGS OCCUPY A STATE OF SUSPENSION BETWEEN WHAT IS OBSERVED AND WHAT IS EVOKED BY WHAT IS OBSERVED – THE *FEELING* OF OBJECTS IN SPACE AND TIME. IT IS ONLY WHEN THE VIEWER RELEASES HERSELF FROM THE DESIRE TO RELATE FORMS TO SPECIFIC THINGS THAT A GREATER WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES BEGINS TO OPEN UP IN THE EXPERIENCE OF LOOKING AT VANCE'S PAINTINGS.

A notable quality of Vance's paintings is their sense of movement – they don't appear to sit still. In fact, the works can be characterised by perpetual shapeshifting and turning in, out and around on themselves, as if subject to some unseen movement or force. What is fascinating about these paintings is the way they move between surface and depth, solidity and fluidity, clarity and obscurity. Abstract forms appear in sharp focus and then blow out; outlines define and then disappear; colours come and are seen to dissolve and be washed away. There is an extraordinary push and pull between the creation of an illusory space and the revelation of the painting process itself. Vance skilfully achieves the coexistence of both in the one painting.

Vance's paintings appear to grant us special access to what may not usually be visible – inside, behind and looking through and past things. Especially when set against the darkest of backdrops, she creates the impression of looking into another dimension. Take, for example, the pale grey and chalky white painting with its swash of bright red (*Untitled*, 2012). A large part of this painting appears to have been purposely rubbed out, covered over or obscured. Only in one small area, like an open wound, can we peer into an unknowable darkness at its core. A number of paintings function in a similar way – as a threshold, looking from one space into another, or from the outside in. But then Vance will shift focus again, and it is impossible to establish a singular logic that can be applied across all paintings.

What is decipherable is Vance's passionate immersion in the history of painting. There is a deep knowledge and respect in her paintings for the intensity of the seventeenth-century still life, the visceral quality of the baroque, the dream state of surrealism, the cut-up of cubism and the modernist embrace of abstraction. As Vance has stated, 'There's so much in the history of painting, I can't even think of taking on anything beyond that.'[3] But she does take on painting directly. This is not an artist interested in nostalgic remakes or sampling. There is clear evidence here of a determination to make something of her paintings, to find a space between abstraction and representation, the past and the present that Vance can make her own. These are deeply introspective paintings, but they are also generous, open paintings that invite the viewer into a rare, intimate experience of art.

1 'Lesley Vance & Ricky Swallow' was on show at the Huntington Art Gallery, Los Angeles, 10 November 2012 – 11 March 2013.
2 Aimee Walleston, 'Five from the Whitney: Lesley Vance', *Art in America*, 16 February 2010, *www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-opinion/conversations/2010-02-16/five-from-the-whitney-lesley-vance/*.
3 ibid.

Greenberg, Kevin, “Lesley Vance,” *The Last Magazine*, Issue 10, April 2013

Lesley Vance, untitled, 2012. Photography by Fredrik Nilsen. Courtesy of the artist and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles.

LESLEY VANCE

By Kevin Greenburg

Greenberg, Kevin, "Lesley Vance," *The Last Magazine*, Issue 10, April 2013

Lesley Vance, untitled, 2012. Photography by Fredrik Nilsen. Courtesy of the artist and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles.

"I think of abstraction as a verb," says the painter Lesley Vance. "It is something that happens to my work while I am making it." Vance's paintings are exquisite things: shimmering chiaroscuro jewel boxes, equally indebted to abstraction and still life, seemingly extracted from the silent depths of an early morning dream. Vance collects sundries that she later arranges to inform her modestly-sized canvases. "I am usually drawn to organic or irregular shapes," she says. "Potter's wheel mistakes, broken shells, jagged pieces of ceramic, or anything I find on the ground." Vance is influenced by a wide range of art historical movements, but the two influences that might be most noticeable to the casual viewer are Surrealism, with its heady phantasms and blithe disregard for the rules of nature and perspective, and the inky depths, half-disclosed forms, and focused light of the Spanish still life. Vance explains: "My favorite artists from these periods—Zurbarán, Cotán, Magritte, de Chirico—presented representational spaces but took liberties with how gravity, light, color, even time functioned within them. But in the end they bring all their peculiar elements together with such resolve the mind never thinks of them as fantasy."

There is much of the Tenebrism of Caravaggio and his descendents in Vance's work, but there is also much more to admire; there are very few painters practicing today who share Vance's capacity to create works that are both timeless and thoroughly contemporary. Like the best works of art (and those most impervious to the passage of time), Vance's canvases seem to respect a private language as interior as it is sacrosanct. The best art arrests the viewer with its intimacy, and in person, it's easy to stare at Vance's works for an unreasonably long amount of time (as anyone who happened to have the good fortune of encountering them at the 2010 Whitney Biennial surely remembers). Quiet, elegant, and exquisite, these are the kinds of images that etch themselves onto your subconscious, even as their depths seem to elude the naked eye.

Perhaps that peculiar, intangible allure comes from the way Vance approaches her antecedents. "I don't like to organize painting movements in any rational chronology," she says. "And I tend to take from paintings selfishly—in other words, I don't often think about what a painter intended when he or she made the painting or even the historical time it was made in as much as what it's doing when I am looking at it."

Drohojowska-Philp, Hunter, “Lesley Vance and Ricky Swallow at the Huntington,” *Art Talk on KCRW*, January 10, 2013

ART TALK

Lesley Vance and Ricky Swallow at the Huntington

Host: Hunter Drohojowska-Philip

The Huntington offers blooming gardens, cream teas, Blue Boy and Pinkie. Walking into the foyer of the stately Art Gallery, a beaux arts mansion once home to collectors Henry and Arabella Huntington, is a step back in time with rooms delightfully furnished with 18th and 19th century furniture, English silver, French porcelains and some exquisite paintings made before the modern era. On the second floor, in a gallery with windows overlooking the grounds, there is a bold new development: paintings and sculptures by contemporary artists Lesley Vance and Ricky Swallow on view through March 11.

The artists happen to be married – she is from Wisconsin, he from Australia-- and in addition to sharing studio space, they share an apparent interest in the formal aspects of traditional art as they may be reinterpreted for the present. Vance’s paintings are modest in scale and her swirls of brush work play against shapes and patterns of solid color in a way that recalls earlier experiments in abstraction. Yet, she works from arrangements of still life objects that she photographs. As she paints, the picture morphs away from representation to play with illusions of two and three dimensionality and reflection. Her palette is muted, free from the artificial hues of acrylic paint or the digital realm.

Similarly, Swallow’s sculptures are no larger than a table lamp apart from the one about five feet tall and positioned in a hallway. He deconstructs everyday objects like cups, vases, even a small guitar, and remakes them in cardboard that is cast in bronze and patinated in various soft colors. His work looks as though David Smith and Pablo Picasso had turned to the contents of the kitchen cupboards and the utility closets for inspiration. Like Vance, they evince the pull of familiarity but there is the twist of making it work for today without being anachronistic.

Drohojowska-Philp, Hunter, “Lesley Vance and Ricky Swallow at the Huntington,” *Art Talk on KCRW*, January 10, 2013

Though all of their work was made in the past few years, the show seems a fitting continuation of the art of previous centuries arranged throughout the house. About one-third of the work was created specifically for this exhibition and the domestic scale is ideal for a gallery that was once living space. Huntington Curator Catherine Hess arranged the show with Christopher Bedford and as she notes in the catalogue, “all art was at one time contemporary.” Curiously, the experience of seeing the contemporary painting and sculpture refreshes the experience of seeing the grand manner portraits, the Chinese Chippendale chairs. This works well in an adjacent gallery where a single small painting and sculpture are in the corner as a surprise. The small catalog with essays by Hess, Bedford and Suzanne Hudson is a nice complement. Hopefully, this will be viewed as so satisfactory an experience that the Huntington house can accommodate more such exhibitions. For more information, go to www.Huntington.org.

Holte, Michael Ned, "The Actuality of Light," *Lesley Vance: Paintings & Watercolours*, Brussels: Xavier Hufkens, 2012, pp. 5-6, 8, 11

The Actuality of Light

MICHAEL NED HOLTE

I. An attempt to describe one of these paintings, but where to begin, exactly? Perhaps in an accumulation of white and pale gray swipes and swabs—at once shapes that are also adamantly brushstrokes, a mass that is simultaneously legible as a sequence of discrete gestures: I couldn't help but think of a pile of feathers, yet no individual mark actually resembles a feather. The order of accumulation is nearly impossible to determine; the mass, anchored at the bottom left of the small canvas consumes much of the given space, demands attention. Still, this white-gray mass nearly runs into other things—passages, events—in red oxide and pale yellow, against an apparently deep backdrop of blacks, blues. How deep? It's hard to say. The space in this painting hints at infinity glimpsed from a carved gash. Just above the bottom edge of the image stands a stone-like oblong shape, grassy green and mineral, along with the shape of its apparent reflection, like a dropped shadow but in the same verdant tones.

II. Or, another: the painting with two egg-like orbs, the one above, round and soft gray, the other elongated to a point, swathed in blue. A diagonal line, barely touching this point, dividing a salmon area from sienna. Is that space or an object, it's difficult to say. Elsewhere, a darker graphite gray giving way to pitch black and silvery gray—I'm imagining a just-caught salmon splayed, with insides becoming exterior surfaces, a split second before beginning to rot. But what to make of the gold, and dove white, and yellow flurry I have yet to mention? A banana peel flurry—another emblem of slipperiness, an assurance of the viewer, *this viewer*, slipping up?

III. *"Untitled"*—has there ever been a stronger means of defense in the painter's toolkit against the totalizing force of language? If not stronger, then certainly more deferential, coy. You used to name things: "*Conch*." "*Mussels, Coral Frond*." "*Fawn's Horn*." Of course these things could be seen, identified without these tags; the titles were redundant. Even earlier, you alluded to specific phenomena: "*The Greening*." "*The Colors of the Day Wore On*." Now, we are left to reconcile these im-

Holte, Michael Ned, "The Actuality of Light," *Lesley Vance: Paintings & Watercolours*, Brussels: Xavier Hufkens, 2012, pp. 5-6, 8, 11

ages to a place where language treads perilously, then dangles from a cliff before plummeting into a void. There are other metaphors, equally imperfect.

IV. The word "essay" means "an attempt," I'd like you to know.

V. I want to say that the old language of abstraction is completely useless here, in describing your paintings. By "old" of course I mean the modernist language, because I don't know if there was a language of abstraction before modernity. In 1936, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. produced a diagram—an unruly account of cause and effect—for the cover of the catalogue for his *Cubism and Abstract Art*, his first major exhibition at the Modern. The diagram (it's a timeline really) culminates in two distinct possibilities for painting as he pictured it: "Geometrical Abstraction" and "Non-Geometrical Abstraction." It's not difficult to understand that the art he had in mind was the stuff of the present—his present, 1935, 1936; the future was, for better or worse, unimaginable. There was not a language for abstraction that dealt with its inherent uncertainty. There is still not.

VI. And of course I'm also thinking of the overbearing certainty of Greenberg, *et al*. But one thing Greenberg gave us that remains useful, is the idea of the "all-over" painting. In fact, I want to go out on a limb and suggest the all-over has become the dominant approach to painting—certainly since Pollock, but really since Manet, and probably since the invention of photography. (Photography, too, is an "all-over" technology.) I'm looking at thumbnail images for an exhibition you'll soon be in that surveys the field of contemporary painting, and it strikes me that all of the painters in the show, *all of these painters except you*, are working through a legacy of the all-over: They are inheritors of Pointillism, the monochrome, the objecthood of Stella and Johns, Richter's reification of the photograph's logic, and so on. Not a bad thing at all, really, for one to be part of this lineage, but I want to argue that space works in an entirely different way in your paintings. You're doing something that, even for just a moment, in the face of all this, I'm tempted to call the *un-all-over*.

VII. Yet, I wouldn't want to get entangled in what your paintings are *not* doing, even if it would be far easier to explain. "Abstraction" is messy business, as I already mentioned.

Holte, Michael Ned, "The Actuality of Light," *Lesley Vance: Paintings & Watercolours*, Brussels: Xavier Hufkens, 2012, pp. 5-6, 8, 11

VIII. In short, you remain invested in the legacy of the pictorial. You picture things—complex phenomena, things that exist outside of language. In confronting these paintings, I am constantly scrambling to imagine nameable subjects, whether animal, mineral, or vegetal. Perhaps this is owing to your earlier still life paintings of mussels, poppies, seashells. A few years ago, shortly after seeing your first abstractions in your studio, I noted to myself that these paintings were, in fact, "no different than her Chardin-like still lives of shells or vegetables, really, except the new 'abstracts' are basically essays on how one paints a thing in the world—how things gather light and how paint, in layers, strokes, smears, juxtapositions, reconstructs that sense of light."

IX. Paint: always such an oddly physical, tangible substance to apprehend the elusive actuality of light.

X. I want to point out that the events in your paintings one might hope to identify through comparison to nameable things—"stone-like oblong shape, grassy green and mineral," "banana peel flurry," etc.—indeed represent the way light is apprehended via certain objects, such as the prismatic facets of a gemstone or the silvery iridescence of salmon skin, yet the way in which these unidentifiable objects or events coexist in your paintings suggests a kind of *space* that is not identifiable and perhaps not even possible.

XI. Not possible, perhaps, except in the spatial logic of painting.

XII. I have a suspicion that when one refers to surrealism, what first comes to mind for most people is a constellation of objects, things—fried eggs, clocks, the moon—rather than the ("empty") spaces these inhabit. But for me what's most radical in surrealism is the defiance of spatial logic. I'm thinking less of someone like Tanguy, whose sense of space is relatively conventional—eerie, and maybe even sublime, but in the final analysis it's still a kind of distended version of classical perspective. (Maybe this was truly unconventional when De Chirico did it a decade or so earlier—the "metaphysical interior." I'm sure it was.) I'm really thinking about the space in a Magritte painting, which is a paradoxical space, and most likely informed by the revolutionary potential of collage before it. It's reliant upon the viewer's recognition of specific, nameable things that coexist in a way that utterly defies logic. Or liberates it.

Holte, Michael Ned, "The Actuality of Light," *Lesley Vance: Paintings & Watercolours*, Brussels: Xavier Hufkens, 2012, pp. 5-6, 8, 11

XIII. I don't want to say what you're doing is "surrealism," but it's genetically linked, reliant on that liberating potential of paradoxical space. For example, there's your painting with a field of dark teal (if that's the right name for it), and a blade-like shape that seems to be cutting through this field along the left side of the image with a long angled slice, peeling the picture plane back to reveal black space beneath—or is it a shadow? (Are we looking down at this field? I have the feeling of being suspended above it, somehow.) Another shape, of sky blue giving way to rusty orange, slides between the top plane and what I imagine to be a knife—calling attention to your own use of one, perhaps—and into this newly opened slice. Atop the teal plane lay several shapes including a lemony wedge or "petal" and a squiggle that seems to partially lift off the plane, yellowing in the process. (It seems clear these are "atop" because they cast shadows.) Above the squiggle are two circular shapes that are more likely to be holes than objects. Near this is a dense gathering of S-shapes, interlocking like an infinity sign in a state of becoming. What to make of this, spatially—this sign of time?

XVI. You've moved well beyond the still life, spatially, but I'm certain you've maintained an abiding interest in that genre's paradoxical notion of temporality—typically expressed as a coexistence of living (or liveliness) and dying (or dead). The still life is an impossible stabilization of ceaseless processes—entropy, rot, decay—and multiple temporalities. Well, impossible except in painting or, perhaps, photomontage. I cannot describe your paintings without imagining the physical processes they insinuate—peeling, cutting, folding, curling, undulating, hovering, puncturing, eclipsing—captured in stride and frozen in time.

XV. The paradox you've activated—and, if it's one owing to surrealism, it's been newly reinvigorated—is that you've staked out a place for illusion, but it's the illusion of phenomena hitherto unknown and still unnamable. And despite of this unsettling of language, or perhaps because of it, these dazzling orchestrations of brushstrokes and smears appear to articulate new possibilities for reconstructing space and time in the knowable world, out of time and precisely in the present.

Hudson, Suzanne, “The Surface of Circumstance,” *Lesley Vance & Ricky Swallow at The Huntington*, The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, Seattle: Marquand Books, Inc., 2012, pp. 16-21

The Surface of Circumstance

Suzanne Hudson

Hudson, Suzanne, "The Surface of Circumstance," *Lesley Vance & Ricky Swallow at The Huntington*, The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, Seattle: Marquand Books, Inc., 2012, pp. 16-21

A man holding a black umbrella stands inconspicuously amid a throng of spectators, despite the incongruity of his attribute. The citizen, incidentally recorded by the home-movie camera of Abraham Zapruder, might have supplied an inconsequential detail in a prosaic community pageant were it not for the exigencies that brought the film to public attention in the first place. (It famously captures John F. Kennedy's motorcade passing through Dealey Plaza in Dallas on November 22, 1963, offering a largely unobstructed and especially gruesome vantage of the president's assassination.) Like many of his generation, John Updike was compelled by the so-called umbrella man's presence in the Zapruder images, as well as the myriad conspiracy theories in which he subsequently assumed a prominent role. This sentinel lingered, in the writer's words, like a "fetish"—an empirical fact and estimation of what might remain beyond it. In a dazzling passage, Updike poses: "We wonder whether a genuine mystery is being concealed here or whether any similar scrutiny of a minute section of time and space would yield similar strangenesses—gaps, inconsistencies, warps, and bubbles in the surface of circumstance."[1]

I came across this quote recently and distractedly; but once I read it, I couldn't let it go. It so happened that I was thinking about Lesley Vance's practice and the apposition of these words to her small canvases came to seem inevitable. More than any critical writing on the historical still life or its contemporary manifestations, Updike's musings about this celluloid frame approach the inherent peculiarity of really *looking* that Vance's paintings perform as method and manage as pictorial effect. Surfaces of circumstance felicitously illustrate the conditional coming together of objects in the representational field. And Updike's description—tinged as it is with a kind of morbidity—finds comparable expression in the heightened vulnerability of the genre's mainstays: ripe fruit and foodstuff anticipatorily shown before consumption or flora in full bloom awaiting detumescence. It is striking the extent to which these issues obtain even in Vance's recent abstract paintings, begun in 2009, which eschew the direct translation of thing into pigment that characterized her prior efforts in more conventional still life.

Hudson, Suzanne, "The Surface of Circumstance," *Lesley Vance & Ricky Swallow at The Huntington*, The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, Seattle: Marquand Books, Inc., 2012, pp. 16-21

Fig. 6 Lesley Vance
Mussels, Coral Frond, 2007
Oil on linen, 8 × 11 inches
Private Collection

In formative pieces like *Mussels, Coral Frond* (fig. 6) and *Four Poppies* (fig. 7), both painted in 2007, Vance offered glimpses of a world greeted at arm's length, patiently transcribed in all of its sensuousness (the glistening opalescence of the clams; the intense vermillion of the flowers). But to say "direct translation," as I just did, is not quite right, because these and other examples betray Vance's explicit self-consciousness in facture-laden passages where her brush lingered and went sketchy, thereby obfuscating some detail that it might have clarified. (One could propose that Vance exposes a dynamic central to modernism as critic Clement Greenberg understood it, namely the using of art to call attention to, rather than conceal, the nature of art: "The limitations that constitute the medium of painting—the flat surface, the shape of the support, the properties of the pigment—were treated by the Old Masters as negative factors that could be acknowledged only implicitly or indirectly. Under Modernism these same limitations came to be regarded as positive factors, and were acknowledged openly.")[2] Vance makes clear the conceits framing the act of still-life painting. The careful arrangements—or items spied in isolation—that emerge out of velveteen black backgrounds recall such seventeenth-century Spanish painters as Juan Sanchez Cotán and Francisco de Zurburán. Indeed, these allusions are so direct that the act of appropriation itself becomes a kind of subject.

Vance since has maintained a commitment to staging the contingency of relationships, though on different terms: Whereas the still-life figures these interactions as representational order (a quince just caressed by an apple adjacent to it), her abstractions recast them as process. Vance begins by selecting objects from her curio-cabinet-like storehouse. She then assembles them to be photographed in a resolutely low-tech cardboard box outfitted for diverse lighting scenarios. The photo becomes the

Hudson, Suzanne, "The Surface of Circumstance," *Lesley Vance & Ricky Swallow at The Huntington*, The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, Seattle: Marquand Books, Inc., 2012, pp. 16-21

Fig. 7 Lesley Vance
Four Poppies, 2007
Oil on linen, 11 × 14 inches
Collection of Joshua Adler, New York

basis for the painting, which wrests from such tangible articles—shells, horns, a piece of coral, a ceramic jar—a series of formal passages akin to cubist dissections. Although decision-making is clearly key to achieving coruscating tints and fugitive effects of light and shadow in such shallow space—and at such a small scale—the paintings do not offer themselves up in such a way as to demonstrate either the sequence or intentionality of these choices. Instead, the fact that Vance's brush moved here not there, revealing this peach not that umber, is upheld as the mystery of the straightforward course so clearly announced at the outset: gather, shoot, labor in a single sitting, over the span of hours, with paint deposited onto wet paint.

Thus does narrative become a matter of technique—how the work came to be as a material fact, not to what it refers. (Nonetheless, as in the instance of the umbrella man, there is a remainder beyond this obdurate presence that manages, like uncanny surrealist juxtapositions before it, to unsettle.) In, say, *Untitled,* of 2012 (fig. 8), we cannot excavate what engendered it (that is, we cannot determine its sources, which are made exogenous to the work; we cannot find the still life, even as we know it started things in motion, even as we appreciate that it generated the nonobjective structure that now serves in its place). In rare instances, we gain hold of intimations of these forbearers through the contour of a shape or the spectrum of a palette—experiences of what Willem de Kooning called glimpses of content, "an encounter like a flash."[3] More commonly, we are left with the fact of the paint pushed into its current arrangement, and the question of how, especially as the paint typically sits, all surface, as a single layer—again, the result of Vance working it over such a short course of time. Swatches of linen weave visible through palette knife-scraped paint provide one rejoinder, but Vance avoids global transparency. Even

Hudson, Suzanne, "The Surface of Circumstance," *Lesley Vance & Ricky Swallow at The Huntington*, The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, Seattle: Marquand Books, Inc., 2012, pp. 16-21

Fig. 8 Lesley Vance
Untitled, 2012
Oil on linen, 18 × 14 inches

her related charcoal, watercolor, and gouache drawings on vellum, which record her play with the primary elements at varying stages, bear little resemblance to the paintings.

Perhaps this lingering sense of inscrutability owes to Vance's courting of the aleatory for herself, as maker and her own first viewer. Despite the circumscription of the act within the parameters of scenario and temporal duration, there is neither a telos to some anticipated end (as there is in a composition determined a priori) nor a knowable outcome. There is only, at best, a provisional stasis that results from Vance's calling it quits for the day—and leaving the painting in that design ever after. In this, Vance's abstractions are built on the logic of suspension. Each painting depicts—and comes to rest on—a state of transformation poised between what brought it into being and where it might still go. Caught where it is, fixed at a determinate moment, each one is, too, an artifact emblematic of the fleeting precariousness long associated with still life.

This raises the question, which Vance solicits in the paintings and put forward to me in conversation: What would it mean for abstraction to "bring you in like a representational painting"?[4] It might mean, for one, assuming still life as the point of comparison (as is true for Vance), that we enter a pictorial space supposing its intimacy and finding, as a byproduct of the weirdness of the world observed at such a proximate range and with such intensity, the dilations, puckers, warps, and incongruities coincident with that peculiar realm of the sensate to which John Updike had

Hudson, Suzanne, "The Surface of Circumstance," *Lesley Vance & Ricky Swallow at The Huntington*, The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, Seattle: Marquand Books, Inc., 2012, pp. 16-21

recourse. It likewise raises a very interesting inverse problem—answered in one way by Clement Greenberg—namely how the intercession of abstraction transforms our perception of representational painting, Old Master or otherwise. The art historian Christopher Wood writes: "Abstraction implores us to look at the rest of painting as if it were abstract. In Meyer Schapiro's paradoxical formulation, realism itself re-created the world by a 'series of abstract calculations of perspective and gradations of color.' . . . Abstraction, it appears, was never anything more than a refinement or a mannered distortion of the components of painted art, totally consistent with the previous history of painting, and capable of very many of its effects."[5]

Vance's abstractions, built as they are on a still life mediated by a photograph only to be let loose from the burdens of semblance, claim abstraction and representation to exist on a continuum. The latter yields the disorientation of specific entity into color and shape, even as the former makes that plastic space stunningly real. To be sure, Vance tempers an impulse toward autonomous painting (long associated with abstraction's eschewal of the mimetic) with an equal imperative to locate it within the tradition of three-dimensional rendering, so reliant on skills of manipulating light and color, shading and shadow, and so on, to create pictorial illusions. However, Vance stops short of denying objecthood; instead, she everywhere highlights the physicality of the linen and the reality of its surface alike. This emphasis is, finally, what gives the notion of the surface of circumstance such interpretive weight: What is brought into being there is not incidental or dematerialized, but insistently present, bearing actual holes (and startling depths) alongside its conjured ones. For Vance, still life facilitates abstraction, which, in turn, divulges the abstraction subtending a representational articulation of appearance. We are left with paintings about painting as a site of material and conceptual convention; even more, these are paintings that, at their best, in their insistence on the consequence of bearing down on a "minute section of time and space," train us to really see.

1 John Updike, "Comment," *New Yorker,* December 9, 1967, 51. Quoted in Jon Michaud, "Updike, J. F. K. and the Umbrella Man," *New Yorker,* November 22, 2011, http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/backissues/2011/11/john-updike-jfk-assassination-the-umbrella-man.html.

2 Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism,* vol. 4, *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969,* ed. John O'Brian (1960; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 86.

3 Willem de Kooning, "Content Is a Glimpse," in *Willem de Kooning: The Collected Writings,* ed. George Scrivani (1963; Madras and New York: Hanuman Books, 1988), 83.

4 Lesley Vance in conversation with the author, December 19, 2011.

5 Christopher S. Wood, "Ryman's Poetics," *Art in America* 82, no. 1 (January 1994): 67–68. See also Meyer Schapiro, "Nature of Abstract Art," in *Modern Art: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (1937; New York: George Braziller, 1978), 196.

Finkel, Jori, “Huntington mansion to house works from Lesley Vance, Ricky Swallow,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 10, 2012

Los Angeles Times

Huntington mansion to house works from Lesley Vance, Ricky Swallow

Work by Lesley Vance and Ricky Swallow will be shown at the Huntington. From left: Vance's untitled oil on linen painting, 2012, from Xavier Hufkens gallery; Ricky Swallow's bronze sculpture "Staggered Lamp Study," 2011, from the artist, Stuart Shave/Modern Art and Marc Foxx gallery. (Fredrik Nilsen)

By Jori Finkel

It's hard to keep a house museum from seeming dusty and static, even one as full of surprises -- and British paintings and French porcelain -- as the Huntington mansion. That's one reason why the powers-that-be at the Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens have decided to introduce new work by living artists into the mansion for the first time in its 84-year history.

Huntingon curator Catherine Hess and guest curator Christopher Bedford (of the Rose Art Museum) have been working with two L.A. artists, Lesley Vance and Ricky Swallow, to exhibit their art in an upstairs room in the mansion for a show that will open Nov. 10. Usually this room holds 18th century British paintings and objects like silverware and musical instruments, but the contents will be removed for the occasion.

Finkel, Jori, “Huntington mansion to house works from Lesley Vance, Ricky Swallow,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 10, 2012

It will mark the first time Vance and Swallow, who are married and show here at the David Kordansky and Marc Foxx galleries, respectively, have showed their work together in the same gallery space.

Vance, who makes abstract paintings with the glimmering chiarascuoro effects of an Old Masters palette, will have eight or nine works on view. Swallow, whose enigmatic sculptures often speak to everyday objects, will have 12 small sculptures on display.

Much of the work is new, but they said it was not made in response to any particular artworks at the Huntington as much as inspired by the idea and texture of domestic life.

So is this another example of a contemporary art intervention into an established historical site?
"It could be considered an intervention in that it will be contemporary art in a place you're not used to seeing it," said Swallow. "But both of our work references historical models and modernism, so won't be such a radical shift. I'm hoping it will seem at home there."

"I don't consider it an intervention -- I think that's too disruptive a term," said Vance.

But she did acknowledge that the room itself will look a lot different come November. "What I'm most excited about is the chance to lighten up the room. I'm excited to lift the curtains and paint the room white and hang it more sparingly than most of the rooms are hung with different display mechanisms -- simple pedestals -- for Ricky's sculptures."

"It's also an exciting opportunity to see what happens when our work does come together in the same room," she said.

Baker, Kenneth, “The suave abstract surrealism of Lesley Vance,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 29, 2012

San Francisco Chronicle

The suave abstract surrealism of Lesley Vance

Kenneth Baker

“Untitled” (2012) oil on linen By Lesley Vance 14” x 11” Photo: Fredrick Nilsen / SF

Nothing in the Whitney Museum of American Art’s oracular 2010 Biennial Exhibition impressed me more than the work of Los Angeles painter Lesley Vance. Now her work - sadly, only two pieces - figures in a group show just opened at Anthony Meier Fine Arts.

Vance’s untitled canvas (accompanied by an unrelated, untitled watercolor) typifies her approach to working away from a still life subject or photograph. The paint strokes and scraping down in this picture seem to peel apart a dark surface to let in light from behind.

Vance distills painting’s power to evoke tangibility while keeping illusionistic volume to a minimum. The eye reaches again and again into the pale folds of her picture, unable to get a firm hold. A suave abstract surrealism results.

The Vance watercolor here, which rehearses a different oil painting, suggests admiration and study of some of Richard Diebenkorn’s small “Ocean Park” works.

Mark Hagen bestrides the exhibition with a tough, minimalist painting on burlap, speckled with odd irregularities, and a cluster of sculptures in obsidian, a material seldom seen in contemporary art.

Hagen selects blocks of the black “volcanic glass,” has them cut, with limited precision, to his specifications, then polishes certain faces. He presents the pieces on boxy pedestals that might pass for sculptures in their own right.

Hagen’s carvings somehow merge the aesthetic flavor of ancient relics with that of work by a modern sculptor such as Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988).

Richard Hoblock’s paintings keep good company with Vance’s work, to their credit, but they revisit ground already too well trodden in the abstract field.

Mark Hagen, Richard Hoblock, Lesley Vance: Paintings and sculpture. Through Aug. 3. Anthony Meier Fine Arts, 1969 California St., S.F. (415) 351-1400. www.anthonymeierfinearts.com.

Griffin, Jonathan, “Lesley Vance,” *Vitamin P2*, London: Phaidon, 2011, pp. 298-299

LESLEY VANCE

Painting has, in one way or another, always been about time – how to slow it down, arrest it, reverse it, speed it up or dispense with it altogether. Lesley Vance makes paintings quickly that unfold slowly, and which expand from their modest physical proportions into sprawling timescales, histories and formal reverberations.

Cubism, the art-historical movement that remains a touchstone for the artist, was essentially an exercise in presenting multiple moments at once, thus confounding the notion that depiction was limited to a single, preserved instant (as with most photography). Cubists such as Juan Gris, whose work Vance adores, made images that thrust themselves forward from the wall, projecting (sometimes literally, in the case of their collages and assemblages) all at once into the space of the viewer.

Vance sets out to create abstract paintings that are as temporally complex as these antecedents, but which, by contrast, retain the illusion of depth and an intimacy that draws the viewer in towards them. The results can be confusing and uncanny. Instead of Cubism's extrovert qualities, Vance's paintings keep their secrets, only hinting at the absences within themselves.

This attitude arises, in part, from Vance's particular working process. She sets out as a still-life painter, in the traditional mould, selecting objects and setting them against a dark background, lighting them carefully and making pencil or pastel studies. When she finally starts painting (on smooth, gessoed canvases) the work emerges over the course of a single day, freeing itself from its figurative beginnings through adventures of wet paint. When finished, the original tableau is almost unrecognisable, often resembling nothing so much as folded paper – as if Vance is making collages from her own paintings.

She describes her smeared and scraped gestures as strategies for 'covering her tracks'; there lingers, however, a tantalizing sense that there are tracks to be followed. She has referred to the sensation of walking into a room for the first time and sensing that an object is missing while not knowing precisely what. Her finished paintings, none of which is titled aside from a number that distinguishes it from the others, are at once resolutely complete and mystifyingly fragmented, as if still in a fluid process of becoming.

What we are left with is a sense of atmosphere – almost like scent – that emerges through colour temperature and texture, and which originates from the specific temporal and spatial origins of these still lifes. With their unexpected shadows and excised forms, they perform the trick of making loose gestures concrete and solidity rootless. In a 1919 pamphlet on the intentions of Cubism, the writer Maurice Raynal quoted Plato: 'The senses perceive that which passes, the understanding that which endures.' Through her attentiveness to the history of painting, Vance creates images that are like nothing we've seen before, while remaining heavy with the sense of that which is past. - *Jonathan Griffin*

1.

2.

1. *Untitled (15)*, 2009
   Oil on linen
   45.5 x 38 cm

2. *Untitled (29)*, 2010
   Oil on linen
   53.5 x 40.5 cm

3. *Untitled (30)*, 2010
   Oil on linen
   51 x 40.5 cm

Griffin, Jonathan, “Lesley Vance,” *Vitamin P2*, London: Phaidon, 2011, pp. 298-299

3.

Schad, Ed, "Lesley Vance," *ArtReview*, September 2011, p. 176

Art Review:

LESLEY VANCE

Lesley Vance
David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles
25 June – 13 August

Each Lesley Vance painting begins as an interaction with a still life of objects set up in her studio. Over the course of several hours, never more than a day, the objects morph, evaporate, dissolve and play inside the viscous nature of oil and watercolours. In the end, the still life exists at a slant, blurred and barely recognisable, enduring, as Vance has said, as 'the feeling of a memory – not a specific memory, but just that feeling a memory can produce'.

Vance's mention of memory makes a certain amount of sense. Her humble paintings (usually no bigger than 50 cm on a side, and all untitled) register primarily as floating, wispy forms, dipping and dancing into corners, on top of and through floating planes of browns, ochres and other warm hues. If the still life as a collection of objects is present at all, it is only out of a preknowledge of Vance's method or through an intellectual leap on the part of the viewer. Vance reserves her memory as the backdrop and originating force of her paintings, but for a viewer, that memory is not of the still life itself but of the historical styles of still life paintings.

Vance's paintings have about as much of an 'actual' relationship to objects as one would find in Joan Miró or in surrealists like Yves Tanguy. The flavour one gets of historical still life painting instead comes across not through the objects but through the feel of the canvases, their antique warm emanations, their old-fashioned colours. Vance has an ability to conjure an old style of painting without invoking its particulars. The paintings may remind one of Francisco de Zurbarán, but they contain none of his specific history other than an aftertaste, a bit of his light, a sense of his space. Each canvas creates an opportunity for historical way-finding that may be likened to how one might pick out different spices and fruits inside the taste of wine.

However, the idea of the still life in the background, its light presence so subtly stated, adds an essential conceptual angle that is valuable to consider. Contrary to what several writers have stated, Vance does not succeed in freeing herself 'from the theoretical and conceptual agenda of classical mediums' (this from a recent article in *Art in America*). Instead, the historical slowness of a still life, its conceptual thrust as a genre whose existence is rooted in meditations on mortality and on the fleeting nature of appearances, has to be regarded as a counterpoint to Vance's quick working method, the velocity of her forms, the speed of her brushstrokes.

Vance uses the tension that the classical still life creates between the present moment and its ever-advancing mortal demise, and brings it into a fast-moving contemporary society that has little time for such extended reflection. Though conjuring old things, Vance's canvases dodge any formal fixity. They are less of the firmness of history than of the airy, nimble, unreflective now.

ED SCHAD

O'Neill-Butler, Lauren, "Critics' Picks: Lesley Vance," *Artforum.com*, July 29, 2011

ARTFORUM

3143 S. La Cienega Blvd., Unit A
June 25–August 13

There's an internal logic to the thirteen small, untitled paintings in Lesley Vance's latest solo show. Which is to say, there's no need to muscle reason in here, even if it seems like the canvases could eventually transmit some secret code or ancient knowledge. Vance is known for her smeared and stroked wet-on-wet abstractions of *natures mortes* (collections of leaves, shells, wood, and rocks), and if her approach remains constant in this exhibition, don't expect to find more of the same. There is a greater focus on aspects of movement and light in her latest works. In some, luster seeps through hairline cracks; others seem to channel the source of their illumination from a hidden presence behind the wall, in a way that evokes Dan Flavin's fluorescent tubes.

Lesley Vance, untitled, 2011, oil on linen, 14 x 12".

Like those pivotal works, Vance's canvases, as well as the eight new unearthly watercolors on view, pull the world in, absorbing everything around them. But Vance does not aspire to Flavin's simplicity (or, for that matter, the clarity trumpeted by Barnett Newman). Instead, her process of veiling—from the translation of spotlit tableaux into individual marks on a canvas, to the ways in which she complicates the objectness of her works through the numerous, nearly sculptural layers of paint—provides something novel. Perhaps it is a different kind of clarity. In this show, colors migrate, forms mutate, and painting is a vehicle for more than mere contemplation, and something greater than a state of mind.

— Lauren O'Neill-Butler

Pagel, David, "Art review: Lesley Vance at David Kordansky Gallery," *Los Angeles Times*, July 29, 2011, p. D16

Los Angeles Times

Art review: Lesley Vance at David Kordansky Gallery

Lesley Vance's dense little paintings are jam-packed with contradictions. That may be maddening for people who like their art to be logical and consistent, like arguments and contracts. But paintings are neither. And that's exactly why Vance's works are so fascinating.

At David Kordansky Gallery, her 13 oils on linen and eight watercolors seem to contain more space, movement and light-swallowing emptiness than their dimensions allow. The biggest measures less than 20-by-15-inches. It appears to present three fragments of three broken images — all suspended in velvety blackness — alongside what might be a magnified detail of the fragment on the right.

Its format recalls maps within maps, schematic diagrams that use shifts in scale to provide the right balance between details and overviews. Vance's mastery of scale-shifts gives her abstract pictures the capacity to teeter-totter between tightly focused close-ups and distant, big-picture perspectives.

Many of her sumptuously painted works have an eye-to-the-keyhole atmosphere. Yet they never evoke anything illicit. In some, highlights recall klieg lights in the night sky. Others resemble the flickering beams of flashlights, just before the batteries die.

Both intimate and impenetrable, vibrant and icy, Vance's paintings make strange bedfellows of their influences. Some borrow Caravaggio's sumptuous browns, inky blacks and glowing golds, along with his capacity to muster mystery from the darkest of shadows. Others steal from Dali, taking the sensation that they depict an actual world, exactly as it appears in the artist's imagination. And others riff off of Arthur Dove, suffusing themselves with the feeling that they are boiled-down distillations of reality's essentials.

As demanding as they are satisfying, Vance's paintings do not suffer fools.

-- David Pagel

Lesley Vance, David Kordansky Gallery, 3143 S. La Cienega Blvd., Unit A, (310) 558-3030, through Aug. 13. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.davidkordanskygallery.com

Image: Lesley Vance, "Untitled," 2011. Credit: David Kordansky Gallery

Vance, Lesley, "Artists on AbEx: Lesley Vance," *Artforum*, Summer 2011, p. 373

ARTFORUM

LESLEY VANCE

The first painter to make a meaningful impression on me in school was Jackson Pollock; the first painter to make a meaningful impression when I encountered his work in person was Mark Rothko; and the artist I keep going back to right now is Lee Krasner. I especially love her collages. I admire their force, their uncompromised dynamic. And I can relate to the role destruction played in their creation.

At one point in the early 1950s, Krasner grew dissatisfied with some drawings she had been working on in her studio, so she tore them to shreds and tossed the scraps on the floor in frustration. The sight of those fallen fragments triggered much of her subsequent work—collages made from ripped-apart drawings and, later, from torn sections of paintings.

I had a similar moment of destruction born from discontent a few years ago, only instead of tearing up my painting, I scraped away paint. This act of erasure produced a more intuitive composition and opened the door to the type of spaces I now pursue. Likewise, the paintings I end up being the most satisfied with have to go through a stage in which I dislike the work enough to lose it for a while, prompting nonsensical actions that become essential. □

LESLEY VANCE IS A LOS ANGELES–BASED ARTIST.

Lesley Vance, *Untitled (44)*, 2010,
oil on canvas, 16 x 14".

2010 Biennial Exhibition, New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2010, pp.116-117

2010 Biennial Exhibition, New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2010, pp.116-117

Lesley Vance

1977 Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Lesley Vance makes dark, luminous paintings that are as much about process as result. Her early work focused on fantastical, romantic landscapes and sparse still lifes, often blurring human and natural forms and referencing seventeenth-century Spanish painters like Francisco de Zurbarán and Sánchez Cotán in palette and mood. Vance's paintings now explore new territory while preserving these historical references. Representations of carefully lit natural forms anchored amidst backgrounds with visible brushwork have given way to measured abstractions glowing quietly from within.

Vance uses the creation of a still life as the point of entry for formal and spatial exploration. Initially, she photographs arranged and deliberately lit compositions of natural forms and works from these photographs to paint the still life. At a certain point, the work begins to evolve as Vance applies and scrapes paint, working wet on wet with palette knives and brushes to form fluid layers that are alternately lush and delicate, revealing patches of the canvas's linen weave in places. The earth and vegetal tones of earlier painting remain, as do forms that vaguely suggest leaves, blooms, and branches.

The still life endures, as Vance describes it, only as "the feeling of a memory—not a specific memory, but just that feeling a memory can produce." Working quickly and fluidly, the artist reveals a reverence for process, chance, and intuition. The paintings are completed in a day, finding resolution, she says, "where they part with their spatial and physical references and form a more malleable, even intuitive space, a tactile yet totally fictitious abstraction, that pushes and pulls, confuses spatial norms." While the artist's goal is an abstract space rendered in paint that retains the intimacy and refinement of a traditional still life, equally important is the painting's status as a physical record of marks, actions, accidents, negotiations, decisions, and ideas over time. The still life's traditional representation of time as strictly measured and fleeting is replaced by a more fluid, abstract, almost three-dimensional concept of time that Vance describes as "that quality of time unique to painting—everything folding and unfolding on the surface forward and backward." NC

Untitled (12), 2009 / Oil on linen, 18 × 15 in. (45.7 × 38.1 cm) / Collection of the artist

Wullschlager, Jackie, “Energised by yourthful chaos,” *Financial Times*, October 16, 2010, p. 10

FINANCIAL TIMES

“If everything’s blue chip, it becomes kinda dull,” dealer Larry Gagosian told me on the eve of Frieze. He was talking about his own empire – blue chip artists spiced up with a few less tested talents – but his words echoed through Regent’s Park. For though there are fresh works to die for by established figures – Alex Katz’s shimmering white, flat, mint-cool portrait of his daughter-in-law, “Walking”, at Thaddaeus Ropac; Zhang En-li’s vertiginous, lyrical, grid painting of green leaves on pink, “Sky Number 5”, at Hauser and Wirth – without the lightness of being and self-mocking energy of its younger players, Frieze would sink under its own success.

Most resoundingly popular of these is Simon Fujiwara, whose fabulous intervention “Frozen”, a fake excavation of a decadent art-crazed ancient city, has made him the outstanding new name of 2010. Frieze rarely facilitates such breakthroughs, yet a pleasure this year is several mini solo shows of quietly confident, emerging artists in their 30s.

Lesley Vance featured in the 2010 Whitney biennial but is new to London. Los Angeles gallerist David Kordansky is showing a dozen smallish oil-on-linen compositions whose pressured, wet, long, heavy strokes fold in and out of each other, creating abstract forms of terrific sculptural density. Sombre colours – browns, blacks, greens, occasional lemon or pink – and a backlit, inner luminosity recall 17th-century Spanish still-life painting, which Vance cites as an influence. Kordansky mentions “a European vibe to the work”, though Vance plays tradition at one remove: she arranges items such as rocks and shells, photographs them, then works from the image, abstracting, compacting: a cerebral, elegant riff on still-life history.

In method, abstract/figurative tension and the acceptance that all imagery is filtered second-hand, Vance shares much with English painter William Daniels, showing at Vilma Gold and Mark Foxx. His taut, silvery paintings evoke vanitas motifs, in an art of fake excavation as delicious as Fujiwara’s. Daniels works by making laborious, old-fashioned constructions, sometimes his own designs, sometimes based on Old Masters, from cereal packets, masking tape and torn paper; he then depicts his models in oil on board, eliminating figural elements to emphasise volume, form, light and shadow.

Another maker of deliberately antiquated models is Marcel Dzama, born in Winnipeg and a rising international star. David Zwirner’s installation of his wooden and glass dioramas peopled with elaborately drawn, cut out balletic paper figures and a graphite scroll featuring naked dancers brandishing revolvers, medieval jesters and chess pieces, is a mixture of charm and horror, caught conceptually between Bosch and Duchamp. “Later the Delights of Damnation Will Be More Profound” is the title of Dzama’s society whirl: surely a portrait of Frieze itself.

Wullschlager, Jackie, “Energised by yourthful chaos,” *Financial Times*, October 16, 2010, p. 10

At Frame, the fair’s chaotic youthful section, the single opportunity for reflection is at James Fuentes, exhibiting New Yorker Jessica Dickinson’s pared-down abstractions, mostly monochromes in blues, turquoises, pale grey, white. Building thin washes of paint over plastered grounds, erasing, scrubbing, sanding, re-painting or working in delicate gouache, pastel and graphite, Dickinson is concerned with surfaces and how we read traces of mark-making. Her open, rootless works are classically American, bringing to mind painters from Ad Reinhardt to Agnes Martin but also the skimming, endlessly changing patterns of screen life, the 21st-century’s visual backcloth.

Fried, Laura, "Brand New: Lesley Vance," *Flash Art*, May - June 2010, p. 106

Lesley Vance

Laura Fried

Lesley Vance was born in 1977 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She lives and works in Los Angeles. Selected solo shows: 2008: The Suburban, Oak Park, Illinois (with Ricky Swallow). 2007: David Kordansky, Los Angeles. 2006: Stuart Shave | Modern Art, London (with Violet Hopkins). 2005: David Kordansky, Los Angeles.
Laura Fried is assistant curator at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis.

LAURA FRIED: *Lesley, your compact compositions reveal suspended abstract forms, layered by series of densely pigmented veils of paint. And yet process seems to vanish behind the completed form… What are the character and conditions of the image in your painting?*

Lesley Vance: My paintings originate from still lives of natural forms composed in the studio: I put together an arrangement of objects from my collection in a box where I control lighting by cutting openings for light to shine through. I'll paint this image, and once it reaches a certain point of resolution, the composition begins to evolve and I'm no longer looking at the source material. From there the surface becomes a malleable space as the objects dissolve into pure form, although traces from the original image frequently remain in the finished work. Decisions I make either echo or challenge formal qualities from the earlier composition. It's an intuitive process with a continuous back and forth between spontaneous gestures and cerebral control. The painting conforms to its own spatial principles as it makes its way towards its natural end, which doesn't happen unless the image becomes its own concrete reality. I hope that in the end, the painting's shapes, colors and gestures fold into and out of themselves as well as the space they occupy. I don't want the viewer to trace the steps backward when looking at the work; it is important that the image feels new and strange but confident in its existence and asserts its reality, however awkward, with pleasure and ease.

LF: *In your studio we discussed the traditions of the still life genre. What is your relationship to the representational form, which is propelled to real abstraction in your painting?*

LV: I have to let the original composition go so the new one can find itself. I think about 17th-century Spanish painters Zurburán and Cotán, whose intense color choices and extreme contrasts nearly transform their arrangements into otherworldly events. In my work the still life only endures as something like the sense you get in certain rooms that exist as you see them when you walk in, but somehow feel like vaults of past activity and objects. Right now I especially love Gris. His paintings are strange and awkward but so elegant. Gertrude Stein writes about him: "As a Spaniard he knew cubism and had stepped through into it. He had stepped through it. There was beside this perfection."

LF: *I've noticed your palette has shifted this year; texture has begun to surface at precise moments…*

LV: Over the last year paintings have become richer and colors bolder. Color lends itself to the painting's atmosphere, but I also use color to lift surfaces above others or set shapes back. Expanding my palette allows me to create more depth, and using more saturated colors can produce sharper contrasts of light and dark. Scraping paint from the surface sometimes creates holes in the space to imply further depths, but often the texture from the linen's weave appears to lie on the surface rather than beneath it. Moments of painterly texture also emerge from the traces of the earliest referential forms that have remained over the course of painting.

From left: Untitled (12), 2009. Oil on linen, 46 x 38 cm. Untitled (18), 2009. Oil on linen, 46 x 38 cm. All courtesy David Kordansky, Los Angeles. Photos: Fredrik Nilsen.

Lacayo, Richard, “Stars of the Arts: Three artists to watch at the Whitney Biennial,” *Time*, March 22, 2010, pp. 65-67

Arts

EXHIBITIONS MOVIES BOOKS SHORT LIST

Brushworker *Painter Lesley Vance in her Los Angeles studio*

Untitled (14) *(2009)*

Lesley Vance

PAINTER

Yes, there are still artists who do that venerable thing called painting, and some even do it for the pleasures only paint can deliver. Lesley Vance's pictures are compact and luscious but produced with a tough-mindedness that knows the difference between beautiful and pretty. They have the warmth and compressed drama of 17th century Spanish still life—one of her acknowledged models—as well as a feeling of pressure and release that reminds you of the British painter Howard Hodgkin. Again and again, she arrives at old-fashioned painterly beauty, its ragged flag still flying. To get there, Vance sets up still-life arrangements of things like rocks and shells in her Los Angeles studio. Then she photographs them and works from the photo, using brushes and palette knives to drag pigment into flickering formations in which only trace elements of the original scene remain. In the completed canvas, the familiar world has been transformed, but its properties of light, volume and surface still flourish. *Cabinet pictures* was the term once used to describe paintings like these, with their intimate scale and lovingly administered paint. That term won't do. It makes the pictures sound small, and Vance's are anything but. ■

Walleston, Aimee, “Five From the Whitney: Lesley Vance,” *ArtInAmerica.com*, February 16, 2010

Art in America INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

A painter whose abstract works gently push the medium into unexpected realms, Milwaukee-born artist Lesley Vance has developed a practice with a renewed rapture for the formal aspects of painting. Her inclusion in the 2010 Whitney Biennial speaks to a nascent interest in an exploration of classic mediums devoid of a theoretical or conceptual agenda. Her sensuous, optical oil-on-linen pieces give an alternative existential identity of the objects she is painting (and, remarkably, to paint itself).

Vance received her MFA in 2003 from Cal Arts, and has lived and worked in Los Angeles ever since. She describes a quiet, internally-directed process that addresses painting as a timeless personal act, untouched by trend (though without retro fetishism). Explains the artist, "The works start out with still lifes—I set up a still life in a dark box in my studio. I have a collection of organic materials, like rocks, shells and horns-sometimes I use a chunk of ceramic. I do each painting in a day, so [the paint] all sits as one layer. It's strange, because the paintings almost look like collage. But I want the image to all be in one layer, so you can't trace the steps backward to the original still life. They only work as their own reality. And yet, they contain moments of the original still life: shadows that don't make sense, but that were there in the beginning.”

Asked about her commitment to painting and its almost instinctive aspects—rather than as the by-product of an art historical thought process—the artist answers, "The whole history of painting is in painting—I don't see that as being something outside of my practice. There's so much in the history of painting, I can't even think of taking on anything beyond that. I just respect painting too much." And of her particular evolution towards abstraction, Vance says, "There wasn't much abstraction that felt warm and intimate. Abstraction that works like representation, that invites you in. I wanted the energy of my works to be interior. I was looking at 17th century Spanish still lifes. In Francisco de Zurbarán's Still Life With Lemons, Oranges and a Rose (1633) the lemons almost become pure form, but they stop just short. The representation pulls them back. I felt like I wanted to keep painting the lemon past the point of representation, so that it could become something else."

Regarding her upcoming inclusion in the Biennial, the artist is pleased, but well aware that such an inclusion means a variety of things to different people. Those outside the art world (and many within) sometimes have a difficult time contextualizing the exhibition. Says Vance: "Someone interviewed me from my hometown, near Milwaukee, for the local newspaper. She said that someone told her that being in the Whitney Biennial was like winning the Super Bowl. I had to explain to them that it's nothing like the Super Bowl. I had to keep telling her it wasn't a competition."