

by Joe Bradley: a monumental vertical rectangle of pristine, unprimed canvas, framed by plain wooden strips that had been painted a dull dark brown. In the pair's dual exhibition, Martin's eclectic excesses played off Bradley's hieratic reticence in a sustained, energized volley.

Martin's eight paintings could almost have been created by eight different people, albeit eight people with a shared interest in free-wheeling bricolage and optical legerdemain. *Big Glitter Painting*, 2009–10, with its hedgerow of effulgent oval pods on tall red stalks, might be a Venusian nature study. In *Hemlock*, 2010, his rendering of two shadowy evergreens evokes Bob Ross's happy-little-trees technique—fan-brush crescents stacked one atop the other—but Martin, by blowing the image up to enormous size, allows the work to retain the Romantic dignity that should attend its subject. The gaudily polychrome *Untitled*, 2010, lies somewhere between a Victor Vasarely and an aged carnival sign; it features a spindly seven-pointed star with beveled spokes that appear volumetric but are in fact flat, while painted-over Styrofoam disks appear flat at first but are in fact volumetric. The grayish-beige *Last Optical Illusion of 2009*, 2006–2009, features a small black dot within a double wreath of oval forms. A legend running along the bottom edge reads CYCLOPS: STARE AT THE BLACK DOT WHILE MOVING BACK AND FORTH.

Bradley, meanwhile, works within a severely limited repertoire of form and material, exploring the possible permutations of rectilinear planes, unprimed or brown-painted canvas, and brown-painted wooden frames. If his earlier, brightly colored shaped canvases appeared vaguely anthropomorphic, evoking clunky Constructivist tin men, his newer work is similarly schematized. But rather than the human form, it schematizes itself. In addition to the blank canvas mentioned above, another untitled painting, too, features a blank canvas bordered by brown-painted wood. This application of chromatically redundant pigment is the single painterly gesture—the work is not so much about its own edge as about Bradley's assertion, or confirmation, of that edge. Several shaped canvases—upside-down T shapes in varying proportions—seem, similarly, to assert their own shape, and nothing more. It's as if each painting aspires to have only a single property—edge, or shape, or the roughness of a woven surface, or the tension of taut, stretched fabric—as if the veridical nature of painting can only be confirmed by testing each component. Something in the work's utterly deadpan address, however, suggests that Bradley knows full well that there is something absurd in this methodology—since, after all, no object can possess edge without shape, shape without surface, etc.

In considering Martin and Bradley's works together, it seems useful to invoke the poles of Robert Rauschenberg's practice—Combines and "White Paintings." In the first, painting balloons bumpily into the sculptural field, like a popcorn kernel pushed outward by a buildup of thermal energy; in the second, painting withdraws, gathers itself to itself, leaves the shadows playing across its surface to whisper about the fungibility of perception. These two poles are not opposed; both approach painting's paradoxes via a wry epistemology grounded in material. Not such strange bedfellows, Bradley and Martin suggest why painting's constantly cited "end" may also be understood as a perpetual morning.

—Elizabeth Schambelan

Joe Bradley and Chris Martin

MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

In Chris Martin's painting *Six Pillows Rose Up to Greet the Dawn—Good Morning! Good Morning!*, 2007–2009, the six pillows—appended to a canvas in two rows of three—appear to have had a rough night indeed. But, per the title, they are nevertheless jaunty in their thick coatings of blue, white, pink, or yellow pigment, cheerfully registering all the depravities of facture that may occur when oil paint is slathered onto stuffed-cotton convexities. The paint is scabby and scrofulous in some places, rippled with mazelike whorls in others, while the sections that are smooth have a strangely plasticine appearance. Next to *Six Pillows*, in this recent show, was an untitled 2010 painting

Joe Bradley, *Untitled*, 2010, canvas, painted frame, 109 1/2 x 76 1/2"

