

# MATT CONNORS



INTERVIEW BY ALEXIS GEORGOPOULOS  
 PORTRAITS AND STUDIO PHOTOGRAPHY BY CALI THORNHILL-DEWITT  
 ARTWORK COURTESY CHERRY AND MARTIN, LOS ANGELES

## “Honor thy error as hidden intention.”

So reads a card in Peter Schmidt and Brian Eno’s *Oblique Strategies* deck of cards. This humble yet resonant piece of advice could be seen as a mantra of sorts for the process of artist Matt Connors. Smart, geometric and minimal but also imbued with a casual air, a nonchalance, his paintings and sculptures strike a rare balance, contrasting the detached and historical with a sense of something real; unfolding, unhindered and genuine. One can detect nods to Helen Frankenthaler, André Cadere, Morris Louis, Sigmar Polke, Hans Hoffman, Barnett Newman, Anne Truitt, Sean Scully, Sam Francis, and Daniel Buren in his work, but admittedly, Connors’ palette of influence is continually evolving. And yet, it must be said, in Connors’ work, *reference* is a subject in and of itself. Not limited to the insular jargon of the world of visual art, he casts a wide net. You might see a reference to a song by Glam satirists *Sparks*, or to a *Durutti Column* title, or see a deliberately crude rendition of a *Cluster* album cover. Like

language itself, where Connors finds so much inspiration, such as Gertrude Stein and Jack Spicer essays, reproduced in his book *A Bell Is A Cup* (Rainoff, 2012). These works draw connections with Connors’ process – his work suggests quotation, parentheses, reflection, new vocabularies, and new grammars. Lest one feels lost in the cerebral conversations that bog down so much contemporary art, in Connors’ work (exhibited recently at MoMA PS1, the Walker Art Center, Herald St, and Cherry & Martin) there is sheer joy to be found in the color and texture. Witness the saturated cobalt blues and rich pomegranate reds that have dyed the canvas through and through. Works such as, *Food Plus Drug* (2012) or the springy Kandinsky-esque squiggles that make *Vocals* (2010) seem to ricochet off the canvas. If he shares with contemporaries Alex Hubbard, Richard Aldrich, Joe Bradley, Bernard Piffaretti and Alex Olson a certain penchant towards the reductive, the messily contained, Connors stands apart with what might be called a gentle mysticism. Not the macho variety that characterizes a good deal of 20th Century Modern Abstractionists but a kind that may be said to be particular to the

early 21st Century. One that seems to say, “There is something here, something deep, if you care to look. But if you just want to cast a cursory glance and have a pleasant experience, well, that’s your right, isn’t it?” Though he is often called a painter, ‘painting’ is not always what his ‘paintings’ look like. MoMA PS1 curator, Peter Eeley has suggested that, “His canvases often don’t look like they’ve been ‘painted’ as much as soak-stained, remarkable for the apparent thinness of their surface; paint ends up in them, rather than on them.” Indeed, one afternoon, while we spoke in his Williamsburg studio, he laughed as he described how when he wasn’t happy with a particular piece. In reaction, he simply reversed the canvas, turned it inside out, and let what had seeped through the canvas become ‘the painting’. This allowed both sides of the painting to interact—in the process creating an accidental work that pleased him much more than the original. Not so much an error, as a perfect realization of the unintended finding its way to the fore. The following conversation took place last Spring via telephone. A casual conversation among friends.





(previous page)

**Fifth Thirds**, 2012

Acrylic on canvas  
100x80 in.

(above)

**Trapdoor**, 2010

Oil on stretcher bar, muslin and hand painted frame  
35.25x 31.25 in.

(opposite)

Installation view of the exhibition

**Matt Connors: Complaints III**

**Cherry and Martin, Los Angeles, CA**

January 18 – March 15, 2014

Photo by Brian Forrest



**Alexis Georgopoulos: Hey Matt!**

Matt Connors: How's it going?

**AG: Going well. I'm suffering from some horrible spring hay fever allergies, but otherwise good.**

MC: I'm feeling that too, but I thought I had a brain tumor.

**AG: Funny you say that! Because you know, I have sort of a hypochondriac thing about that exact thing!**

MC: Yeah? Also there's a meningitis outbreak going around among homosexuals. I was like, "Oh my head hurts..."

**AG: Wait, what is Meningitis?**

MC: All I know is that you get it and you're dead two days later.

**AG: Oh my god.**

MC: It's so mysterious I don't even know that much about it. Freshmen in college are the most likely to get it...you can't go to college unless you get a shot for it or something.

**AG: Wow. Well, I hope both of us are just suffering from allergies.**

MC: I know! I started to realize that's it's from my nose to the back of my head. So, it's more like a sinus...

**AG: I get this cloudy head thing where it's like doing anything that requires actual brain function becomes really challenging.**

MC: That's nice to hear because maybe that's what's wrong with me. Yesterday I had to go give a lecture and I left my computer at my studio and it was an hour away.

**AG: Oh no!**

MC: Luckily the people at my gallery were here and I was like, "Do you mind emailing it to me?"

**AG: Oh, so it was mostly images not notes?**

MC: When I have to remember words, then that's when I really get nervous. I don't get nervous if I'm just riffing. I don't know, that's easier for me for some reason. If I have to follow a script I feel stupid. I feel nervous.

**AG: So how did it go?**

MC: It was good. Because, I always do it off the cuff, I don't think it really impacted me that I didn't have my images with me. So it really depends on the crowd. If they're really cool art kids and they're just into talking, it's perfect. Because that's all I really want to do in lectures just shoot the shit with them. I don't make the kind of work where I can give a chronological story. So either they're cool and I get a vibe from them and we can just talk and they think I'm funny and it's fun, or I get this negative vibe from them.

**AG: The audience was receptive, then?**

MC: They were really cool actually! I've been obsessed with *Suicide* this week, the band, so while I was waiting for the email to come in with the images I showed them this live *Suicide* clip on YouTube. *Suicide* were so old when they started...

**AG: I guess I never really thought about that. They did both look pretty haggard from the beginning...(laughs)**

MC: I think in 1979 Alan Vega was like 35? Which is so weird! I've been thinking about how weird they are as a band in general. How from outer space they are, yet at the same time they're this very traditional rock and roll band.

**AG: In certain ways they were very traditional, very 1950s rock n roll.**

MC: I was going to speak about their music in relation to how I feel about genre and paintings. I was thinking about how they seemed so crazy Punk Rock and from outer space, but they were actually doing like this Elvis thing, basically.

**AG: (Laughs) First of all, why hasn't the second *Suicide* album gotten a proper reissue? I don't understand.**

MC: Is there a second one? I didn't even know about it.

**AG: Yeah, I'm sure you've heard a couple of the songs. *Diamonds, Fur Coat, Champagne or Sweetheart?* Those were some of their songs from that record. Anyway, that record**

**had some great stuff on it. I think that record was produced by Ric Ocasek from The Cars. He must have heard the pop potential at the heart of their strangeness. Even though he was the go-to guy for Pop crossover. But of course it didn't go over.**

MC: They're such weirdo's! It's amazing.

**AG: Well, when you mentioned genre as it applies to your work, what were you talking about specifically?**

MC: Matt (Wolf, filmmaker) and I did this funny talk at the Walker Art Center recently, and we came up with these keywords. I think Matt came up with *Genre* and that gave us something to talk around, I think of painting *itself* as kind of a genre. I think of myself as an artist first, but then I'm totally happy as a painter. It's like a writer who's writing a mystery or like a filmmaker making a Film Noir. So I like to think about my work more in terms of genre rather than style. It's a fun way to think around the process.

**AG: Let's get to that.**

MC: How do you record this?

**AG: I have the most bizarre set-up! When I used to write for magazines regularly I had a proper recorder.**

MC: Plug in microphone or something?

**AG: Exactly. But I'm having this problem where I've re-updated my iTunes password so many times that I've forgotten what it is. So I wasn't able to download this app that would have made this very simple. So what I've got going now is ridiculous! It's a 1/8th inch cable going from my phone into my laptop and I'm recording it all into Logic.**

MC: You should put a Vocoder on it. (laughs)

**AG: Yeah! Anyway, how is LA? How long has it been now since you've been living there?**

MC: I came here in February, I think. It seems like a long time ago now...but it's cool! My main psychological issue right now with this whole idea of being bi-coastal was deciding to solve this

anguish between New York and Los Angeles. But I still have to remind myself that I'm doing this, because I still have a lot of stressful thoughts about deciding. I have to remind myself that I'm doing both of them. I just need to relax about it. The whole reason I moved is because I fell into this really rad apartment, which is super beyond belief. It's tiny, it's a studio, but it has a huge yard and it's in a great neighborhood. I have a fireplace and a washer/dryer. There's this ridiculous view! So it's just like stupid nice and cheap. That's really great. And I fell into this art studio and then I had all this really great serendipity where two friends of mine are down to be my permanent New York sub-letters. They took both my apartment and my studio there, so that solved this huge anxiety part of the whole idea. They're super flexible, so now whenever I want to come to LA, they'll just pop into my place in New York.

**AG: That's perfect.**

MC: I know! When that started to shake down I said to myself, "Really? This is wild!" And you know they're friends and artists, very trustworthy and all that. So I just need to relax and be like, "Everything's working out." I've had three months to make all of my shows over the last couple of years and sometimes I think that's less than ideal, but then I wonder if maybe I do it on purpose without realizing it.

**AG: Like it is a necessary evil?**

MC: Maybe, but I kind of want to figure out some kind of middle. The gallery in New York (Canada Gallery) has been closed for about a year because they're building a new space. So I don't really know when that show will be, but I'm hoping it will take a little bit longer than three months.

**AG: What's a typical day for you in Los Angeles?**

MC: I live right by the dog park, so I just get up and go to the dog park. I either go hiking in the morning or around sunset with a bunch of friends. It's super easy and you can get to Griffith Park really easily. You know LA a little bit right?

**AG: Yeah.**

MC: Griffith Park is a five-minute drive. It's ridiculous and you can do pretty killer hikes. It's a good exercise. So I'll either hike in the morning or hopefully in the afternoon. My studio is a few miles away and I drive to the studio, usually pretty early. I've maintained this jet lag schedule where I wake up early. It's just about getting older, I guess. So I've become a kind of a 9 to 5'er from Monday through Friday. I think it's partially because my New York studio is in Williamsburg and I really don't want to go out there on the weekends or after dark. But I've had that studio in Williamsburg since 1997. So that's shaped me into working on a real salary man's schedule.

**AG: I think it's challenging when you're creating your own hours. You can sometimes fall into a trap where you don't know when to clock out in your mind.**

MC: I tend towards feeling guilty so I'm always thinking I'm not working enough. But then I can also feel like I'm *always* working. It's such a weird and ridiculous fantasy to be doing what you want to be doing as your day job. So it's kind of nice to create some false trappings of 'going to work' sometimes, you know?

**AG: I've never had the liberty of having a studio outside of my apartment, but I've reached a point now where I think I need to do it. I can't blur the line between the two. Even though I have all my instruments in their own corner of my apartment, there are just too many distractions. Did I deal with my bills? Finish that book? Clean the apartment?**

MC: If you jump into it, your life will follow you. You'll force yourself to create circumstances that let you do what you need to do.

**AG: So do you find fewer distractions in California than you would in New York?**

MC: I don't know. Both of my studios are equally kind of isolated. Maybe a little bit less so in Williamsburg, but my studio here is in an area

called Glassell Park. It's pretty industrial. There's only one place to eat. I have to drive ten minutes just to get to Whole Foods. My distractions are more from the internet you know? When I'm working I feel like I'm vaguely on autopilot. I don't really have a plan and I just show up at the studio and read and look at things and push things around. Something will eventually float to the top about a decision I have to make, but it's real slow and very piecemeal. Sometimes I wonder if I do anything. I could have a whole studio day where all I did was decide that a painting went the other way around. But I had to stare at it for three hours and read a blog to figure that out.

**AG: Your recent book, which is beautiful by the way, is called *A Bell Is A Cup*. Besides being a great title, funnily enough, that was the first time I heard *Wire* in high school...**

MC: It was that album?

**AG: Yeah! It was! Strange, huh? It wasn't *Pink Flag* or *Chairs Missing*. It just happened to be playing in a record store! I bought it on cassette. The full title of the record was *A Bell Is A Cup...Until It Is Struck*, right? That brings to mind the way your work calls into question specificity or functionality. Is that what drew you to the title?**

MC: I've always loved that title. I have certain things that kind of turn into mantras. Just things or sayings that I really mentally hook onto. I had that record when it came out too. So that phrase has been kicking around in my brain. It's funny because these undergrads were looking at the book yesterday and they were saying, "Wait! A bell *IS* a cup!" I was thinking, "Oh my god." But I think it's just such a beautiful little poem in three words. It's a really efficient little phrase that reads much larger than it is. Which is kind of a model that I like to follow. But another reason why I chose that title for the book is I like to have these embedded, really super personal references. You know, the actual title of the *Wire* album has a second part that's

Installation view of the exhibition  
**Painter Painter**  
Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN  
February 2 - October 27, 2013



on the back of the cassette. It's *A Bell Is A Cup... Until it is Struck*. So a person picking up my book, reading the title, especially if they are familiar with that Wire album, the second part of the title would kind of reverberate without them actually having to read it. I also really like that process of suggesting invisible allusions or invoking an absent part. I'm also starting to feel guilty about my overuse of other people's titles.

**AG: It's funny. Our relationships to references are all quite different and it feels like we all make different decisions about when it's OK to reference and when it's not OK to reference...**

MC: I think music and record covers and record titles were my very first introduction to art-making. Also, maybe it relates to a certain poetics, where you were listening to music and looking at an image and those two things together create an atmosphere or an idea. You know when you're a kid how deep you get with album covers and music? I remember I was listening to Prince's *1999* as a kid and there's a part at the end of one of the sides where there's a voice that yells out, "Help! Somebody help me!" I was so deep in that album that I ran outside because I thought someone was in trouble! I thought it was real. It's just that weird connection. Some of the records that we were both probably into, like *New Order* and *Joy Division*, those bands are so oblique and there are really complicated relationships between the music and the covers. To me that was a real formative idea in terms of making meaning. So I do like to reference music. I've worked at record stores for my whole life. My brother is really involved in music and I studied music in college. So it's a real pivotal way of thinking for me as a musical appreciator. I'm not anywhere near to being a musician, but as a music listener, it's a great way to think about meaning and structure. So yes, referencing music for my work seems really natural to me.

**AG: I love the text in your book. It's interesting that you've included texts by**

**Gertrude Stein, Peter Eleey, and Jack Spicer. Have you ever thought about writing yourself?**

MC: I would like to, but I find writing incredibly difficult. It's so hard and painful. But I think I need to get over that. There are things that I do write as part of my job, and I will say that after the fact I really enjoy it. As a matter of necessity, I think there will probably be more and more occasions for that. I would like to do some curating in the future and I'm sure that will involve justifying what's there. But still I think it's really hard. I have friends that are writers, so I understand the pain that goes along with it. Every writer I know talks about how painful it is.

**AG: You like to use the word poetic(s) a lot, which can mean a lot of different things. But it seems like one of the many strengths of your work is your ability to conjure something or, perhaps, suggest something. As you said earlier in regards to the book title, to let things reverberate out. That makes me think of poetry more so than prose.**

MC: Maybe it's related to my attraction to minimalism? I don't know. The less is more thing is so tired I guess, at this point, because more is more too. But, for me, I also think it relates to my restlessness. My attention deficit disorder? I'm not really interested in making anything highly crafted as the end product. I just want to see the ideas finished. I have an idea and I want to make it so. I'm not interested in a very high polish or a super delicate construction. I have much more an interest in expediency. I'm restless. I don't have that much patience. If I have an idea I just want to get it out there so in some ways I'm not really that invested in the physical making of the work. The end product is to me a little bit less precious or valuable than maybe it would be to a different kind of artist. For me, it's more like evidence or the residue of me working out an idea. The bigger project of how I think in materials. I don't use fancy paint brushes, I don't use super nice paint, I don't work on things

for a really long time because they usually generate the next idea while I'm making it. Then I don't have the patience for waiting on that second idea. So I'll jump to the second idea and it will kick back ideas onto the first idea. So it's more of a process for me than a slow secretion I guess.

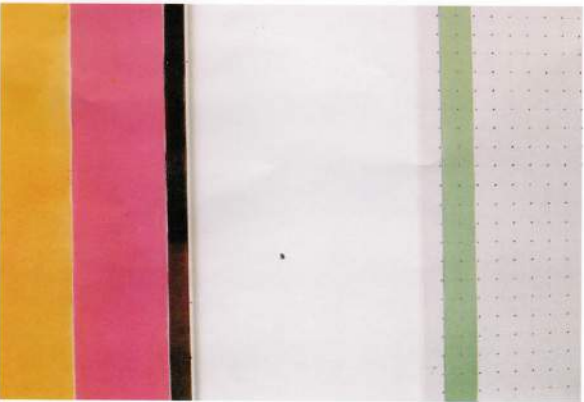
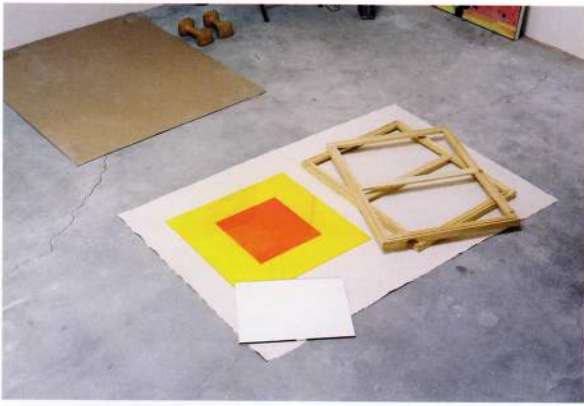
**AG: Your other book, *Correspondences*, uses frames as it's predominant theme, leaving rectangular voids of empty space. And many of your paintings don't contain subject matter. Can you tell me a little bit about this fascination with frames?**

MC: I don't know where it came from, but I think that as I started to think of the work more as objects, I really could not escape from that physical perception of them. This is common for most painters. Because the physical paintings are objects when you have to build the structures all the time and it's like you're building little minimalist plinths. When you look at other people's work, you look at the edges and you see how they're hung on the wall and you see how the corners are dealt with and for me that just developed into a pretty intense focus on how the edges in my work were dealt with in relation to the center. But also, without the hierarchy of it being in the center or the edge. Someone recently was asking me how I felt politics could play into being an abstract artist and it rendered me mute and sort of guilty feeling. But in some ways I think that the schematics of focusing on the perimeter rather than the center in a rather ideal world is maybe political? Also, I used to work in a much smaller scale and it started to feel very meaningful to me. I pay a lot of attention to scale and those pieces were really a series of small, edge shaped objects. The edges and the borders of those were very important, so as the scale has increased, I feel like I still focus on the ephemeral aspects of the work. I think it's just become a really exciting process to have that stuff take over. It was an experiment, like me asking, "What if the center is the edge and the edge is the center?" It's a material project as much as a conceptual project.

**Fiction**, 2011  
Acrylic on canvas, 2-part  
59x36 in. each part







Views of the artist's studio  
Los Angeles, CA  
Photographed by Cali Thornhill-Dewitt

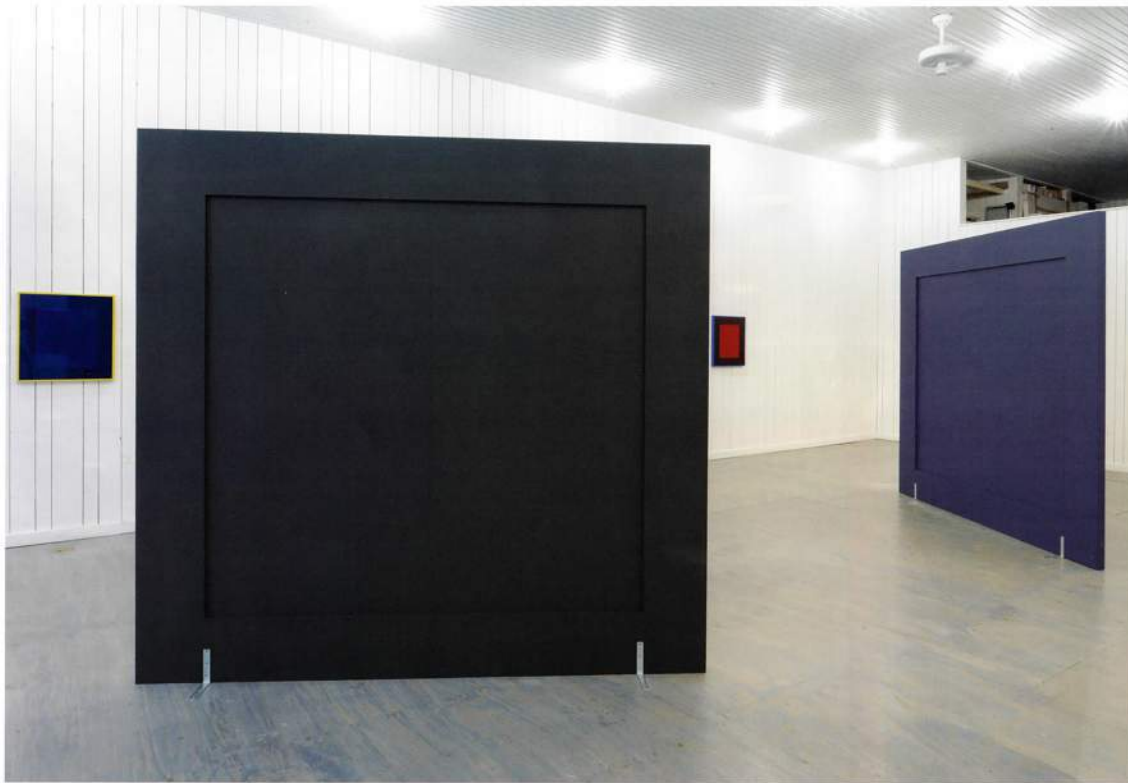
(opposite)  
**What Was Music.**, 2012  
Poplar and oil  
68.5x40.75 in.  
Photo by Robert Wedemeyer





*Reverse Commute*, 2014  
Acrylic on canvas  
14.5x12 in.  
Courtesy of Canada, New York

(opposite)  
Installation view of the exhibition  
**Matt Connors: ZONDER KARMA**,  
Amagansett, NY  
June 14 – July 6, 2014



**AG: I suppose the word *function* is a loaded word. But as we're all surrounded by material objects. It's something that you just can't help but think about. Have you ever had moments where you've asked yourself what is the function of this work that you're making?**

MC: When you're a young artist in New York and you're working and busting your ass to pay your rent and then suddenly you get to be an artist as your main job I think there's a crisis. It seems ridiculous and you feel like a wastoid that you're making this "frou frou" for the 1% or something. I just think about myself as a human being and I have really fed off of and lived off of art and kind of the ideal of the inherent politics of my version of abstraction. I think there's a utility in being an artist. Producing culture is a really civilizing thing in the world.

**AG: What do you mean by civilizing?**

MC: Anti-barbarism?

**AG: Oh, so you mean *civilizing* in a positive sense?**

MC: This is such wishful thinking and something that I think me and my friends cling to in order to feel good about it. I mean that sounds so depressing. I don't know if I would have survived or at least been the person I am without finding art. Even from art books then eventually going to museums. I think that physical paintings as objects of consideration, to me they're kind of like philosopher stones or something. You look at them to glean some sort of ideas or maybe complicate your ideas? My particular favored art experience is one of complication and confusion. So as a consumer of art that's what I want. I don't really appreciate the experience of known things. The things that change my life and make me think are these times of confusion and misapprehension.

**AG: Why do you think you get so much from confusion and disorientation?**

MC: I just think it's productive. We're fed all this dialed-up, sealed-in meaning then we get it and we go on. The art and music that sounded like nails across a chalkboard when I was young ended up being the stuff that I really loved later in life.

**AG: Like what? Can you give examples?**

MC: There are very specific painting techniques that used to drive me crazy. This is so basic and boring, but I used to hate acrylic paint. I used to have this old art school thing where only oil paint acceptable, and now I'm only using acrylic paint. I'm facing all these technical things with it that used to rub me the wrong way. Before it felt very amateurish or cheap.

**AG: But you use acrylic in a way that seems very naturalistic.**

MC: I hope so. I hope my materials will change...

**AG: Another recurrent theme in your work is these cylindrical metal bars or tubes. You often lean them up against the works and that seems to be like a recurring theme. Do you think of those as totems in a way?**

MC: Maybe? But the sculptural stuff is really generated by chance within the studio and a real sense of permission and letting myself appreciate imagery and pictures that are generated in my studio. The first time I used one of those leaning poles, I was working on a sculpture that involved a pole. I had just gone to Home Depot and bought the pole, which is as far as I had gone into thinking about it. But I needed to get it out of the way of something so I leaned it in front of a painting. It just created this image, a three-dimensional thing, it acted as a line addition to the painting. I was at a place in my artistic development where I was really excited about following the rabbit holes of really basic, stupid ideas. Not stupid, but just following the trail of the work as it suggests things. I didn't understand at that point why I couldn't do that. So I did it, which is 'one small step' for a painter. It didn't seem like that big of a deal. But for someone who considers himself a two-dimensional artist to add a three-dimensional part feels very dramatic. That was very gratifying to let myself kind of own up to that image and then use it as a work. In retrospect, there are references to Joseph Beuys, and there's Cadere and Blinky Palermo's staffs, that are also totally the same thing, 'totem' stuff and that's obviously in the meat grinder that my brain is. So it's there and I really like that post-acknowledgement of the obvious references that have been feeding into my autopilot. I made this

piece that was basically kind of a painting/sculpture combine and it turned out to be a pretty faithful copy of a Richard Serra prop piece. I eventually referenced the Serra piece in the title. But it's not like I didn't know I was doing that, I just wasn't bothering to worry about it. In the end there are a lot of crucial differences. Richard Serra is an artist that I always hated actually.

**AG: Why's that? Did you find the work just ego driven, monolithic?**

MC: I also just thought they were ugly! (laughs) I just had a taste thing with them. I'm still not in love with certain super ego driven practices. The piece that I did is actually one of my favorite pieces, even though it makes this really clear reference to Richard Serra. I don't know. I'm not troubled by it, there's no anxiety in that influence for me. The Serra piece is probably in the book. It's called "False Prop." The actual Richard Serra pieces were like a box, stand-alone iron slabs that use gravity to stand up. The prop piece was a big iron square with an iron pole that was holding it to the wall. But in my painting there's a wooden plank on the floor then there's a cardboard tube leaning, but it doesn't touch the painting, so it references the elements of the Serra thing, but there isn't any real gravity involved in the painting. So it's just skirting all those issues. But right when I finished it, I thought, "Does this look like a Richard Serra?" After you find it in the book, you should go Google the Richard Serra one.

**AG: You often use tray pieces where you have an object that holds a few different pieces. Does that also come about when you're just rearranging things to create space?**

MC: I had come up with this idea for building these trays to dip paintings in and I did do that, but I had a couple of false starts. I had someone build me a tray that was the wrong size. So this wrong sized box was sitting around my studio and I had to get stuff out of the way, so I started to stack paintings in them. So yeah, it was just like another accidental image, an external composition, that then I re-purposed as a work. They also seemed like simple machine-like sculptures to me, they're really nice



vehicles for color and for setting up very theatrical color relationships. In the new work for my next one-man show, I'm really paring it down. You'll see, everything is weirdly monochrome. This expediency has kind of devolved into just putting *this color* next to *that color*. So I just paint two canvases so I can just put the colors next to each other.

**AG: Barnett Newman is someone who I think of occasionally when I look at your pieces and he definitely explored some things like that. What's your relationship to his work?**

MC: That's another thing that's funny because Barnett Newman and Robert Motherwell are certainly looming large, and I like them a lot. But I would say they were absent from my artistic upbringing. I was never super stoked on either of them until recently. I've never owned a book by either of them. This is really an adult onset appreciation of these artists.

**AG: It is curious when you make something that you come to find out after the fact resembles someone else's work. And someone whose work you don't even care for!**

MC: It's like your subconscious is telling you to pay attention. Someone wrote something about this painting I made and they were like (adopts mocking tone), "Rothko much?" And I thought, "Oh yeah, that *does* look like a Rothko! (laughs) But I mean, I'm never going to make a Rothko copy and even if I did, I think it would be interesting in the way that I failed. So, I don't think it's a problem. At MoCA here in LA, there's a primitive installation of a faux-Rothko Chapel. It's almost like my work told me to go look at it, you know? I think that's exciting. And that's part of why I'm really dedicated to this interpretive, loose, open-ended process because I think it creates these *directionals* that don't necessarily just move *forward*.

**AG: What do you make of the fact that in the past few years, you and a handful of other artists have been grouped under the rubric of New Abstractionists?**

MC: I think it's boring and not that interesting. I do think it's hard to write about artwork. So, if those categories help people make sense of things, that's fine.

**AG: Is it about people coming to grips with the fact that paintings seem to still be relevant to people? And they have to place it on a certain historical continuum? Or is it a commerce issue?**

MC: I mean, sadly I think it's a bit of a market thing. As we speak, there's a figurative renaissance happening. I mean, who knows? I know how long these *ANP's* take to publish (laughs) so by the time it comes out, there'll probably be a figurative comeback. But that's an unfortunate part of these categories. I think it's cool when critics are actually trying to grapple with why people are maybe thinking in similar ways. That's a cool iteration of these categories, but I think that might be the exception rather than the rule. There's also a rage right now for finding older artists that could have their second act that were undiscovered. So that's also getting a bit ridiculous. You know, like, "This lady from Laguna Beach is 90, and she makes triangle paintings. And no one's ever seen them!"

**AG: It seems that critics have created this dialectic between either the artist who's ironically detached while referencing or the artist who's earnestly engaged while referencing. Whereas there's this ideal of the artist who is just naturally making work that's unique.**

MC: Which totally exists. I think unique doesn't have to be, you know, there's a different person making every body of work so they're *de facto different* works. I don't appreciate irony as a mode of working or thinking. I think I'm a bit more of a romantic or idealist. Jokey, ironic artistic practices make me sad. There is a real tussle with how people are engaging with art history and how it's characterized. It's come up a lot recently.

**AG: There's a beautiful interplay in your work between the deliberate and what we could call the chance or the happenstance. Do you consider improvisation part of the process?**

MC: Totally. And then, there's also a complication of, once you know that chance and accident are part of your process how do you cultivate chance without it becoming fake, you know? I was talking about *the drip* as a concept and how I make fake drips all the

time. Like, if I want to place color somewhere but I don't feel like using a brush, I *manufacture* a drip and it's kind of comedic. I load a brush and hover it over the spot and then it creates this thing that's theoretically accidental.

**AG: It's the anti-macho Pollock.**

MC: I guess Pollock was macho but he was doing this very delicate thing. I also think that maybe characterization of Pollock's drip being his "jism" is getting a little bit old.

**AG: I wasn't thinking about jism per se. I was thinking more about the physical gesture and the jazzy...**

MC: Just talking about *the drip* as an analogy for history, or *Abstract Expressionism*. Like, the drips would be the byproduct of a really furious brushstroke that went across the top. And you didn't care that it dripped all across the bottom! Now when I make a drip, I'm obviously referencing historical... I mean, you can't have a drip on a painting without someone thinking of quote-unquote drips. But it seems like an exciting word, another piece of language I can use. I do have legitimate drips happen because I'm a mess. But in learning to be an artist, in just the same way that I appreciated those studio constructions that then became intentions, I started to notice that, "Oh you know when I have to move a really wet painting over another wet painting, it will probably drip on that painting." So after that happened a couple times, that became a tool for me. I can construct two paintings next to each other and utilize the accidents that proximity creates as another kind of grammar. Sometimes I think of my studio as a desert island studio. Like I don't have any other supplies, I'm just stuck in this room and I can only use these twenty things. Some of those things happen to include those other paintings I'm working on. But, to return to that earlier question, I'd say as a person working with this stuff, I take a very idealistic, optimistic, charitable, hopeful stance on all these issues of appropriation and semantics of history and re-use. I'm trying to proceed rather than get mired in it. I think if you're legitimately just making stuff and you want to see what comes out next, I think there's this hypothetical vacuum that critics and other artists really want to exist. But it sounds boring to me and also impossible.

*False Prop*, 2011, Acrylic on canvas, wood and cardboard, 3-part 85x60x32.25 in. installed. Photo by Robert Wedemeyer

*Second Divot (articulated) for Candy*, 2012, Acrylic on canvas, 80x60 in. overall installed

(opposite) *Demonstration (red and blue)*, 2013, Standard construction grade walls, welded sheet metal, paint, 2-part, 6 meters high. Photo by Sebastiano Pelloni di Persano

