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16 ARTISTS TO WATCH IN 2016 (+ 2)

The needs and priorities of artists are in constant flux. Art historians have attempted to document this flux by identifying a series of seismic shifts in aesthetics and attaching to each its defining characteristics. This practice has provided us with a litany of isms that stretch back centuries. Art history will continue to roll on, but it very well may be that the age of the ism is behind us. That's not to say that there are not, and will not continue to be, clusters of like-minded artists whose combined efforts can generate an aesthetic critical mass that historians are able to delineate. But with instant global communication, the time in which new ideas are disseminated, assimilated, and ultimately disregarded is so compressed that the enterprise has been, at best, reduced to trend spotting.

The medium of painting, in particular, has always been prone to noticeable trends. For the better part of a decade, the trend of note has been the overwhelming amount of abstraction that has circulated, in particular that of the provisional, or de-skilled ilk. While there are some talented artists working in this vein--Richard Aldrich and Joe Bradley, to name two--much of the stuff is so hopelessly bland and devoid of meaningful content that it has garnered the moniker "zombie formalism." In the past two years, however, the winds have shifted. Abstraction is out, and the figure is in; flatness is out, as artists begin to embrace a space that lies somewhere between reality and a digital simulacrum of it.

Both of these trends were widely visible in 2015. As I wandered though the various art fairs that make up Miami's art week in early December I was overwhelmed by the amount of figurative painting on view...much of it at galleries that have rarely, if ever, exhibited such work. The figure is everywhere, and being addressed with all manner of stylistic intonation. Even more conspicuous was the number of artists who, whatever their subject matter, are conjuring a kind of space that seems teasingly "real," yet clearly relies on life as experienced

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weaned on the Internet is now coming of age.

Before getting in to this year's list of Artists to Watch, I want to say how pleased I am to see the success of all of the artists featured on last year's list. Sadie Benning had a knockout show at Susanne Vielmetter in Los Angeles that was critically acclaimed. Katherine Bernhardt took it to the next level with her outing at Venus Over Manhattan. Daniel Heidkamp, who just gets better and better, was heavily in demand. Eddie Martinez, whose current show at Mitchell-Innes & Nash is his best to date, is now firmly on the radar of serious international collectors. Most exciting to me is the attention given to mature painter, Katherine Bradford. Bradford has been making her quirky, extraordinary paintings for years and, finally, the world has caught up. Her work looked completely of-the-moment at NADA Miami, and her subsequent one-woman show at CANADA in New York City was a huge commercial and critical success. - *Steven Zevitas, Editor/Publisher*

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Katherine Bradford. Courtesy of CANADA, New York.

BRIAN BELOTT

Belott is not new to the art scene. I first came across his work at CANADA in the early-2000s. Since then he has plugged away and gained the respect of many artists that I know. Belott's sensitivity with materials – even the most humble – has always been evident. There is a sort of kitschy, tossed off vibe that always hovers around his work, but make no doubt, he is deadly serious. His soon to close show at ultra-hip Moran Bondaroff in Los Angeles is the best Belott exhibition I have seen to date. It evinces a new maturity and an ability to work successfully on a large scale.



Brian Belott. Courtesy of Moran Bondaroff, Los Angeles.

BILLY AL BENGSTON

The 82-year old artist has been a known quantity on the West Coast for decades. He is perhaps best known for his paintings that involve the motif of sergeant's stripes, which he adopted after seeing Jasper

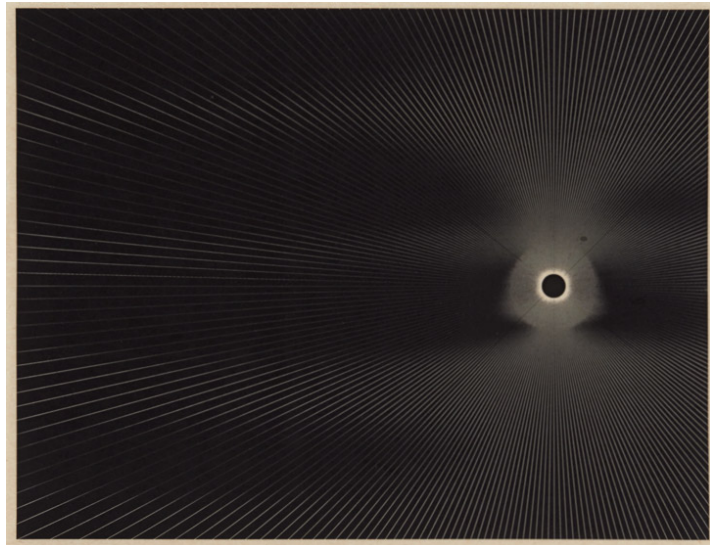
Johns work at the 1958 Venice Biennale. As with many artists who developed their careers outside of New York City, Bengston never got his proper due. Whether due to the recent interest in all things LA, or the art world's concurrent focus on the work of underappreciated mature artists, Bengston's work is now actively being discovered by a new generation of curators and collectors.



Billy Al Bengston. Courtesy of Franklin Parrasch, Los Angeles.

MARSHA COTTRELL

I have known Cottrell's elegant and carefully considered work since a 1998 show at Derek Eller Gallery. Since then, I came across it here or there in the context of a group exhibition, but never had the opportunity to appreciate it on its own terms. Eleven Rivington's 2015 solo of her work changed that. A painter by trade, Cottrell's recent is made by tweaking digital image files and then printing with a laser printer. The results are stunning. At the end of day it is all about being in command of your materials, and Cottrell somehow generates highly nuanced and personal work from a process that should not allow it.



Marsha Cottrell. Courtesy of Eleven Rivington, New York.

DANIEL CREWS-CHUBB

Crews-Chubb was a Miami discovery for me this year. His solo presentation at UNTITLED was one of the highlights of the fair. It would be overstating it to call Crews-Chubb an expressionist per se,

but the fluid and aggressive manner with which he handles paint certainly owes something to the legacy of de Kooning and others. There is no artifice to his paintings...what you see is what you get. In them, roughly hewn figures jostle for dominance over each other and the picture plane. I am a huge fan of how this guy paints feet.



Daniel Crews-Chubb. Courtesy of Vigo, London.

MIRA DANCY

I first saw Dancy's work in 2013 at Kansas Gallery in New York City. Having graduated from Columbia's MFA program in 2009, Dancy is a solid member of the new generation of figurative painters, many of whom are quickly gaining attention. She focuses on the female body with a vengeance. It is almost as if she is trying to wrest it from the hands of the mostly male cast of artists who have laid claim to it over the years. In the past few years her compositional sense has gotten ever more sophisticated. I am excited to see how she grows.



Mira Dancy. Courtesy of Night Gallery, Los Angeles.

JOHN FINNERAN

Finneran was part of the now legendary Rivington Arms roster that set the tone for the Lower East Side gallery scene in the early-2000s. While he did not experience the sort of meteoric-rise that some of his stable mates did, Finneran has consistently looked good in the intervening years. When I walked into Hannah Hoffman's LA digs this past October, I wasn't even sure what was on view. There was Finneran with an immaculately installed exhibition of paintings, works on paper and sculpture. He is a great example of an artist who has steadfastly pursued his own vision, whatever the current aesthetic climate, and come out on top.



John Finneran. Courtesy of Hannah Hoffman Gallery, Los Angeles.

JONATHAN GARDNER

It is not surprising that Gardner spent time in Chicago, where he was undoubtedly exposed to the work of that city's best known aesthetic export: Chicago Imagism. Gardner makes very strange paintings, and I mean that as a compliment. They are not strange because of their subject matter, which is the figure sprawled out in all manner of Matisse-ean repose, but for their overall presence. Like a number of emerging artists, Gardner constructs space in a way that is at once "real" and completely fabricated. The net result is disorienting. Who are these people, and where do they exist?



Jonathan Gardner. Courtesy of Casey Kaplan, New York.

LAEH GLENN

Altman Siegel's solo booth of new paintings by LA-based artist Laeh Glenn at the NADA Art Fair was simply my favorite booth at any art fair in Miami this past December. Just wow. Just when you think that it would be impossible for an artist to do something with painting that would blow you away, there it was. Collectors agreed, as the entire booth was sold out before the end of the fair's typically frenetic VIP opening. Glenn mines a wide range of art historical tropes, yet arrives at paintings that are fresh and resolutely her own. I have rarely seen the figure and abstraction locked in more resonant harmony.



Laeh Glenn, Courtesy of Altman Siegel, San Francisco.

GUY GOODWIN

Goodwin has been actively exhibiting since the mid-1970s. Like Chris Martin and other artists who have been plugging away for years, sometimes all it takes is the right context for the work to be properly appreciated. I loved his one-man exhibition at New York's Brennan & Griffin in 2012, but his solo at B&G's NADA Miami booth this past December blew me away. Raucous yet controlled, chromatically dissonant, yet harmonious, Goodwin's recent works lives and breathes in the space between painting and sculpture, formalism and representation.



Guy Goodwin. Courtesy of Brennan & Griffin, New York.

LOIE HOLLOWELL

Hollowell was featured in *New American Paintings 2011 MFA Annual* when she was still a student at VCU's increasingly prominent MFA program. Her work has changed dramatically since then, and she now finds herself in the thick of the dialog surrounding painters who are exploring a new type of pictorial space. Ostensibly abstract, Hollowell's paintings draw from a growing lexicon of forms and

reference everything from the vagina to architectural forms. Like Jonathan Gardner though, it is not so much what she paints, as it is the uneasy and shifting presence of these paintings that make them special. Look for Hollowell's upcoming solo at Feuer/Mesler in October.



Loie Hollowell. Courtesy of the Feuer/Mesler, New York.

JOSH JEFFERSON

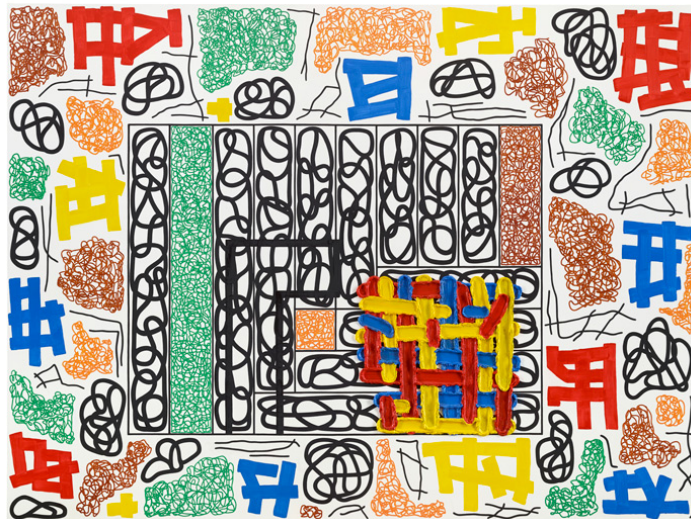
My good buddy Scott Zieher – one of the three art world SZs, myself and Steve Zavattero being the others – sent me an email last year and encouraged me to visit with Jefferson, who, unbeknownst to me, was living in Boston. There are certain people who I will never refuse a request from, and Scott is firmly on that list. I didn't know what to expect when I arrived at Jefferson's basement studio, but it was well worth the trip. Looking at the trajectory of Jefferson's work that day, it was clear that he had found a very strong voice. He is, in the manner of Eddie Martinez, a truly natural painter. To his credit, he has relentlessly focused on a small number of subjects in the past few years – most notably the figure – which has allowed him to hone his painting chops and explore all manner of formal intervention. Jefferson had a well-received exhibition at Gallery 16 in San Francisco in 2015, and I expect that we will be seeing a lot of him in 2016 beyond. His work is featured on the cover of the February/March issue of *New American Paintings*.



Josh Jefferson. Courtesy of the Artist.

JONATHAN LASKER

Ok, I know, duh Zevitas. Promoting Lasker may be like preaching to the converted. I have liked the work since seeing it at Sperone Westwater's Soho space in my earliest art world days. To be honest though, I don't think I ever really loved it. With Lasker's soon-to-close exhibition at Cheim & Read though, I am all in. This is a career defining show that distills years of experience into one loud thunder-clap. Never has the grid seemed less constraining and more malleable. Bravo.



Jonathan Lasker. Courtesy of Cheim & Read, New York.

TALA MADANI

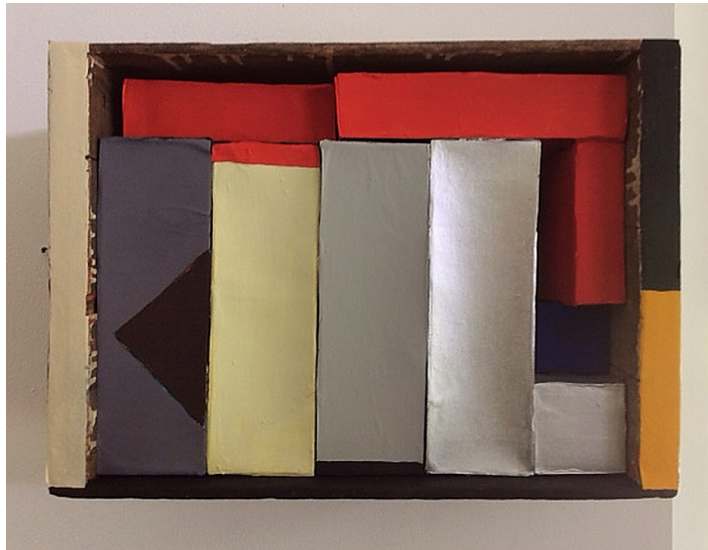
Born in Tehran, Madani is another of a growing number of artists who call LA their home. Madani does not make easy paintings, and in them, men do not fare well. Her figures are subjected to all manner of humiliation and violence. Most are leaking some sort of bodily fluid. Excrement is everywhere. Even with all of this going on, the tone of these paintings is not hectoring. To her credit, Madani effectively employs her knack for spontaneous painterly gestures to the service of the work's overall content. There is a purposeful, if strident, energy to each painting.



Tala Madani. Courtesy of Pilar Corrias, London.

NANCY SHAVER

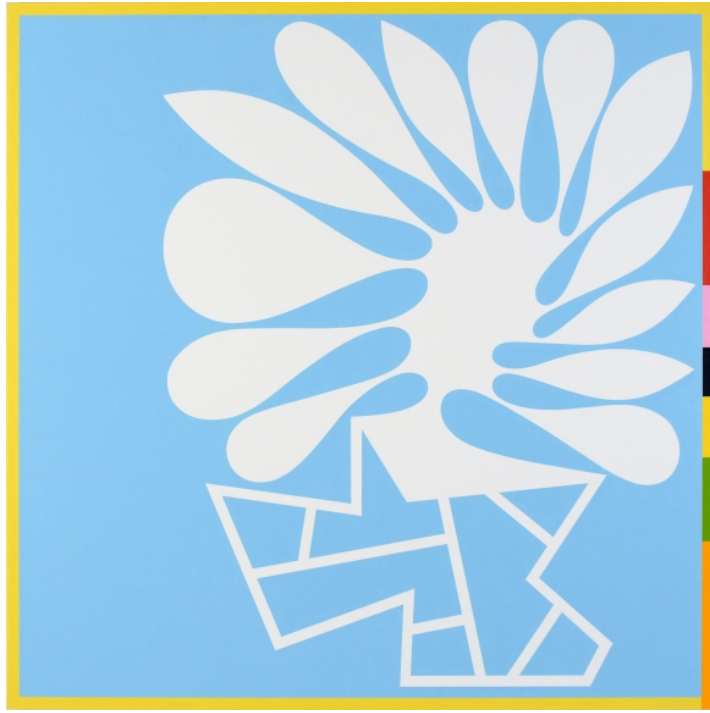
I was introduced Shaver's work by the great Hudson at Feature Inc. more than a decade ago. (I truly miss Hudson. He was a generous soul with an unflinching vision. He was in the art world for all of the right reasons.) Shaver has been making mature work and exhibiting for more than four decades. Like Katherine Bradford, and many others, she is way overdue for wider recognition. Shaver is an absolute master of redeeming materials that are aesthetically intractable. Look for an upcoming solo at Derek Eller's soon-to-open new Lower East Side space.



Nancy Shaver. Courtesy of Derek Eller Gallery, New York.

CARY SMITH

Smith is another artist who Hudson introduced me to a number of years ago. I have always had a great deal of respect for his work, and he happens to be one of the nicest people that you will meet. I can't quite put my finger on it, but something has happened with Smith's work in the past couple of years that has taken it to the next level. He has always worked with paintings most basic elements, color and form, in a focused way. Recently though, his formal explorations have taken on a new resonance, and he is producing paintings that simply sing with joy and clarity of vision. His late 2015 exhibition at Fredericks & Freiser in New York was one of the year's best gallery exhibitions.



Cary Smith. Courtesy of Fredericks & Freiser, New York.

EMILY MAE SMITH

Smith is yet another strong painter to emerge from Columbia's MFA program. My first contact with the work came at Laurel Gitlen's space in the Lower East Side this past September. It was a fun exhibition to walk into. Smith's paintings draw from the graphic clarity of Pop-art and digital space to critique sexual politics, gender and identity. They are, however, never preachy or cloying. Like other artists on this list, Smith's paintings are simply weird in the best, indescribable way.



Emily Mae Smith. Courtesy of Laurel Gitlen, New York.

EVAN TRINE

Trine's work came to my attention as we were preparing *New American Paintings 2016 MFA Annual*, which will be released in early April. At first glance, I thought that Trine's "minimal" abstractions were taut formal exercises with paintings most basic elements, color and form. I was weaned on this type of painting and tend to respond well to its purity and focus of vision. Something kept nagging at me though as we put the issue together and I continued to interact with the work. I had a strong sense that there was more than first meets the eye with Trine's work. As it turns out, there is. His paintings are, in fact, methodical distillations of carefully selected subject matter. Working with computer software, Trine puts his original source material through various stages of manipulation and ultimately arrives at a condensed, simplified and essential version. The strength of the work derives from the faint visual echo it gives off even as it remains resolutely abstract. As an aside, I meant to contact Trine for a studio visit given that I recently opened a second gallery there and Trine lives in the area. Well, as they say: You snooze, you lose. Trine has quickly been snapped up by one of LA's most respected galleries, Roberts & Tilton.



Evan Trine. Courtesy of Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles.

ERIC YAHNKER

In the interest of full disclosure, my partner and I will be presenting a solo exhibition of new work by Eric Yahnker that opens next month at Zevitas Marcus in LA. I know, I know...separate the church and state, Zevitas. Sorry, I can't on this one. I have known Yahnker's work for close to a decade. He is a virtual seismometer of the current cultural zeitgeist, and a master draughtsman. The combination of these two skills has resulted in a body of work that is consistently incisive and on point. To an extent, Yahnker's work comes out of the tradition of political satire, but the depth of his art historical and cultural knowledge make for works that operate on so many levels it will make your head spin. His upcoming show is sure to generate a lot of controversy.



Eric Yahnker. Courtesy of Zevitas Marcus, Los Angeles.

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