

# HYPERALLERGIC

ART • WEEKEND

## Daniel Hesidence's Views of an Imaginary Landscape

Hesidence masterfully balances information and aesthetic pleasure to produce a joy that should not be taken lightly.

Dan Nadel [3 hours ago](#)



At a rock show in the 1990s I swear that the singer/guitarist standing center stage had, without warning arrived there from a rigid horizontal position, like a trap door swinging open. One of the great pleasures of encountering a Daniel Hesidence painting in the wild is its unabashed presence — the feeling that it, like that singer, suddenly and brazenly presents itself.

Eleven masterful paintings are on exhibit in Hesidence's current show at Canada, *Place Holders*. Ten are horizontal canvases and one is a square with a horizontal composition. Seven seem to reveal groups of two or

three humanoid heads, while one summons an impression of a goggle-wearing bust. The other three lack any obvious figurative referents. Their colors are yellow, purple, blue, brown, red, green, and white. Certain allusive shapes reappear: a bearish hump; repeated curlicues; double curves terminating in horizontal or vertical lines. The paint strokes have Errol Flynn-like bravado and feathering, as well as light cloudy atmospherics and a solid ground. It is rare to say this about contemporary paintings, but they are rendered with a romantic sense of swooping virtuosity that is close to de Kooning and Gorky. Yet in other works tiny tracks across the painting are evident, as is a ruthless scraping away — and when Hesidence scrapes at his paintings, it is unsparing. As if all the beauty is too much, he brings forth real ugliness across thick strata of paint, interior turbulence translated into exterior surface violence. If a subject can be identified, if I were forced to narrate this group of paintings, I might venture that they represent the civilization portrayed in Hesidence's last series of paintings, *Summers Gun* (2014-2015), which, while ostensibly abstract, also resemble aerial views of an imaginary landscape.

But to call these paintings narrative or figurative is to deprive them of their own quality. In “Untitled” (2018), a dynamic brown scribble occupies the center of the canvas, with heads floating asymmetrically on either side, the lower one, scraped horizontally and left cracked and raw, is inscribed with a triangle pointed up, the higher one, likewise excavated but smoothed and painted into, with a triangle pointed down. Thick lines of white paint, squeezed right out of the tube (a recent constant in Hesidence's paintings) circumscribe these forms. Both heads also recede into space, while the abstract brown form is built up, and the surrounding cerulean is thick and luscious, with smokey whites floating floating just below the surface. The work is structurally robust along a diagonal axis. Neither a primary subject nor a hierarchy of subject matter or forms emerges in the painting; instead it presents the sensation of adjusting itself with each interaction in real time.

In another untitled painting from 2018, a white line zips around zones of blue, brown, and green pigment, as two rectangles, resembling goggles or portals, float near the center, scraped, smoothed and otherwise worked into submission. A blue line moves in from the left side of the painting, echoing and, at times, crossing the white.





Unlike many paintings, which can be parsed into figure and ground, process and structure, image and object, the content of Hesidence's paintings is inseparable from the process. That from-the-shoulder motion that draws the white line into and across the canvas is integral to the composition, and expresses a non-verbal thought process related to allusive and elusive elements in the other works, as well as, in this case, the Summer's Gun series, as the emerald areas, emphasized by what look like paw prints, and given focus by the line, call back to that earlier series.

Hesidence's work masterfully balances information and aesthetic pleasure. The joy it produces should not be taken lightly. It reminds me at times of Wayne Thiebaud's mid-1960s paintings, such as "Woman in Tub" (1965), in the artist's willingness to allow the paint to simply be material for observation. There might also be the smeared television faces of Ed Paschke and blurred motion of Gerhard Richter in his work, as well as the measured chaos of Albert Oehlen and hints of Jackson Pollock's late work. But Hesidence is unattached to a specific genre or group (although his booth with Jason Fox in Frieze's Hudson/Feature Inc. section contextualizes some of his interests) — and any affinities with other artists are not references, but rather, as Hesidence might say, information.



In "Untitled" (2018), a red rectangle containing scraping-down heads with features solely consisting of undulating white lines could be a frame, a chamber, a window, or a compositional device. To complicate the situation further, that container is ringed with black and white glyphs. And then there is so much painting and motion happening elsewhere that the blue and grey drift in the lower left of the painting pushes goggle forms forward, curving the

painting space. I have the sense this sliding space of the painting, like that of the others, is intended to capture time, in both a linear sense and spatial sense: forward, backward and across.

In an interview with Jason Fox, on the occasion of the *Summers Gun* catalog, Hesidence provided some insight into his process and objective, stating, “The only way for me to gain information is by working through it.” Explaining that painting “positions us into a space to locate new information,” he elaborated that this “information” is all around us, but we make it tangible. In doing so, we create a “vessel,” which enables us to relay it to others. This “cultivating [of] an awareness” is an acute kind of noticing. Hesidence’s entire project evokes philosopher Maurice Merleau Ponty’s assertion that the experience of viewing art comprises an interchange between the viewer and the artwork: the act of perceiving allows the painting to open itself, present itself. It is a dynamic of giving and receiving, from which we exit sated, enervated, transformed, and ready, eventually, for more.

Daniel Hesidence: *Place Holders continues at Canada Gallery (333 Broome Street, Lower East Side, Manhattan) through May 27.*