

■ CRITICISM

Friday, April 8th, 2016

“This is how it’s done”: David Salle Curates Recent Painting

by Katelynn Mills

Nice Weather at Skarstedt

Curated by David Salle

February 25 to April 16, 2016

20 East 79th Street (at Madison Avenue)

New York, 212 737 2060

550 West 21st Street (at 11th Avenue)

New York, 212 994 5200



David Salle, *Hot People*, 2016. Oil, acrylic, charcoal and archival digital print on linen, 60 x 80 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Skarstedt.

One cannot help but feed off the vitality of the paintings in “Nice Weather,” twin group shows at Skarstedt’s Chelsea and Upper East Side locations, curated by David Salle. Taking it all in, I was reminded of Salle’s review of the Museum of Modern Art’s “The Forever Now,” [published last year in *ArtNews*](#). That show, which was curated by Laura Hoptman, attempted to showcase a cross-section of what painting is today and, in so many words, Salle said, “This is what’s working, these are the things that aren’t working.” “Nice Weather” can be read as an extension of that review, saying, “This is how it’s done.” I had the chance to ask Salle if he agrees, to which he replied “I would. But the criterion and the mandate for a gallery show are different from that of a museum. In fact, ‘Nice Weather’ has many artists in common with Hoptman’s show.”

Aside from employing some of the same artists, there are many seemingly responsive comparisons to “The Forever Now,” the first being the title itself, which is borrowed from the name of a book by Frederick Seidel. “Nice Weather” is an instance of both temporal as well as a temporality. It describes something which happens in a given, precise moment. But weather, like time, is also a ubiquitous, constant element. Nice weather is forever and now, and as a title escapes pretension and contradiction by suggesting a natural flow of events.

Reading the materials listed for all the works in “Nice Weather” for the Chelsea location was almost as fun as looking at the pieces. There are all sorts of things, from neon, to soap, glitter, leaf extract, etc. Perhaps the reason why the material application is successful, as opposed to merely eccentric or arbitrary, is because, as Salle explains, “They all work. That is to say, everything is subsumed into a pictorial vision; it’s not novelty for its own sake.” One of the more noticeable examples in the Chelsea show is Chris Martin’s



Installation view, "Nice Weather," 2016, at Skarstedt, Upper East Side. Courtesy of the gallery.



Chris Martin, *Untitled*, 2015. Acrylic, glitter and foam disks on canvas, 88 x 77 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Skarstedt.

engrossing.



Installation view of "Nice Weather," 2016, at Skarstedt, Chelsea. Courtesy of the gallery.



Installation view of "Nice Weather," 2016, at Skarstedt, Chelsea. Courtesy of the gallery.

Untitled (2015). He manifests a flashy, casual energy, coupled with a felt experience, which could only result from a long, productive practice. This picture is a fast read. One doesn't have to spend much time scrutinizing over it, or even necessarily be painting-literate to derive pleasure or understand it. But being familiar with the sensibility applied to the practice painting does offer a layer of meaning that might be otherwise overlooked. The color of Martin's glitter is a musty, 1970s sort of brown, which fights against its sparkly, garish nature. It sits comfortably on top of a rainbow of blue, yellow, pink, and green. By seamlessly integrating the nasty brown into the Day-Glo wash, Martin seems to splice in a subliminal message of awkwardness or distaste. Carroll Dunham's piece, *Mound* (1991-92), hanging at the Uptown location, relates to the immediacy Martin asserts, but is exceedingly more blatant in its distastefulness — and, conversely, offers a secret beauty. Frank Galuszka, in a 1997 essay, described Dunham's work as "biologic entities [that] have a cruel and sometimes sexual (but never sexy) humor [...] Dunham's paintings are valentines sent between cold sores if not among cancer cells." And the statement holds true today: one doesn't have to spend much time gazing into this work to see that it's gross and weird. But many discrete surprises unfold in this work for those who do.

The reward for close looking, not dissimilar from what happens when one looks closely at another person, is the discovery of autonomy — what it is that really makes an individual special. I believe that contradiction in a painting (not to be confused with ambiguity or confusion) is what ensures such a powerful presence. It's like the human's physicality and spiritual or intellectual self — two impossibly disparate conditions that magically fuse into one. The brown in Martin's sorbet landscape, and the sweetness in Dunham's toxicity, point to the multifarious nature of their work.

At the Chelsea gallery, looking at Cecily Brown's *Party of Animals* (2015–16) requires much harder looking. The figurative gestures of her abstract, de Kooning-esque scene unfold and take on volume over time — one cannot see the picture in a quick glance. It's as though a cacophony of flesh and landscape unfolds and disappears at an increasingly intense rate through staring at it. I asked Salle whether some pictures here require more time to understand than others. "I'm not sure I would break it down like that," he responded, "I think a good painting does both — it coalesces into a visual immediacy and also repays hard looking." Perhaps this is true, but Nicole Wittenberg's *Kiss* paintings (2015) certainly demonstrate how immediate and time-released information can occur simultaneously. Straight away, one can see that the subject of Wittenberg's paintings is painting. She has a direct, muscular manner of handling paint. The markmaking is juicy and meaty — emphasized by the saturated reds, pinks, and yellows. It's the hook that grabs the viewer's attention, but further inspection reveals subtle allusions. Giotto's *The Meeting at the Golden Gate* (1303–05) comes to mind: two heads come together as one, featuring two eyes, one nose, and one mouth. It is only through extended consideration that the subject, or subjects are revealed: love, lust, Eros, spontaneity. And the parallels she draws, between erotic desire and painting, are

Wittenberg appears to use color to unpack information the way Salle himself has in the curation of artworks. Regarding this idea, Salle commented that "[Color factors into the process] a lot. But color is not something applied on top of a painting — it's integral. In a group show, color is like a thermostat — you can dial the temperature up or down." Another element of this show's curation, I was pleased to notice, was how well-balanced it was with regard to gender. Salle explains, "It wasn't even a question. A lot of the most interesting painters working now happen to be women. Some of the women painters in the show have been at it a long time. The perceptions might change, but the work was always there."

When I asked Salle how curating influences his work as an artist, he replied, "I'm not sure, but deeply engaging with anyone's work — which is really the pleasure of curating in the first place — is going to have some effect. What one does with curating is to make a context, hopefully a place of depth, and also of buoyancy." And so we have it: all that is needed to enjoy "Nice Weather" is a sense of care and curiosity, and engagement, which will yield both joy and knowledge for those who seek.

More from artcritical



Offline: Lygia Clark and the Original Social Media



Shape Shifters: David Salle Ghost Paintings



Roundtable: "The Forever Now" at MoMA



Tell Me: with Bill Corbett



Brooklyn DIY: A Story of Williamsburg Art Scene 1987-2007 directed by Martin Ramocki