

Painting in Four Takes On View at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum November 15, 2015 through April 3, 2016

(Ridgefield, CT – July, 2015) – The last one hundred years have witnessed the explosion of virtually every available means and medium in the service of art making, yet painting has not only maintained a central position in visual art, but has also adapted creatively to rapid changes in our culture as a whole. Today, painting is embedded in the broad debate of actual vs. virtual, and its ability to balance between what is illusive and what is real, what is tactile and what is optical, and what is emotive and what is formal, providing fertile ground for a diverse range of artists.

Painting in Four Takes is a semester-long series of solo exhibitions that will provide a window into the practices of four engaging painters who imbue the medium with relevance and character. The series will mark the first time in over twenty years that The Aldrich has dedicated all of its galleries to painting.

“While some point to marketability as the basis for the entrenchment of painting as a leading visual arts medium, for many artists, painting provides the most relevant platform for expression, allowing for both the potential of innovation and deep historical continuity,” says Richard Klein, exhibitions director, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum.

Aldrich curator Amy Smith-Stewart says, “The four artists selected span generations, methods and intentions, but all are deeply entrenched in what painting is and can be in the image- dominate atmosphere of our 21st century. All the artists uniquely negotiate today’s two opposing image-producing arenas, the frenetic pace and global reach of the digital world, and the slow, tactual and hermetic tradition of studio practice.”

Steve DiBenedetto: *Evidence of Everything*

In a career that spans three decades, Steve DiBenedetto (b. 1958, Bronx, New York) has established himself as an idiosyncratic artist who has brought the pursuit of painting into the unpredictable chaos and flux that categorize the Post-Modern world. *Evidence of Everything* marks an important milestone for the artist, as his first major solo museum exhibition.

DiBenedetto has consistently rejected formalism throughout an era where both formal and conceptual approaches to painting have become de rigueur, taking a position where the canvas and the act of painting initiate a site for struggle, invention, and ultimately reinvention. Utilizing an inventory of leitmotifs, including the helicopter, octopus, wheel, and glass office tower, DiBenedetto paints and repaints his subjects in states of apocalyptic trauma where content and technique become unified, while the boundaries between the objective and subjective become uncertain. The artist’s work has prophetic, philosophical, and mystical undercurrents, with imagery often forming geometric webs or mandala-like vortices that tear themselves apart only to recongeal in thick, spectral passages of paint. Through his work, DiBenedetto has cast himself as a kind of baroque symbolist, working in the deep tradition of European Romanticism, with his excesses tempered by a terrible, yet transcendental beauty. “You never know what is enough,” wrote William Blake, “unless you know what is more than enough.” Marked by both foresight and revelation, DiBenedetto’s painting exists in a continuum that flows from Blake to speculative novelist William Gibson. Curated by Richard Klein.

Hayal Pozanti: *Deep Learning*

The practice of Hayal Pozanti (b. 1983, Istanbul) spans painting, digital animation, sculpture, and collage. For her first solo museum exhibition, she will debut a new series of paintings and digital animations. Pozanti negotiates two opposing image-producing interfaces, the Internet, with its frenetic pace, and traditional studio practice, with its slowness and tactile insistence. To do so, she invented a visual vocabulary based on a thirty-one character “alphabet,” never allowing a shape to repeat itself or have a recognizable equivalent in visual culture. Pozanti’s process begins with hand drawings scanned into the computer, making several iterations vis-à-vis sketch painting on a track pad in Photoshop, she then draws the image onto a surface to build up thick layers with acrylic paint she mixes herself. Pozanti’s movement, from freehand to track pad, reinforces her intent, so that the final composition is equally successful online and in person. Alongside her paintings, and sometimes shown side by side, she creates digital animations, both informed by her back and forth translation of mechanical and digital processes and her desire for the means in which they are seen to be interchangeable, nonhierarchical, and streamlined. Curated by Amy Smith-Stewart.

Julia Rommel

For her first solo museum exhibition, Julia Rommel (born 1980, Salisbury, Maryland) will debut a series of new paintings presented alongside small works from 2010-2012. Rommel’s oil paintings range from head to body size, and oscillate between cool and warm palettes, color fields of denim blues, moody greys, creamy whites, salmon pinks, and citrus hues. All are intimately connected to their edges, as they are stretched and re-stretched numerous times over the course of their making in a physical wrangle of layering and effacing. As with a haiku, Rommel’s seemingly accessible surfaces belie their mysterious complexity, involving a laborious choreography of cutting, sanding, wiping, expunging, and overlaying, as the build-up and break down of the composition both reveals and disguises a history of choices and decisions, giving the paintings a rhythm and expression not unlike a life cycle. Taken in concert, Rommel’s stressed surfaces, with their bends, folds, cracks, frayed edges and staple holes, have a vitality that connects them to the viewer—and the viewer to the works—in various stages of being and becoming. Curated by Amy Smith-Stewart.

Ruth Root: *Old, Odd, and Oval*

Old, Odd, and Oval will be Ruth Root’s (b. 1967, Chicago, Illinois) first solo museum exhibition in the US. Root’s practice centers on an intensive investigation of color, material, form, and support. For more than two decades, she has worked within the language of abstract painting, exploring the physical and illusory boundary of wall and object, foreground and background, even inventing her own color wheel to challenge canonized color theory. *Old, Odd, and Oval*, will focus on her latest body of work, medium- to large-scale, to site engaged paintings that demonstrate her experimentations with new materials and fabrication methods as she combines hand-painted Plexiglas with colorful fabric patterns she designs digitally. Alongside these new works, The Aldrich will present an intimate salon-style hanging of Root’s painted paper collages, initiated in 1998, to demonstrate her advancing investigation of color, pattern, and composition as noted influencers of what was to come (evidenced by the new works in the adjacent galleries). These small, shaped, works on paper are geometric abstractions that feature quirky cartoonish elements to rupture color fields—madcap flourishes humanizing pure abstract reduction. Curated by Amy Smith-Stewart.

Generous support for this exhibition has been provided by The Coby Foundation.

Publications

The four exhibitions will each be accompanied by a fully-illustrated, full-color publication (trim size 8 x 10 inches) with scholarly essays by the curators, Richard Klein and Amy Smith-Stewart. Ruth Root’s publication will include an artist designed takeaway featured inside: a limited edition bookmark. Ruth Root began making the bookmarks at a moment in her practice when she had “finished” a large body of work and was trying to restart her practice, so she was reading many art books, bookmarking images as she read. She explains, “Somehow, my old drawings that were pieced from painted paper and printed scraps were around the studio and started to be used to bookmark oversized art books, then

the bookmarks became a project of their own. It was as if these huge monumental paintings became smaller and elongated, functional and bookmarking other things that I wanted to think about or incorporate into my work.”

All the Museum’s brochures are available free to the public in the on-going tradition initiated by the Museum in 1996, offering our audience a greater perspective of the exhibitions on view and providing an enduring archival document.

Exhibition Reception

A reception celebrating the four exhibitions is scheduled for Sunday, November 15, 2015, 2-5pm.

About the Museum

Founded by Larry Aldrich in 1964, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum is dedicated to fostering the work of pioneering artists whose interpretations of the world around us serve as a platform to encourage creative thinking. The Aldrich is one of the few independent, non-collecting contemporary art museums in the United States and the only museum in Connecticut devoted to contemporary art, and engages its diverse audiences with thought-provoking, interdisciplinary exhibitions and programs.

The Museum’s education and public programs are designed to connect visitors of all ages to contemporary art through innovative learning approaches in hands-on workshops, tours, and presentations led by artists, curators, Museum educators, and experts in related fields. Area schools are served by curriculum-aligned on-site and in-school programs, as well as teachers’ professional development training.

Supporters

The Aldrich, in addition to significant support from its Board of Trustees, receives contributions from many dedicated friends and patrons. Major funding for Museum programs and operations has been provided by the Department of Economic and Community Development, Connecticut Office of the Arts; the National Endowment for the Arts; the Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Foundation; and the Leir Foundations.

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HamletHub; TownVibe, publishers of *Ridgefield Magazine*; and WSHU Public Radio are the official media sponsors of The Aldrich in 2015.

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