

Juxtapoz Magazine - Laura Owens: 10 Paintings @ CCA Wattis Institute

Apr 28, 2016 - Jul 23, 2016 CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco

A new body of work by Los Angeles–based artist [Laura Owens](#) will debut at [CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts](#). *Laura Owens: 10 Paintings* presents new paintings, artist books, and site-specific, hand-printed wallpaper installations that were created for the presentation and will fill the entire 4,000-square-foot exhibition space, marking the artist's first solo institutional show in the United States since 2004.



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Owens, who is currently shortlisted for the prestigious Hugo Boss Prize and the recipient of the 2015 Robert De Niro Sr. Prize, is known for large-scale, vivid paintings that are simultaneously abstract and figurative and embrace both everyday subject matter and art-historical concerns with restless invention. She explores painting in the wake of conceptual art, continually questioning the possibilities of the medium and furthering many concerns explored throughout Western art history—flatness versus depth, materiality versus illusion, the epic versus the everyday, the grid versus the gesture. Owens has described her work as visually onomatopoeic, in a sense that she creates “paintings that look like paintings.” The

artist has further noted that “every painting is about how you make a painting.”

“With their complex balance of intuition, humor, and formal precision, there is always something wonderfully wrong in Laura Owens’s paintings,” Huberman says. “Her images are childlike but too monumental for children, abstract but too full of language to be speechless, pretty but too impolite to please everyone, and hung on the wall but too sculptural to remain there.”

The artist’s wide-ranging iconography samples genres ranging from 11th-century Chinese landscape painting to Cubism, and draws on sources both high tech and mundane: spam emails, emoji, internet memes, newspaper classified ads, her own photographs, coloring book illustrations, fantasy environments, vintage embroidery patterns, and a host of whimsical plant and animal motifs. Owens has also appropriated doodles her children make, which, depicted at monumental scale, evoke Abstract Expressionist–like gestures.

All untitled, the works blend traditional oil-painting techniques and drawn lines with collage and screen-printed images that Owens digitally manipulates. Her use of Illustrator and Photoshop is visible in the enlarged gestural sweeps and signature drop-shadow effects of finished works, and while many tag the work as “painting in a digital age,” her paintings are decidedly physical. They can involve 50 layers of gesso or incorporate objects attached to the surface of the canvas, such as bicycle wheels, laser-cut wood, or battery-operated clock parts.

Many works comprise multiple paintings and are often arranged in site-specific installations that include the spaces surrounding them. “In that sense, Owens forces painting to perform tasks other than painting,” says Huberman. For her Wattis Institute exhibition, Owens takes the gallery spaces as her point of departure and has extended the height of some of the walls to create a continuous surface for hand-printed wallpaper installations. In addition, she presents new paintings and artist books.

View Gallery

Osterholt’s personal interpretation and assessment of the subject offers a vast array of visual stimuli for his multi-faceted works. Central to many of the bold and graphic tableaus are genderless, draped and hooded figures, their style reminiscent of Eastern European religious icon paintings: “For me, my icon characters represent human mortality and through that the concept of living. We are part of the universe around us and in us. We are infinite and mortal at the same time.”

With his unbiased approach of excerpting, re-interpreting, and fusing religious as well as cultural symbols in his expressive style, the artist is creating a new, a very personal, fictional mythology altogether. The origins of this universe of mythology can be traced back to 1990s youth culture – skateboarding, music, and graffiti writing – a formative period for Osterholt as he took the first steps towards his artistic career.

“Not just beautiful, though – the stars are like the trees in the forest, alive and breathing. And they’re watching me.” – Haruki Murakami, *Kafka on the Shore*

For “The Trees Carry The Wind Into The Forest” Osterholt has created a series of works on canvas, paper and wood as a comprehensive overview, the status-quo of his artistic operation. While each piece tells its own tale, the exhibition as a whole can be viewed as a continuous narrative guiding the viewer through the mythology of SUPERBLAST.

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