

STEVEN ALEXANDER - JOURNAL

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JEREMY GILBERT-ROLFE at Alexander Gray

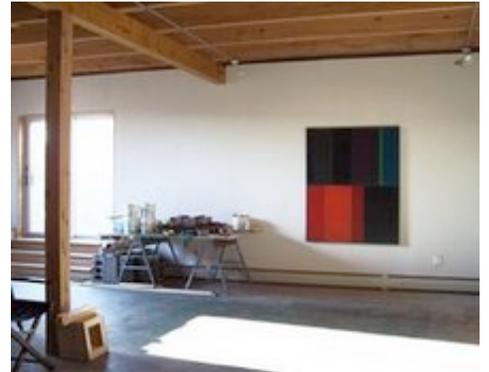


Pynchon, 2008, oil on linen, 66 1/2" x 28"

Since we're talking about relationships between painting and criticism (see the previous post and comments), it seems appropriate to mention Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, who has a show of new paintings at **Alexander Gray Associates** in Chelsea.

First the work; he's showing four large vertical paintings that present meticulously fragmented fields of shifting color relations. The verticality suggests a direct reference to the body, or human presence; but the primary focus here is color - luscious and elusive. My particular interest in these new paintings (aside from their sheer beauty, which is ultimately the point), is the fact that Gilbert-Rolf has

STEVEN ALEXANDER STUDIO



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IN THE STUDIO



Study for "Efforts of Affection (After Petrarch)", 2008, acrylic & graphite on paper, 12" x 18".

recently chosen to adopt, or foreground, the grid as the means of structuring his paintings. Nothing new – the grid has been used in painting since the advent of the rectangular format when painting began to interact with architecture. But what I'm interested in is Gilbert-Rolfe's particular reason for employing it at this point in the development of his work. Primarily, the grid allows him to minimize drawing and mark-making in favor of a heightened focus on color. The grid becomes a technological filter, a unifying organizational tool that releases the painting from linearity, and allows it to operate as a non-hierarchical whole. In this case, that whole is comprised of infinitely changeable color units that coalesce and fragment in endless simultaneous arrays of relations – Nature, or reality, at its most dynamic, transfigured through color.

In his **writing**, Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe has been a clear and strong advocate for painting as a purely visual and immediate experience that is not subject to or dependent on narrative or textual interpretation. There was an interesting interview with him a few years back in **The Brooklyn Rail** – here are a couple of quotes:

"I think painting starts where argument leaves off...- painting's what words can't do..."

"...A painting is not a purely historical object so defining it as such can only produce banality. And banality is all you get in an art world which can only have painting that apologizes for itself by being ironical or faux naïve."

His ideas and references are usually well thought out and clearly stated, and where abstract painting is concerned, I often agree with his assertions. However, I think Gilbert-Rolfe falls into an unfortunate trap as a critic in his staunch prescription for painting when he stakes out an exclusive stance in opposition to all things Duchampian. I can see no need to claim that art must be this or must not be that, and it is self-defeating to invalidate other approaches in order to pursue one's own path. Needless to say, there has been a great wealth of important and exciting work in installation, performance, sculpture and painting that owes a tremendous debt to Duchamp. Of course since the Duchampian thread has been dominant for so long, there is a huge cohort of artists and viewers (not to mention critics) who have no idea how to really look empathetically at abstract painting. Be that as it may, it's a big (art) world, and if "postmodernism" has given us anything, it's the understanding that in art all things are possible - at once. Painting is without a doubt a specialty item, and Gilbert-Rolfe is right that it operates best as a purely visual idiom (his gorgeous new work is the perfect example), but it is also an elastic and

Working on a new large cycle of paintings, ostensibly destined for my next show in **Houston** where there are two 40ft walls. It's a group of 72" x 36" canvases, to be installed in a line with 18" between each piece. The drawing above is one of many preliminary studies. So...we'll see how it goes.



Study for "Efforts of Affection (After Petrarch)", 2008, 44" x 24", acrylic on canvas



The Cool Out, 2008, 36" x 72", acrylic on canvas



Pressure Drop, 2008, 18" x 36", acrylic on canvas

inclusive form that has held its own for a long time now.

POSTED BY S.A. AT 12:29 

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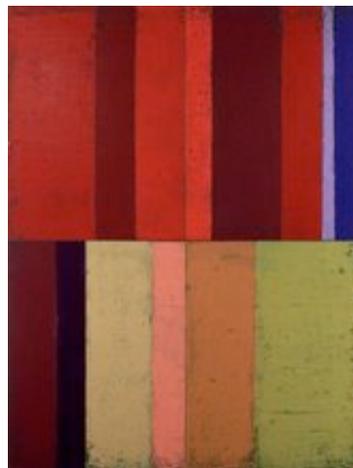
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The Primrose Path, 2007, 48" x 36",
acrylic on canvas



Slave to Love, 2007, 72" x 54",
acrylic on canvas

S.A.

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