

Sleek, 04/2018

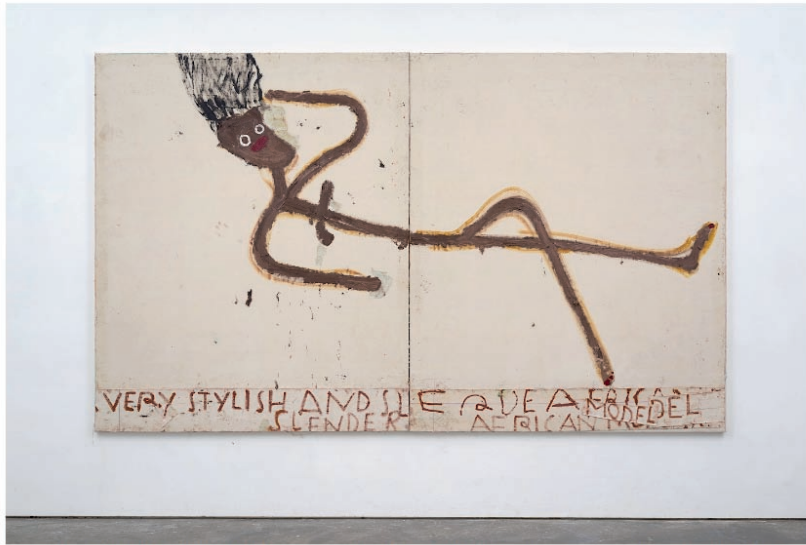
Kathryn O'Regan: „Five Female Painters Breathing New Life into the Medium“

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Five Female Painters Breathing New Life into the Medium

Get to know the women artists changing the face of painting as we know it.



– Rose Wylie, "Tube Girl", 2016, Oil on canvas in two (2) parts, 205 x 341 cm. Image: Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner, London. Copyright Rose Wylie.

From the languorous nudes of Matisse and Picasso to the virtuoso painterly performances of de Kooning and Pollock, the medium of painting has long been regarded as an expression of masculine bravado. In his famous essay on abstract expressionism, "[The American Action Painters](#)", Harold Rosenberg describes the canvas as "an arena in which to act". He compares the abstract expressionist painter – who, throughout his essay, is spoken of in terms of a universal "he" – as "taking to the white expanse of the canvas as Melville's Ishmael took to the sea". For Rosenberg, the American action painters were fearless vanguards, who heroically confronted the canvas with their deep inner malaise. And make no mistake about it – these were "mens' men".

For this reason, painting as a medium has frequently been rejected by women, people of colour and those who do not fit the archetype of the "great male artist" as implied by Rosenberg. In the present era, painting – particularly abstract and expressionist styles – is eschewed by many artists on account of its stale roots in the white male "genius" tropes of yesteryear. In that case, it is always interesting when artists try to overcome this art historical impasse, seeking a way in which to counter painting's suffocating association with machismo and re-imagine the medium. After all, contrary to what art history would have us believe, painting is so much more than an expression of heterosexual male desire or macho bluster; it can also be playful, frangible, liminal and subversive. Artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe, Frida Kahlo and Helen Frankenthaler proved that painting was not just a boys club, but that women painters could push the medium in whole new directions, even surpassing their male counterparts in formal inventiveness. With that in mind, we take a look at five contemporary artists with current or upcoming exhibitions, who are turning the tide in terms of what painting can be.

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Carolyn Eidner



- Left: Carolyn Eidner, "Quantum Foam and Its Outcome", 2018, Pigmentierter Gips auf Styropor / pigmented plaster, mounted on styrofoam, Right: "I am the girl who belongs to stars", 2016, pigmented plaster, mounted on styrofoam. Images: Copyright Carolyn Eidner, Courtesy Aurel Scheibler, Berlin (on consignment from Natlia Hug)

In December Carolyn Eidner received the 2017 Miami Beach NADA Artadia Award, which is given annually to an innovative contemporary artist – and it's easy to see why. On first instance, her work – which predominantly takes the form of plaster blocks pigmented in pleasing sorbet shades and then mounted on styrofoam – is playful and good-humoured due to its quirky use of form and colour. However, Eidner's work cuts through the seriousness of painting as a so-called site of self-expression. Instead, Eidner's "paintings" (and somehow quotation marks suitably describe their status as both painting and otherwise) depict kooky figures and shapes that blatantly reject the grandiose expressive and representative tendencies of painting as we know it. Eidner, who is a former student of Rosemarie Trockel, takes a refreshing absurdist approach to the painting process.

Carolyn Eidner: Vanishing Blue in Pursue of Red and Black runs through to May 5 at Aurel Scheibler, Berlin

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Karla Black



– Left: Karla Black, "Unlike", 2018, Glass, wood, clay, paint, Vaseline, lipstick, foundation, moisturising gel, 139 x 96 x 32 cm. Right: Karla Black, "The Rest Imposed", 2018, glass, clay, gold leaf, paint, Vaseline, lipstick, foundation. Images: Copyright of Karla Black. Courtesy Captain Petzel. Photos: Jens Ziehe.

Karla Black uses unorthodox materials in her work: everything from eye shadow and bath bombs to nail varnish, toilet paper and glitter. Of her work's abstract nature, she says "The process of painting is the sculpture" – she regards the sculptural compositions that she is best known for to be painterly. Her latest body of work, currently on view at Captain Petzel in Berlin, engages with a painterly sensibility more directly than anything she has done before. Here, a mobile of picture frames, coated in chipped gold leaf, dangles from the ceiling. In place of pictures, rectangles of glass smeared and blotted with paint hang instead. Meanwhile, a jaunty scattering of cotton wool balls in spring shades – mint, yolk-yellow and baby pink – litters the gallery floor. Much like her dusty compositions, the effect is that the paint has slipped off the canvas and transformed into a new substance on a different surface. Her work challenges the hegemony of paint-on-canvas, and questions the very nature of what a painting can be.

Karla Black runs through to April 14 at Captain Petzel, Berlin

Ghada Amer



– Left: Ghada Amer, "A Summer in India", 2017, acrylic, embroidery and gel medium on canvas, 45 x 45 inches. Right: "Glimpse into a new painting", 2018, acrylic, embroidery and gel medium on canvas, 64 x 72 inches. Images: Courtesy of Cheim and Read, New York.

Ghada Amer explicitly engages with the politics of painting. Her brightly-coloured canvases swap paint for intricate layers of embroidery, which weave their way in and out of social commentary – her work frequently critiques race and the convention of whiteness, as well as gender and sexuality. Amer's labyrinthine canvases often feature erotic imagery that position women as active agents rather than the passive, lolling bodies of art history. Indeed, as Jenni Sorokin writes in the exhibition catalogue for her upcoming exhibition at Cheim and Read: "Ghada Amer has utilised the lush landscape of the art historical past from which to plunder – re-casting the role of women as subject, versus object". By using thread on canvas, Amer not only dismisses the authority of paint, but elevates a skill (embroidery) commonly demeaned as a "women's craft". It is no coincidence that Amer's complex, deftly-woven squiggles call to mind Pollock's bombastic splatters, except that hers are a provocative exercise in subversion.

Ghada Amer opens at Cheim and Read, New York April 5 and runs through May 12

Rose Wylie



– Rose Wylie, "Yellow Girls I", 2017, Oil on canvas in two (2) parts, 183 x 340 cm, Image: Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner, London. Copyright Rose Wylie.

While Rose Wylie uses oil on canvas, her style is not what you might expect. Her large canvases are a playground of simplistic stick figures and forms, comical scenarios and vibrant colour. In terms of a style, typically this kind of painting is referred to as "naive" as it replicates the easy, egoless style of young children. However, don't be fooled: Wylie might be wielding her paintbrush with a childlike ease, but it is a knowing rejection of the conventions of painting, which are tied up in the art world hierarchies of gender, race, education and class. Instead, her irreverent approach abandons the exhausting legacies of art history and the Academy in favour of a bold formlessness and an effervescent disregard for the rules. Wylie – who only made her name in her 70s – injects a necessary sense of rebellion into the medium.

Rose Wylie: Lolita's House opens April 20 and runs through to May 26 at David Zwirner, London

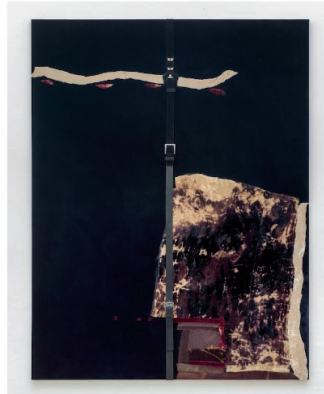
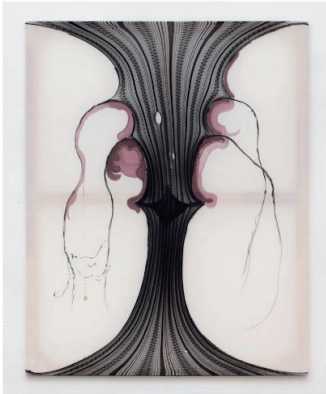
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Leda Bourgogne



- Left: Leda Bourgogne, "Such queer moons we live in", 2018, tights, thread, fineliner, oil on fabric, 185 x 140 x 2,7 cm. Right: "Masochist", 2018, bleach on velvet, thread, belt, 195 x 130 x 2,7 cm. Images: Courtesy of BQ Berlin and Leda Bourgogne.

Although Leda Bourgogne only recently graduated (from the Städelschule, Frankfurt am Main), she is already making a name for herself. This month she will partake in [Berlin's Gallery Weekend](#) with an exhibition at BQ that will feature her darkly masochistic paintings that draw on psychoanalysis and the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. As a matter of fact, it's probably incorrect to describe Bourgogne's works as paintings as many of them don't use paint at all. Instead, she employs an array of unusual substances – bleach, ink, chewing gum, chlorine, lipstick, thread – that spurn the primacy of paint. What's more, Bourgogne's works are highly sensual: they somehow allude to the body and BDSM though her suggestive use of materials like velvet, belts, latex, silk and fishnet tights. In Bourgogne's hands, the canvas because a enigmatic site of bodily intensity.

Leda Bourgogne: Skinless opens April 27 at BQ, Berlin and runs through to June 23