



BROOKLYN BRIDGE
curated by Justine Frischmann

Andrea Belag
Katherine Bradford
Farrell Brickhouse
Sharon Butler
Clare Grill
Clinton King
Chris Martin
Saira McLaren
Paul DeMuro
Mike Olin
Paul Pagk
Jason Stopa
Julie Torres
Wendy White

commentary
Justine Frischmann
George Lawson

A publication of George Lawson Gallery
on the occasion of the exhibition:

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KATHERINE BRADFORD
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PAUL DEMURO
MIKE OLIN
PAUL PAGK
JASON STOPA
JULIE TORRES
WENDY WHITE

George Lawson Gallery
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REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL PART 3 THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE

Perhaps geographical location is not the best organizing principle for grouping artists. But sometimes (to quote from the new Muscle Shoals film), there are certain spots on the planet when something special is happening, places where it seems like there's a tangible energy field. For Muscle Shoals, it happened in the late sixties and early seventies. It happened again in London around the punk era '75—'77. And I saw it happening in music again, in the London of the early '90s where I started making music. It goes like this: a bunch of opinionated and optimistic people start making interesting work, often against the current, well, current. They are closely knit, talking, arguing, listening, competing, supporting each other. Working and living and partying together. They have nothing to lose because no one is listening to them anyway. And then, one by one, they start "breaking" and all of a sudden, the critics start writing about a "movement". And it has power because it didn't just come from the journalists or the advertising execs, it comes from the streets, from grass roots, from something that had been forming and gaining power for years. It has the advantage of multiple view points and shared experience, a large and complex network of people behind it.

I first approached George Lawson about doing this show because I wanted the people here on the West coast to have an opportunity to see some of the fabulous painting that was going on in Brooklyn, in the flesh. Hell, I wanted to see this painting here, in the flesh. I was tired of seeing pixelated versions, particularly when so much of this work has such a striking physicality.

This is by no means a definitive selection, and the quality and sensibilities of the work are certainly not unique to Brooklyn. But nowhere else is this new painting more concentrated than in Brooklyn at the present moment. Nowhere else is there a more interested, critical audience, a place where there are a gazillion painters painting and painters can see paintings in the flesh, not just online.

When I think about what it is that these painters have in common, what I love about this painting, I keep coming back to the thought that it's part of a sensibility that's always excited me. It's punk. Good punk. It's edgy, visceral, exciting, elegant in its simplicity. Intelligent and wild. Delicately poised between high and low culture, knowing and not-knowing. And, perhaps most importantly of all, despite an apparently all-pervasive sense of anxiety and doubt about our very existence on the planet, this work seems almost miraculously optimistic.

I was moved by the title and sentiment of the Zeiher Smith show in December of last year, "Hope Despite the Times". From the press release for that show: "The title indicates both an optimism in [the artists'] own collective ambitions and...belief in the state of contemporary art, despite the art world's record breaking prices and the prevailing, monstrous bloat." I would go further, and say that I am seeing paintings that point to optimism on a metaphysical scale.

Whether it's Mike Olin's *Cave Paintings*, that seem to reference Plato's Cave parable, Andrea Belag's almost numinous stained-glass luminosity, Farrell Brickhouse's *New World Types*, Katherine Bradford's *Supermen* or Jason Stopa's fairytale *///NYC///*, there is evidence of an orientation towards the transcendent, or at the very least, towards heroes over monsters. Even Wendy White's hand-stencilled Nike signs address the human need to merge into a greater identity, in this case, a community of sports fans with their own particular set of heroes.

I could go on, but I won't. I'll let you make up your own mind. We'll see which tunes stick.

Justine Frischmann
San Francisco, April 2014



Justine Frischmann and Chris Martin in Martin's New York Studio, March 2014



George Lawson in Farrell Brickhouse's New York Studio, March 2014

BRIDGING

When Justine first came to me with the idea to curate a show of paintings tied together by a notion of community, I was a bit skeptical—this in spite of knowing full well what a municipal phenomenon painting is and always has been. Anyone fortunate enough to hop from Berlin to London to Paris to New York to Los Angeles to wherever is left will be struck with the sense of how much painting as a collective activity reflects the city in which it is made, as true now as in the old days of travel from Siena to Florence. But still the community angle left me wondering if it wasn't a bit too convivial to stay critical. I was won over in short order, though. Justine is persuasive enough and the *coup de grace* was curator Phong Bui's ambitious group show, *Come Together: Surviving Sandy*. When you see enough of a moment and a place focused through the work of the artists who in their measure define that moment and place, it doesn't take much projection to begin to discern formal elements and grounding attitudes those artists share in common.

One commonality amongst the works in this show is an insistently low-tech, physical presence, an anomaly in a time that seems to eschew the physical. Contemporary painting practice does seem to have finally made a certain peace with time, an independence of obligation from both historical precedent and fashionable currency, though not through lack of awareness of either. The painters of Brooklyn, who are after all the painters of New York, grasped this decoupling first. Painters such as the ones in this show draw on art history with the entitlement of privileged heirs drawing on their inheritances. They own everything that has come before and were born to spend it as they choose. The works in this show seem preponderantly informed by newfound freedoms rather than newfound inventions, and this lateral movement turns out to be a real boon for the rest of us. Free to work ahistorically, painters today are producing works that are simply very compelling to look at.

With her piece, *Don't Look Back* (page 13), **Andrea Belag** makes a case in point, her sense of history dialed in somewhere between everyone's childhood and Lascaux, accomplished through associations that leap from finger painting to cave painting. 30,000 years of elbow room is enough for anyone and definitely lifts painting out of the role of having to trend. Belag's handling, like that of all the painters in this show,

affirms painting as a kind of proto-technology, one well suited to addressing all things perennial—which is to say chronic—in the human condition. Much of new painting seems to defuse the polarities that previously formed the organizing principles of art criticism. **Katherine Bradford** for example, with a work like *Superman Kiss* (page 15), neutralizes the dichotomy between figuration and abstraction, or between any social engagement and painting in its more transcendent guise. These attitudes are if anything even more pronounced in the work of **Farrell Brickhouse**, whose small painting, *New World Types' Paradise* (page 17), as typically in his work, melts the distinction between insider and outsider art, toppling another time-honored pole.

Each painter in the show brings to the forum his or her understanding of both the legacy and the cultural immediacy of painting. *Agnes Martin* (page 19), a painting by **Sharon Butler**, turns history into a Velveteen Rabbit loved to tatters, though dragged around not as a transitional object but as an accumulation of hard won experience. **Clare Grill**, with works like *Glove* (page 21), reminds us that painting belongs to individuals more than movements, that art is a form of joinery, and that touch matters. **Clinton King**, with *Dazzle Decoy* (page 23) explores the degree to which new freedoms bring new strictures. Painters adopt voluntary constraints. Inventing within a tradition is much like diving with weights, and each painter in the show shoulders the double weight of painting's address to, as well as its reach beyond, contemporary context.

Chris Martin, represented in the show with an untitled painting from 2009 (page 25), was amongst the early adopters of a particular set of attitudes that has come to be indicative of the Brooklyn aesthetic, and to the extent that Brooklyn painters could be considered as participating in a movement (as well as a community), Martin shares credit for triggering it. More than the formally contained shape of a movement, however, this collective effort shares in the spreading of an ever-more pervasive set of permissions, indicative of which is Martin's use of collage, along with a developing vernacular and adoption of non-traditional materials. **Saira McLaren** presents the beginnings of a sampler quilt of these modes with *In Recline* (page 27), a painting that utilizes soft focus, porous bleeds, florescent colors and nods at once to street art and to home-spun craft, while **Paul DeMuro** continues the sample with *Radiant Risk* (page 29), built on elements he shares with others in the group such as a strong totemic center, an elaborate framing device and a straight-forward technique.

Mike Olin approaches many of these same devices with a looser handling in his work, *Cavepool Stylus* (page 31), again using the frame and the central totemic cross. The work comes across as an excavation, but one with a painter's inversion, digging toward the light. **Paul Pagk** seems to preserve a Euro-ethic, with his *ogls 132* (page 33) brandishing classic impasto, and an equally classic grappling with the modalities of drawing and painting, flatness and depth, all the tools. **Jason Stopa** in *///NYC///* (page 35), paints every artist's dream, a combination Oz, Camelot and Neverland with a splash of Winkum, Blinkum and Nod—New York as a sparkling citadel of promise on a flowing river of paint. How long did it take painting to let us do just this? **Julie Torres**, with works such as *Who Loves the Sun II* (page 37), seems to be making baked goods, or hearth tiles, objects to fulfill the utility painting should enjoy in any culture.

Still, we live in the culture we do, an incredibly accelerated one, and though painting as a social practice has come a long way towards freeing itself from the role—at least any primary one—of churning out the next new, new thing, it must still hold its place in a burgeoning technocracy. **Wendy White**, in works such as *Bwin* (page 39), with its border clashes and leapfrog iconography, seems to ask whether painting is making a bid for an integrated society or a two-state solution. She explores this citizenship through the tension at the edge of painting and the frames that establish its territory. White's sense of history and her take on the morning news tug at each other in a way that spills out of the painting plane like elbows in a wrestling match.

All the works in this show have this scrappy, wrestling quality about them. There turns out to be much of Brooklyn after all in this painting. Justine Frischmann achieved what she set out to capture, a set of approaches to painting spawned from shared experiences in a common environment. If the neighborhood happens to be not just any hood but rather the epicenter of the entire contemporary art world, I find it, as someone on the other side of the bridge, all the more reassuring that community still plays a role.

George Lawson
San Francisco, April 2014

Andrea Belag
Don't Look Back, 2012
oil on linen
30 x 22 in. (76 x 56 cm)
cat no. ANBBB02



Katherine Bradford
Superman Kiss, 2011
oil on canvas
48 x 29 in. (122 x 74 cm)
cat no. KABBB01



Farrell Brickhouse
New World Types Paradise 3 Arrival, 2014
oil on canvas
14 x 10 in. (36 x 25 cm)
cat no. FABBB02



Sharon Butler
Agnes Martin, 2013
pigment and binder, pencil on canvas
17 x 14 in. (43 x 36 cm)
cat no. SHBBB01



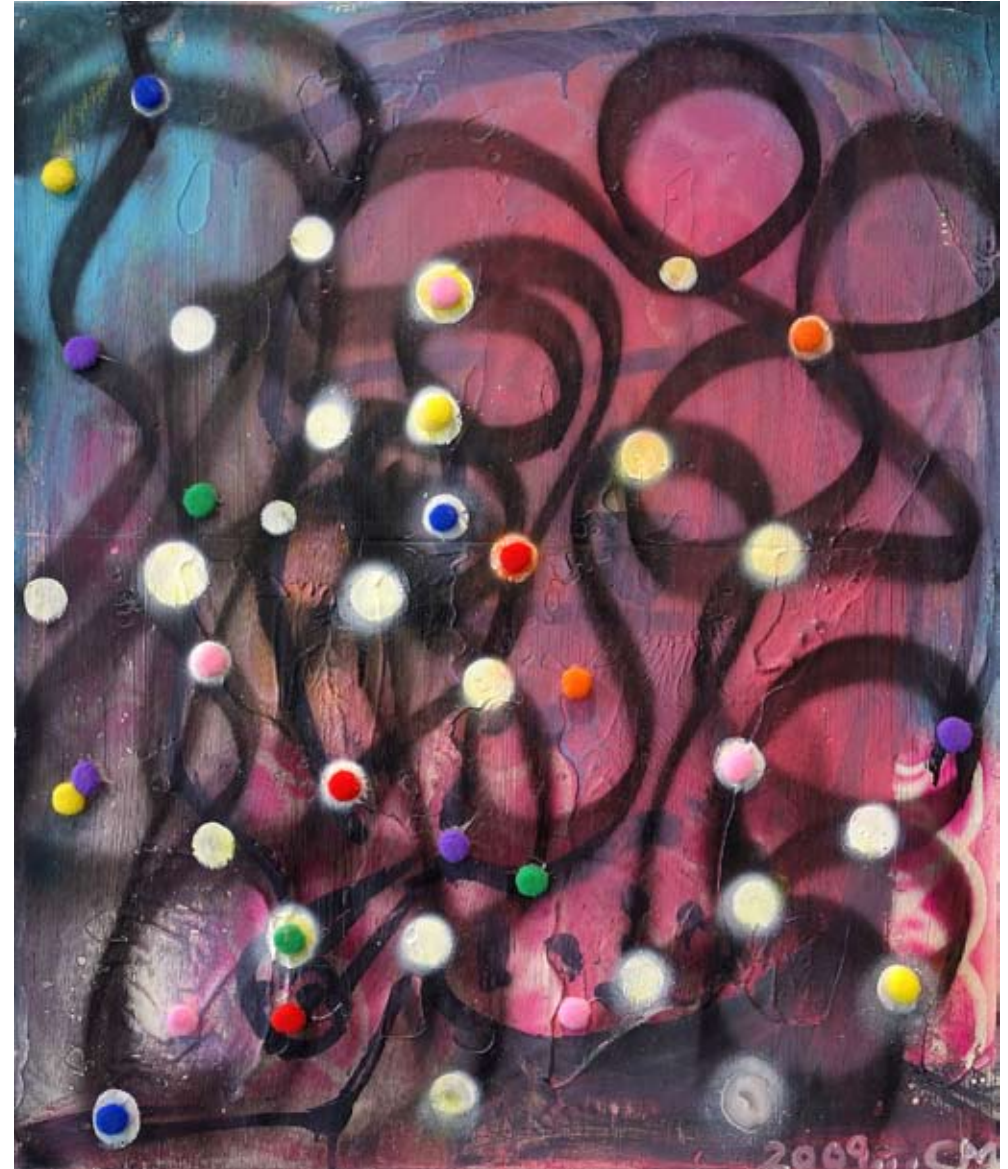
Clare Grill
Glove, 2013
oil on linen
30 x 33 in. (76 x 83.8 cm)
courtesy Soloway Gallery, Brooklyn
cat no. CLGBB03



Clinton King
Dazzle Decoy, 2013
oil on canvas
30 x 20 in. (76 x 51 cm)
cat no. CLKBB01

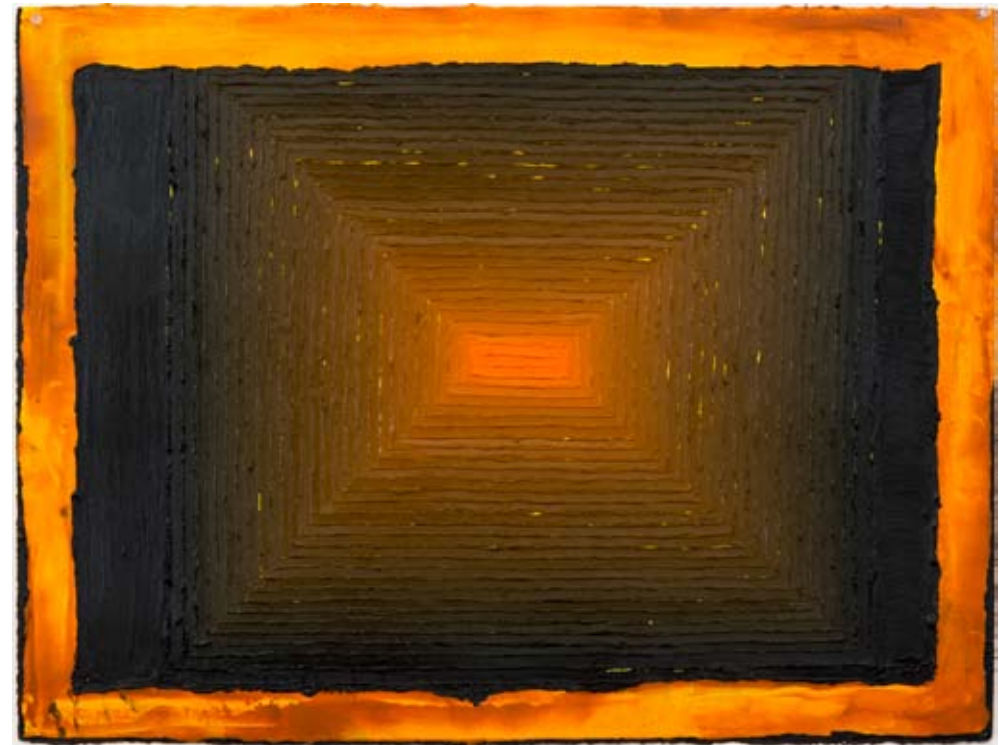


Chris Martin
untitled, 2009
oil, spray paint, gel medium, glue and collage on canvas
31 x 26 in. (79 x 66 cm)
courtesy Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York
cat no. CHMBB01





Saira McLaren
In Recline, 2013
acrylic dye and gold bronze dust on raw linen
34 x 40 in. (86 x 102 cm)
courtesy Sargent's Daughters, New York
cat no. SAMBB01



Paul DeMuro
Radiant Risk, 2013
oil on paper
22 x 30 in. (56 x 76 cm)
courtesy Galerie Zürcher, New York/Paris
cat no. PADBB03

Mike Olin
Cavepool Stylus, 2012
oil, collage and mixed media on linen
36 x 27 in. (91 x 69 cm)
cat no. MIOBB02



Paul Pagk
o g l s 132, 2011-13
oil on linen
25 x 24 in. (64 x 61 cm)
cat no. PAPBB02



Jason Stopa
///NYC///, 2013
oil and glitter on canvas
16 x 16 in. (41 x 41 cm)
cat no. JASBB01



Julie Torres
Who Loves the Sun II, 2013
acrylic on canvas
12 x 9 in. (30 x 23 cm)
cat no. JUTBB02



Wendy White
Bwin, 2014
acrylic on canvas, wood, enamel
18.5 x 18.5 in (47 x 47 cm)
cat no. WEWBB02



