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JOSHUA MARSH

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 **JEFF BAILEY GALLERY**



Drawer 2010, oil on panel, 16 x 34 inches

by Geoffrey Young

What do we see when we look at these pictures?

Can we listen-in on the conversation between color and form, between representation and abstraction? Between sensation and thought?

Marsh starts with things, observed things, then submits his chosen motifs to a willful destabilization by formal means. Color is his trump card; it can all but overwhelm, as light does abrupt things in his pictures. But shape is no less a protagonist, as crucial to the structure of each picture as any voice in the harmonic mix.

A single flip-flop in space, pointing away from the viewer, casts a shadow like a giraffe's tongue. An old iron door-handle with tumescent shadow, a chair and a chair's shadow locked in a garish dance, a blue easel reflected orange in an oval mirror.

Bedside lamp, pillow, bedspread, mattress. All familiar enough, yes. But can you slip under the covers, lean back on the pillow, flick on the lamp, and see yourself reading? Enigmas cannot be explained this way. They must be experienced, puzzled over, succumbed to.

A chest of drawers cloven in two by a swath of interruptive blue, as in late-afternoon light, come upon by chance. Marsh's color masquerades as light, or vice versa; shadow (no less colorful) goes undercover, a sleuth chromatically differentiated, but active.

Exactly where is the back wall, you ask? And where is the light source? If perception reigns in paradise (the painter wants to convey what he sees), still, artistic license gives Marsh options, permits him to challenge the assumptions we make about the legibility of the material world.

Like any magus in a Wal-Mart, Marsh traffics in illusion. But what he's selling you can't buy. Aesthetic experience is the mysterious payoff for retinal absorption. Experience is attention's reward. And it is free. Enriched by perceptual subtlety (his need for infinitely close-values), we learn to see anew, to bear down on what goes unnoticed but is common to us all. These paintings rekindle a feeling for what surrounds us.

That's no waterfall! But something is there, flowing perhaps—a vapour? an X-ray?—being observed by a figure.

And why does that pitcher stand on its head, like Jarry's Ubu, more akin to an exclamation point than a useful household object? Art's question is ever the painting as answer.

Marsh walks a fine line, not quite sacrificing the thing, not quite losing the setting, not quite abandoning conditions. No. He weaves these elements, a composer as sensitive to evanescence as he is to material fact. If his paintings resist standard-issue readings of still-life, it is because his subject is the light in the mind when all our faculties are humming in the service of understanding what hangs before us. Theatrical as divas, though less easy to hear, Marsh's paintings talk to us in the light of an advanced phase of cognition.



Pitcher 2010, oil on panel, 24 x 18 inches

Chair 2010, oil on panel, 50 x 32 inches





Handle 2010, oil on panel, 17 x 14 inches



Pitcher (pink) 2009, oil on panel, 8 x 11 inches



Bedside 2010, oil on panel, 30 x 35 inches



Flip-flop 2010, oil on panel, 8 x 11 inches



Boots 2010, oil on panel, 24 x 30 inches





Stand 2009, oil on panel, 13 x 15 inches



Mirror 2010, oil on panel, 35 x 30 inches



Dustpan 2009, oil on panel, 22 x 24 inches



Pitchers 2009, oil on panel, 14 x 18 inches



Waterfall 2010, oil on panel, 16 x 16 inches



**Table** 2009, oil on panel, 20 x 26 inches

**Joshua Marsh** (born 1973, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania) received a BFA from Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, and an MFA from Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. His work has been exhibited in numerous group exhibitions throughout the United States. "Ten Things" is his first solo exhibition. Marsh lives and works in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

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