

New Ruins, Exhibition Brochure, American University Museum
at The Katzen Arts Center, Washington D. C.. Curated by
Danielle Mysliwiec and Natalie Campbell, January 2017

NEW RUINS



N. DASH JESSICA DICKINSON DONALD MOFFETT SAM MOYER NATHLIE PROVOSTY BRIE RUAIS



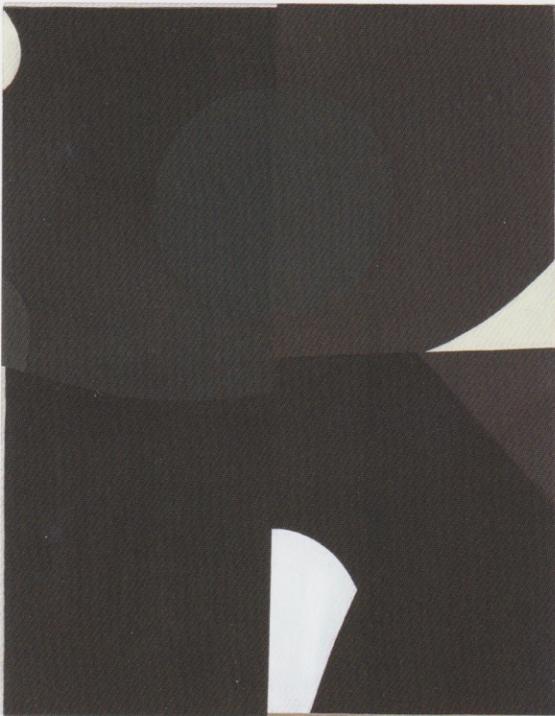
New Ruins presents six contemporary artists whose work foregrounds the specific temporal, material, and tactile aspects of painting as subject. Physical processes such as rubbing, layering, building, wearing away and, on occasion, obliterating combine to offer an alternative to the traditional painter's mark, altering perception of time and presence. Additionally materials such as bronze, marble, plaster, stone, metal, clay and wood are used to expand the language of painting and its traditional viewing modes. While ruins can be many things, here, the framework of the ruin offers a mode of resistance, not only to assumptions about the language and possibilities of painted surface and form, but to our fading relationship to the temporality, the materiality, and the experience of touch and presence in our increasingly digitized lives.

That ruins offer a profoundly different experience than virtual or digital time is evident in works by Jessica Dickinson, N. Dash and Nathlie Provosty. Working intensively on small groups of paintings for as long

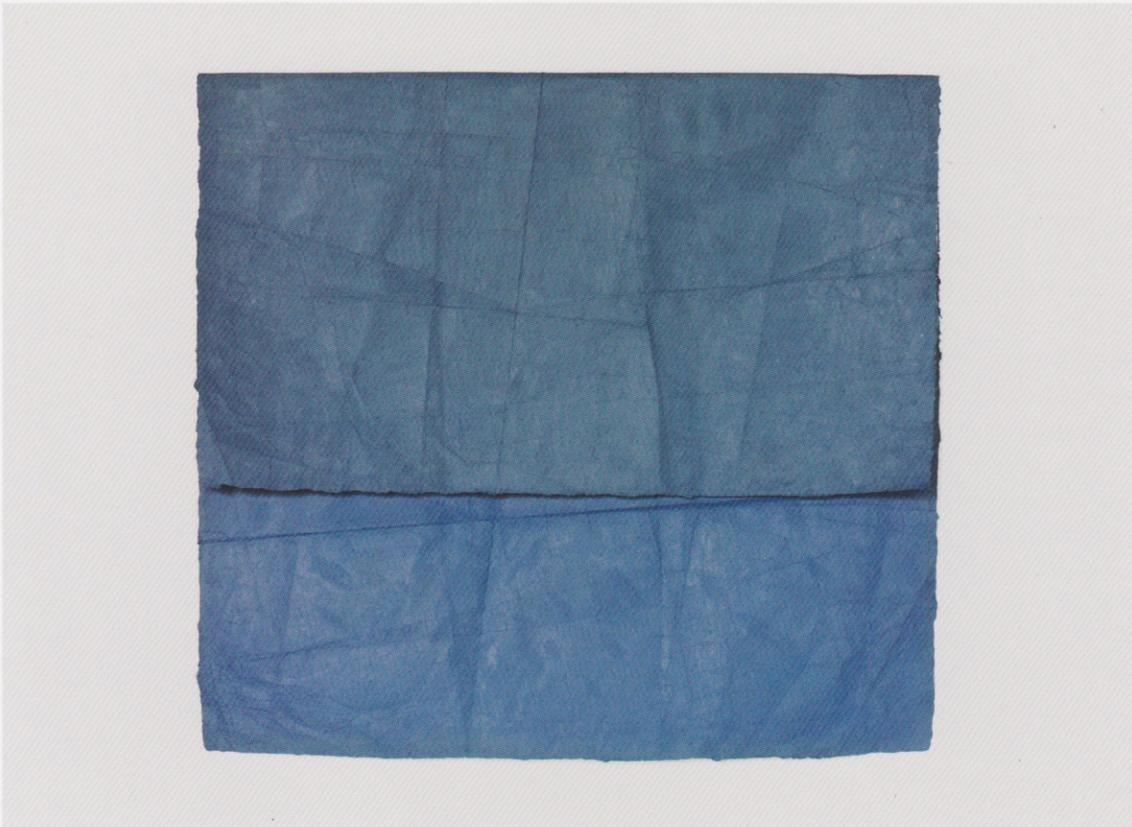
as a year, Dickinson layers oil paint on a plaster-like surface, adding and subtracting abstract actions in response to an event of shifting perceptual phenomenon and sensation, aggregating forms in the surface through marking, scraping, covering, and incision. This prolonged process manifests an index of duration—of time, illumination, and change—in the finished work, as well as in Dickinson's *remainders*—a series of graphite rubbings the artist makes of each painting to document each significant change to its surface. The painter's composition as well as ephemeral moments—accident, erosion, and wear—are recorded and imbued with specific history and gravity. This capacity of an artwork to embody both touch and time is at the core of N. Dash's work. In her *Commuter* series, the artist selects paper to carry with her during her daily subway rides. The paper is not approached as a surface for an image, but rather as a material that acquires meaning as it is handled and rubbed, folded and worn between finger-tips. The works are completed when they reach a kind of titration point, saturated with touch to the brink of disintegration. Then, to halt their deterioration, they are coated and hung on the wall, a kind of artifact of experience. While the *Commuters* literally occur over long expanses of time, Dash's paintings present additional avenues for contemplating time and presence. The artist begins her paintings using Adobe earth, covering the support as if "mudding a wall" and then adds layers of paint and wrapped linen, jute, and other traditional painting substrates. The materials harken back to ancient architecture and the beginning of painting and also combine to create complicated, layered, and textured surfaces that resist being read from a single vantage point. So too, Provosty's paintings require a viewer to be present to fully comprehend their nature. The paintings are abstractions based on a self-contained, iterative iconography using curved, unnoticeably asymmetrical forms. In her large-scale monochrome works, Provosty layers blue, violet and carbon pigment to produce dark, essentially un-reproducible

reflective and matte surfaces that change constantly with shifting light or movement, and stimulate perception on the far edges of sensory range. In her smaller paintings, she manipulates letter-like forms in quadrants that twin, skew, and misalign, producing a kind of stutter or trip that disrupts our sense of wholeness or completion. Throughout both series, Provosty manipulates a restrained formal vocabulary; each grapheme seems to bear its own self-contained form of knowledge, not reliant on human interpretation. As such, the paintings resist an artificial compartmentalization or teleology of time, in favor of an iconic, almost cosmological temporality that prioritizes somatic experience over digital speed.

In the work of Brie Ruais, Sam Moyer and Donald Moffett, painting asserts the importance of touch, texture and weight as the virtual world seemingly threatens to render these qualities obsolete. Working



in ceramic and raw clay, Ruais documents the gestures and movement of the body with malleable materials, evoking the history of figurative sculpture while simultaneously conjuring fossils or excavations in the landscape. Each large-scale ceramic work begins with a unit of clay equal to the artist's body-weight and is then subjected to specific actions. Pounded, stretched, pushed and torn, clay simultaneously evokes the human body and the land as sites of trauma, marked by the scars of labor and extraction. Upon firing, these pieces shift from the floor to the wall and from sculpture to image. For the American University Museum exhibition, Ruais has created four site-specific vertical columns of raw clay, which she has pushed from the floor up the wall; over the course of the exhibition, the life cycle of these works will unfold within view, as the clay goes from wet to dry and natural forces of disintegration supplant the artist's original productive action. This connection to the materiality of earth and stone and their potential as painterly mediums is central to the works of Sam Moyer. Moyer collects remnants of commercial marble, granite, and stone that hold a history of lived spaces and domestic use. She brings these cast-offs onto the wall as a starting point for painting, recognizing the visual texture and pattern within the stones and working through a process of pairing and creating counterparts to arrive at a point of intuitive completion. These materials fuel Moyer's interest in fusing the language of painting and sculpture together with that of photography. In her sculpture *Buddy*, (Sanford Remington 1925-2015), made of marble and Bronze, Moyer has created a three-dimensional two-sided "painting" that, when installed near natural light, reveals the surprising transparency of marble. By leaving behind the wall, Moyer thus alters our assumptions of the stone's materiality and presence. So too Donald Moffett refuses the wall as the traditional platform for viewing painting, extending his career-long interrogation of the medium with a recent series of paintings supported by found structural



elements. For *One's Own*, the artist created a sculptural armature out of industrial and natural remnants to position two paintings in space. Like Moyer, Moffett gives a new narrative and second life to these ruins by restoring beauty and meaning in our contemplation of their combined physical and metaphorical weight. The paintings, balanced on the ends of rebar, invite the viewer up to their visceral surfaces of extruded oil paint and also give us an unconventional access to the back of the paintings, therefore asserting that the texture of the surface, the materiality of the support, and the hole drilled through to connect the two are equal operators of meaning. These works and those on the wall elicit the greatest desire to touch and remind us that this very act is unique in its ability to inform our understanding of the world around us.

The sense of the 'ruin' present in these works is not that of nostalgia or fetish for a lost time, but rather an assertion of experience that exceeds the presence of a singular human subject. The tactile surface—constructed, worn, layered, combined—is instrumental in extending the viewing experience: manifesting a sense of haptic memory and communicating meaning outside of language. In the mute polyvalence of the worked surface, and in their attention to that which is unfixed, peripheral, or reclaimed, the works on view offer a corrective to an image-saturated culture in which everything is disposable—quickly exhausted and emptied of value. Going against the grain of prevalent discourses and practices in abstraction, these works refresh the vocabulary of painting by other means.

Cover: Sam Moyer, *Buddy (Sanford Remington 1926-2015)*, 2015. Bronze, marble, 92 x 65 x 24 in. Courtesy of the artist and Sean Kelly, New York. Back cover: Brie Raus, *Spreading Out From Copper Center*, 2016. Glazed Ceramic, copper leaf, hardware, 52 x 54 x 1 in. Courtesy of the artist and Nicole Klagsbrun. Inside flap: Donald Moffett, *Lot 042010, Lot 010511 (one's own)*, 2012. Oil on Linen with wood panel support, rebar, concrete statuary, log pedestal, ratchet straps, and hardware, 103 x 73 x 30 in. Courtesy of Marianne Boesky Gallery. Inside, from left: Jessica Dickinson, *This: For*, 2016. Oil on limestone polymer on panel, 45.25 x 55.25 in. Courtesy of James Fuentes Gallery.; Nathlie Provosty, *Assonance*, 2016. Oil on linen, 19 x 15 in. Courtesy of Roger E. Kass.; N. Dash, *Commuter*, 2016. Oil, paper, 19.9 x 18.1 in. Courtesy of Casey Kaplan Gallery.



Ruins do not merely evoke the past. They contain a still and seemingly quiescent present, and they also suggest forebodings, pointing to future erasure and subsequently, the reproduction of space, thus conveying a sense of the transience of all spaces.

— Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality*

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CURATED BY DANIELLE MYSLIWIEC AND NATALIE CAMPBELL

January 28 - March 12, 2017

American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center



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