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CROWD

**New Art by Women
from Our Neighbors' Private Collections**

BRUCE MUSEUM, Greenwich, Connecticut

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from Our Neighbors' Private Collections**

Kenneth E. Silver

For my friend and mentor,
Linda Nochlin

▼ III. 24
 Ellen Gallagher
 (b. Providence, Rhode Island, 1965)
Glister, 2010
 Oil, pencil, and paper on canvas
 24 x 24 in.
 Private Collection, Greenwich, Connecticut
 (cat. 14)



▼ III. 25
 Julie Langsam
 (b. New York, New York, 1961)
Kocher/Frey (Aluminaire House), 2008
 Oil on linen
 26 x 26 in.
 Collection of Jacqueline and Arthur Walker
 (cat. 20)



the slippage between the two modes continues to inform much contemporary work, often, though not always, with a political subtext. Nancy Dwyer's *Food* (2012) [ill. 21], for instance, a sculpture consisting of four specially constructed, galvanized garbage cans, surely "speak[s] to a society of waste," as Ken Johnson wrote in the *New York Times*.⁸ Erica Baum creates surprisingly elegant amalgams of text and image in her *Naked Eye Anthology* series, as in *Head Bend* (2013) [ill. 22], in which the bright edges of the book's pages form a striped container for its incongruous photographic illustrations, in this case of a man in swim trunks or undershorts bending over.

Mashup, incongruity, artifice: the postmodern artistic condition is by now nearly as familiar to us as was, once upon a time, high modernism's totalizing aesthetic of truth-to-materials and medium specificity. Although the ability of things already in the world to speak to us *about* our world has long been recognized—collage, Duchamp's Readymades, found objects of all kinds—only in recent years has hybridity come to look like the most convincing picture of life as we know it. Betye Saar, one of the pioneers of California Assemblage—an art built entirely of hybrid elements—often employs the most despised of found objects, racist caricatures, to create intense and moving works. In *The Weight of Color* (2007) [ill. 23], Saar's shackled and caged black crow is wedged between a mammy figure, above, and a rusted scale, below, which metaphorically calibrates just how thoroughly racist stereotypes weigh on the African American, as well as the white American, psyche. Ellen Gallagher's *Glister* (2010) [ill. 24], which at first glance suggests a map of islands in a blue sea, subtly alludes to the history of racism in the United States: stacks of paired shapes near the top are intended, according to the artist, as references to the distorted smiling lips of minstrel shows.⁹ The combination of pictorial and thematic modes in *Glister*—the lyrical "islands," the sardonic "lips," the cool, blue, ruled paper background reminiscent of the Minimalist art of Agnes Martin



▶ III. 30
 Fieroza Doorsen
 (b. Pietermaritzburg, South Africa,
 1960)
Untitled, 2006
 Oil on paper
 14 x 10 in.
 Collection of Susan and Brett
 Tejpaul
 (cat. 9)

▶ III. 31
 Francisca Sutil
 (b. Santiago, Chile, 1952)
Mute, 2009–10
 Gouache on paper
 29 x 22 in.
 Private Collection
 (cat. 34)

▶▶ III. 32
 Margaret Lee
 (b. Bronx, New York, 1980)
Dots!, 2013
 Oil on linen, oil on plaster, oil on wood
 72 x 96 x 21 in.
 Collection of Pamela and Arthur Sanders
 (cat. 22)

or Sol LeWitt—is another instance of the pervasive hybridity of contemporary practice, as is Julie Langsam’s painting *Kocher/Frey (Aluminaire House)* (2008) [ill. 25], where a monument of International Style architecture is juxtaposed to a background of luridly colored clouds, set above what look to be test patterns for a color television, a mashup that makes the simplicity of high modernist design look as quaint as the historicizing complications of Victorian taste looked to the original modernists.

Langsam’s color test patterns, Gallagher’s ruled paper, Baum’s stripes—one cannot help but recognize that abstraction is *again* a major force with which to be reckoned in contemporary art. For women artists, the push-and-pull of abstraction has long been freighted with meaning, for better and for worse. “The problematics of considering women artists’ work in abstraction,” the artist and critic Mira Schor has said, “are ensnared in the subtext of the ideals of abstraction as a universal—ergo, genderless—language,”¹⁰ which is another way of saying that the universe of abstraction has (mostly) remained one that excluded women artists. And when female abstract artists *have* emerged, their gender-neutral art has often been subjected to gendered, essentialist readings (e.g., Georgia O’Keeffe’s “vaginal” flower shapes, Helen Frankenthaler’s “menstrual, liquid” paint application), and not only by male commentators. Indeed, to complicate matters further, one can sometimes make a good case for the validity of such gendered readings of abstraction, like Susan Stoops’s observation that “[t]he project of humanizing abstraction is the legacy” of the 1970s generation of women artists, including Lynda Benglis, Ana Mendieta, and Jackie Winsor, among others.¹¹ At any rate, as a political statement, abstract art would not seem the most effective vehicle: “You can’t put an abstract painting on a banner,” Schor has pointed out, “representation, and more specifically figuration, have proved more useful than abstraction for artists wishing to examine gender difference and feminist issues in visual art.”¹²



20.
Julie Langsam
(b. New York, New York, 1961)
Kocher/Frey (Aluminaire House), 2008
Oil on linen
26 x 26 in.
Collection of Jacqueline and Arthur Walker

This work is part of a series in which Langsam painted realistic depictions of modern architecture (here A. Lawrence Kocher and Albert Frey's Aluminaire House, designed in 1931) on a ground made of geometric forms and set against an expansive sky. Langsam thereby references high modernist abstraction at the bottom of the canvas, modern architecture at its center, and perhaps the romantic nineteenth-century landscape paintings of the Hudson River School at the top. Practitioners of all three of these art movements saw their work as part of a utopian mission. Langsam's painting conveys both a melancholic vision of the failed hopes of these art movements and an admiration for their optimistic belief in art's potential to create a better world.¹

1. Jonathan Gilmore, "Julie Langsam at Frederieke Taylor," *Art in America*, March 1, 2009, online (accessed April 3, 2016).



21.
Annie Lapin
(b. Washington, D.C., 1978)
A Throughishness Sloshes and Comes, 2014
Oil paint, acrylic paint, and acrylic enamel spray-paint
on canvas
82 x 27 in.
Collection of Marie-France and René Kern

Lapin's painting stands on the boundary of abstraction and representation. Here, hints of landscape and floral forms peek out from beneath the exuberant brushstrokes. Lapin has explained that these works are about the process of seeing and the fluidity with which we see things at the edge of our perception. In her attempt to re-create the process of seeing within a singular object, Lapin has named her paintings with prepositions (a grammatical form that indicates motion) that she modifies into nouns (which imply stasis). The inherent complexity of her pursuit is thereby captured in her strange titles, with invented words like "throughishness."¹

1. Priscilla Frank, "Annie Lapin's Newest Painting Exhibition Combines Instant Attraction and a Slow Burn," in *HuffingtonPost*, January 25, 2014 (accessed April 3, 2016).