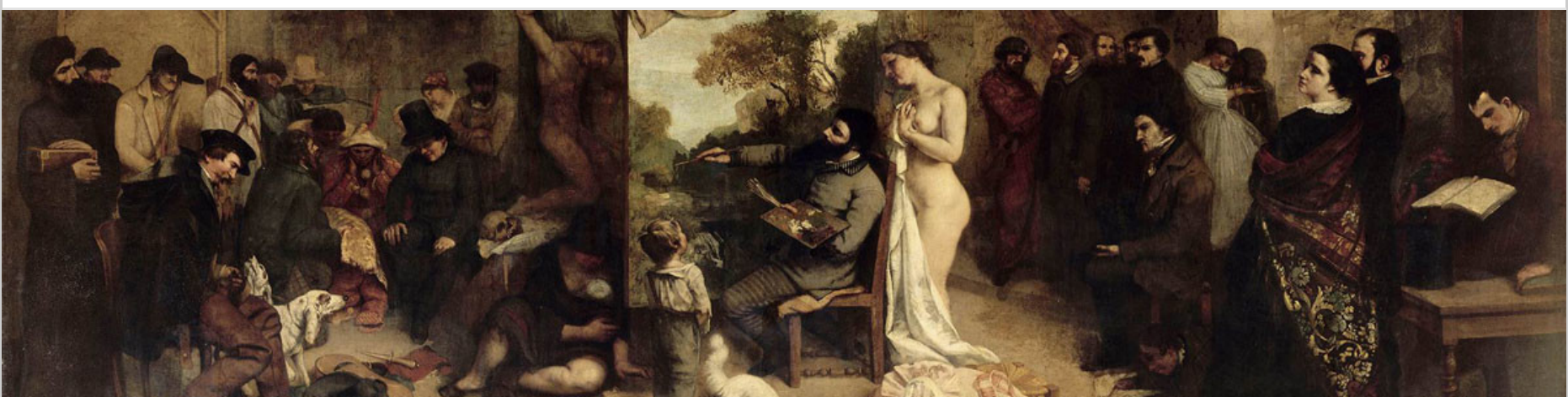


Maureen Mullarkey: Studio Matters



[Home](#) > [Art](#) > [On the Grid with Lloyd Martin](#)

On the Grid with Lloyd Martin

 [Maureen Mullarkey](#)  July 21, 2011  3

LLOYD MARTIN LIVES AND WORKS IN RHODE ISLAND. By no means does that permit anyone to call him a New England painter. There is nothing regional about his painting. His achievement embodies Robert Hughes' observation—made some twenty years ago—that Manhattan is no longer a creative center. A marketing center, certainly; but vital for the development of a painter's talent? Not at all.

Martin has been exhibiting annually with Stephen Haller Gallery for a full decade. Given the diagrammatic, linear rigor of work that grants no compositional quarter to expressive accidents, it is an impressive production schedule. And a welcome one. He continues to renew his signature format with each exhibition. This latest is his handsomest show to date. It is also his liveliest,

rambunctious in its aggressive use of high-keyed color and the stacking of his characteristic ribbons of paint into dominant rectangles.

The fascination of Martin's painting lies in its pitch-perfect balance between the constraints of a formal grid and the rhythmic movement of horizontal bands within it. The tactile materiality of the paint, contained within strict, incised margins, contrasts with the immateriality of the image. Color is arranged antiphonally, occurring in alternating patterns of call-and-response. An orange band across the bottom of a canvas echoes a vertical of the same orange set across a span of neutrals. A single red bar draws the eye to the center of *Dissever* (2010) in terse rejoinder to the red plane that commands the upper left corner.

One inventive alignment follows another. The lessons of Mondrian are evident throughout, most vividly in Martin's attention to intervals between forms and control of repetitions of hue. *Red Breach* (2011) is an eloquent testament to fecund tension between a self-imposed stasis—the fixity of forms—and the fluid movement of paint within and between the forms.

Martin's press material states that his gridwork is based on photographs of the old industrial buildings in and around his studio. Maybe. It is a plausible rationale for gridded compositions at a time when every artist is required to have an identifying schtick. A rhetorical routine that showcases the gray cells behind the eye has become a crucial component of salesmanship. Still, there is no architectural accounting for the near-musical interludes between the dominant and passive bars that cross his canvases. It would surprise me if these negotiations were not carefully worked out on graph paper with little or no reference to photographed sites.

Decades ago Fairfield Porter said out loud something that artists know but tend to leave

unspoken: To a certain extent, every artist addresses himself to other artists. In recognition of that, it is safe to say that a good number of painters will leave this show feeling much like the narrator of Cynthia Ozick's *Usurpation*. The narrator of the story is a writer who attends a manuscript reading at the 92nd Street YMHA. It is a marvelous manuscript—the very thing the narrator had *wanted* to write but never did. She is convinced the author “usurped” her intentions and she wrote the thing before she had the chance to. She covets it.

On view is work that other painters, like Ozick's desirous narrator, could easily wish to have made. The pleasure of it derives from a pictorial intelligence that has no quality of mimicry or glibness about it. Each arrangement results from manifold and complex decisions that aspire to beauty—nothing more and absolutely nothing less.

Lloyd Martin at Stephen Haller Gallery, 524 West 26 Street, 212-741-7777.

This review appeared first in [CityArts](#), June 14, 2011.

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✦ Tags: [Lloyd Martin](#), [Stephen Haller Gallery](#), [the modernist grid](#)

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 3 COMMENTS



 [Diane McGregor](#)

 9 years ago  [Permalink](#)

Wonderfully sensitive review of Lloyd's work. You have it spot on how fervently delicious it must feel for other painters to view his work — with joy as well as a bit of “I wish I'd thought of that” remorse.



Studio Matters

🕒 9 years ago [🔗 Permalink](#)

Thank you for that, Diane. The reason I mentioned the Ozick story was because I felt just like the narrator. I wish I had made those paintings myself.



Karen

🕒 9 years ago [🔗 Permalink](#)

I liked that part of the review. It isn't often one artist says that sort of thing about another. (If I remember rightly, Ozick herself took—usurped—that story from Bernard Malamud.)

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December 2018
November 2018
October 2018
August 2018
July 2018
May 2018
April 2018
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