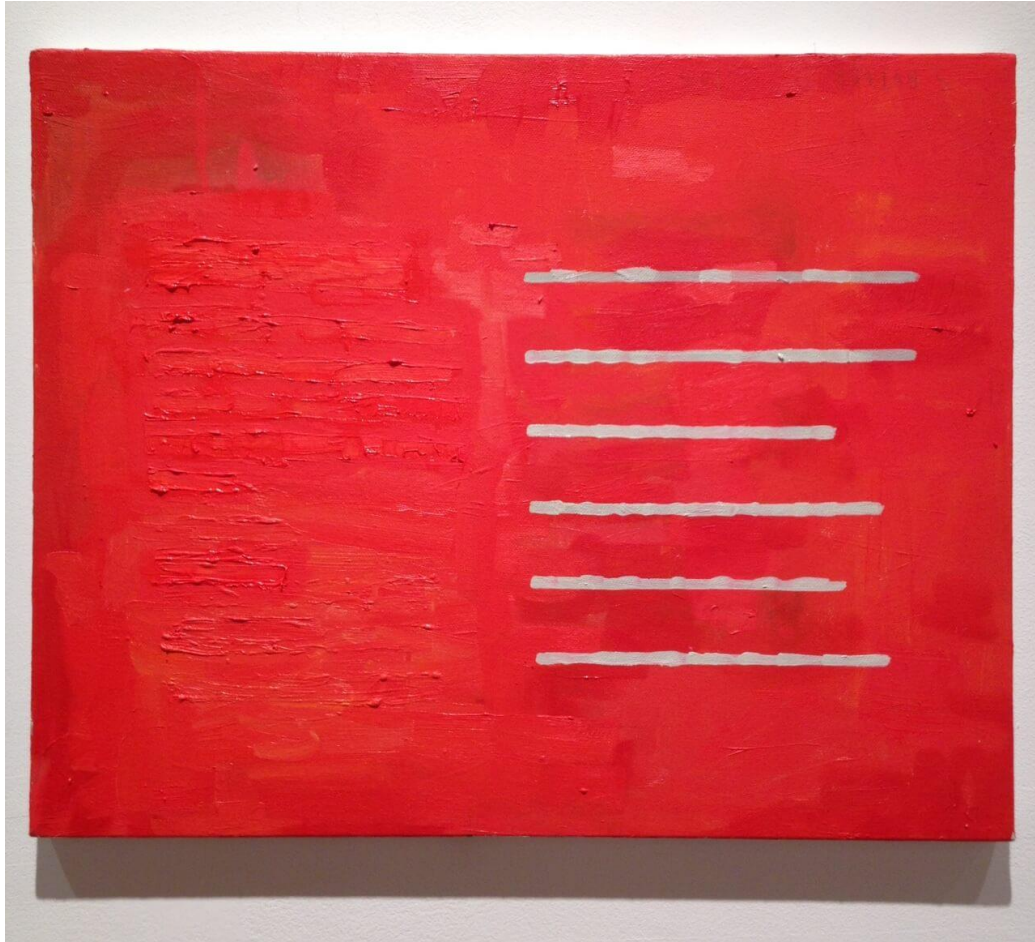


BROOKLYN

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UNREAD THIS: SHARON BUTLER AT THEODORE:ART



Sharon Butler's "Rewrite," in her solo show at Theodore:Art. All photos by Paul D'Agostino.

BY PAUL D'AGOSTINO

NO VISIBLE STAPLES. NO UNSTRETCHED CANVASES. No exposed stretcher bars. No threads of fabric adangle. No apparatuses denuded with certain airs of overtness. No trappings, in other words, of some of Sharon Butler's more readily familiar tendencies and techniques that have been key to her particular contributions to the New Casualist aesthetic in recent years. Abundant, though, in her very strong solo show of 19 small and medium-size oil paintings at [Theodore:Art](#)

(through February 14th), are bold colors and compositional simplicities, limited palettes and linear legibilities, thin and thick surface treatments alike, and more than a fair share of palpable fun.

Some viewers might marvel that Butler made these works, or they might wonder what has become of her previous practices, but let's not exaggerate quite so much: Butler's characteristic temperament and touch are plentifully apparent in most all of these new paintings. While a number of the works suggest markedly new chromatic routes with their colorful robustness (*Vixy*, *Goethe Color Triangle*) or stark juxtapositions of one color with black or white (*Collinwood*, *American Still Life 2*, *Taillights 1*), there are also several pieces executed in quieter, perhaps more recognizably Butlerian tones and hues—in calm greens and hushed oranges, in placid greys and soft blues (*July*, *Marti Pello 2*). There are even several works that might well be read as stretched versions of what the painter might once have left unstretched (*Interstate*, *Taillights 3*), while other pieces register as successful mergings of her previous and present tendencies. These new paintings show Butler making rather decisive moves away from a more declaratively deconstructive practice, but the artist herself is still quite present. Certain particularities of her painterly practice are still quite there. And this is all quite good.

And yet, perhaps there is something a bit indirectly deconstructive about these paintings after all. Depending on how one goes about defining the New Casualist practice or aesthetic—some definitions require a measure of deconstruction at play, others for compositional incompleteness, others yet seem to argue for lots of insouciance, and more than a few explanations would indicate that almost any non-figurative painting made in the last decade or so might be categorized as New Casualist, but defining it isn't quite the point here—perhaps there is yet something quasi-Casualist in some of Butler's new pieces, by dint of a hint of deconstructive wit. In works such as *Rewrite*, *American Still Life 2*, *American Still Life 3*, and perhaps also *Tornado Warning* and *Stanzer*, the whitish horizontals of various lengths, reminiscent of redacted documents, are place-holders, evidently, for lines of text. In the instances where this ersatz non-verbiage is derived from museum labels, Butler's witticism seems to comment on how easy it can be to spend more time and energy focusing on the things that lie tangent to an artwork, or that are ultimately tangential to it—descriptions, theories, histories, trajectories, names, associations, categories, definitions—than on engaging with *the thing itself*, a notion that could very plausibly implicate both the viewer and the person making the work. Commentary along these lines, particularly here, might not rank as candidly deconstructivist, nor might its visual manifestations come across as formally New Casualist, but it does serve to induce reflection on what it might mean for audiences and artists alike to be aware of,

aligned with or opposed to any sort of art-related -ism while otherwise caught up in the act of looking or making.

With or without New Casualist tones or intentions, Butler has crafted a very fine suite of new paintings—of variably intriguing *things themselves*. Visit the gallery, have a good look, engage therewith. Although none of the above is anything along the lines of a spoiler, perhaps the best way to prepare yourself to look at the show, now, is to forget everything I've said.

Paul D'Agostino is @postuccio on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).



Sharon Butler's "July," at Theodore:Art.



A wall of works by Sharon Butler at Theodore:Art.