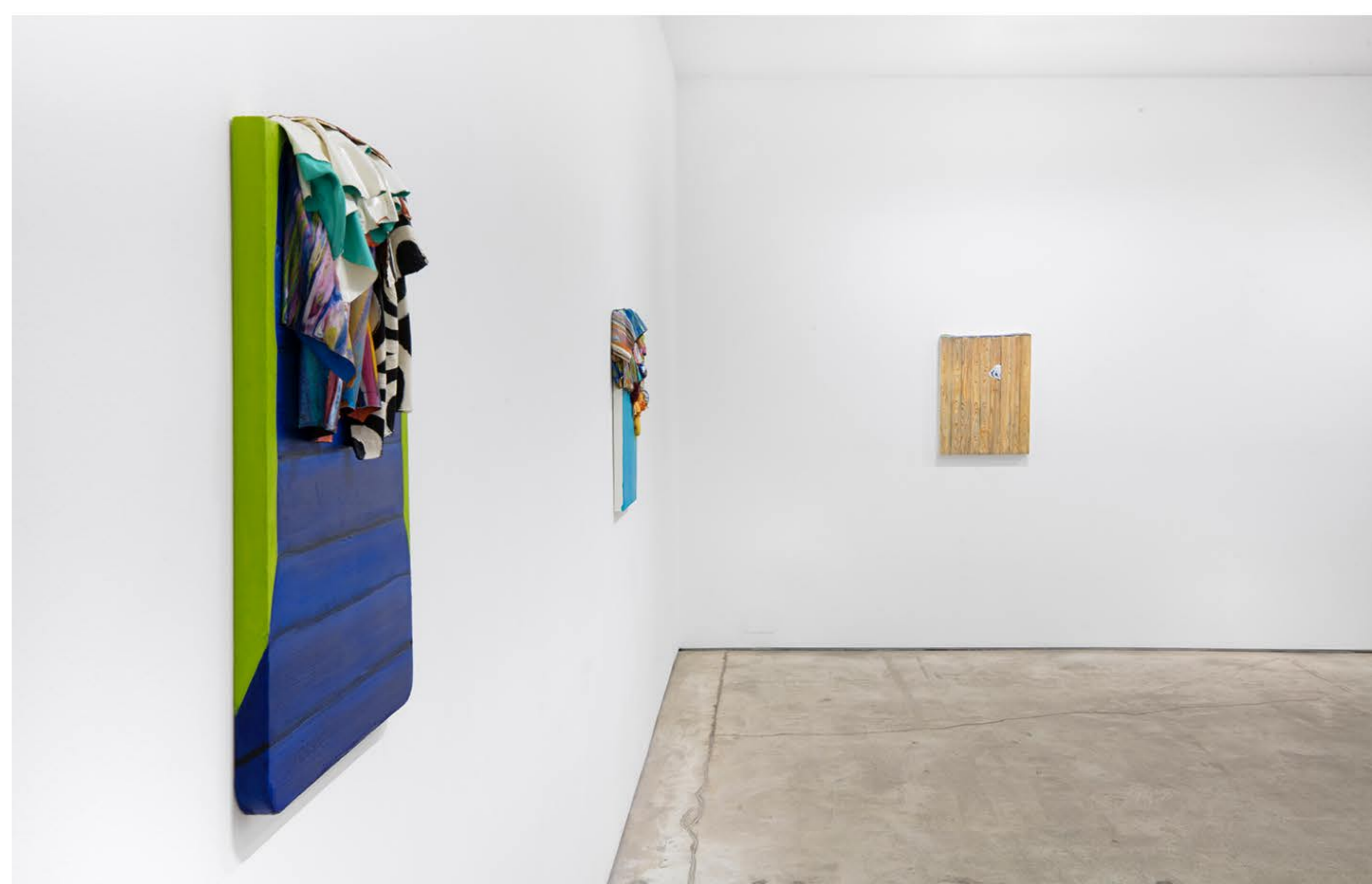


ART

Sculptural Paintings Oozing with Color

Leslie Wayne's richly layered paintings remind us of the playfulness and emotional range to be found in abstraction.

Dennis Kardon | October 4, 2017



Installation view, *Leslie Wayne: Free Experience*, Jack Shainman Gallery (all images courtesy Jack Shainman)

Babyboomer and Gen X artists who outlived the “death of painting” ideologies of the last century will be impressed by the formal and conceptual riposte Leslie Wayne’s new paintings make to that strain of theorizing; young millennial painters, meanwhile, may just enjoy the fresh, inventive construction.

All twenty of the modestly sized paintings in *Free Experience*, Leslie Wayne’s exhibit at Jack Shainman Gallery, seem to come encrusted with various sculptural elements. Followers of Wayne’s work will not be surprised to discover that these are in fact the product of layers of oil paint, peeled off plastic surfaces and then cut, manipulated, and applied to painted wood trapezoidal supports.

In her previous exhibit at Shainman in 2014, *Paint/Rags*, she used these paint surfaces whole, hanging them picture-like on the wall as object metaphors for textiles. With painted patterns on their draped forms, they resembled clothing or dishrags. Throughout her career, Wayne has paired metaphors of painted surface — skin, cloth, and folds of earth strata — with queries as to the nature of painting as a historical idea. Now, by adding pictorial representation to her palette, Wayne gains a new sense of improvisational freedom that makes this work look fresh but mystifying, simultaneously cool and passionate, yet balancing humor with an undercurrent of threat.

Upon entering the gallery and finding a sea of colorful abstraction, a painting like “MM” (2016), immediately grabs attention by appearing as a fogged-up, weathered barn window. Which indeed is a pretty obvious metaphor for the impermeability of the illusionistic window a painting might imply. Despite a winking homage triggered by associations with Josephine Halvorson or Marilyn Minter (the double M of the title) something different is happening here.



Leslie Wayne, “MM” (2016), oil on canvas on panel 27 1/2 x 21 X 2 1/8 inches

In addition to “MM,” many of Wayne’s paintings reference other artists. The nods to Robert Ryman, through an unstretched early white painting of his haphazardly tossed over the back of a painted folding chair in “(W)resting Robert” (2017), and to Frank Stella in “To Be Frank” (2016) are fairly obvious.



Leslie Wayne, “To Be Frank” (2016), oil on panel, 26 x 22 1/2 x 6 inches

But Wayne is just as effective when her allusions are to the quotidian, like a cardboard portfolio cushioned by doggy pee pads leaning on a painted ultramarine quilted seat in “Contra” (2017). By creating ambiguous metaphors ranging from daily life, to collapsed walls, and buggy accidents, each of Wayne’s paintings, despite their outrageous punning titles, elicits a serious emotional response. Like Gary Stephan, another articulate artist who emphasizes the representational metaphors that can be coaxed from abstract paintings, Wayne’s real strength is not the intellectual theory behind the work, but the play of feeling with which she manages to imbue her paintings.

Leslie Wayne: Free Experience continues at Jack Shainman (524 West 24th Street, Manhattan) through October 21.

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