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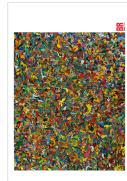
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WEBEXCLUSIVE

Leslie Wayne, *Rags*

by Jonathan Goodman

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JACK SHAINMAN | FEBRUARY 20 – MARCH 22, 2014

Leslie Wayne's sharp show of new work continues her interest in paint not as an embellishment on canvas but rather a physical material in its own right. She's always done fine things with the medium, but in this exhibition, entitled *Rags*, the artist takes her ongoing, nearly obsessive interest in oil paint to a new level, draping paint so that it bends and folds as fabric might. Working in this way, Wayne simultaneously moves toward trompe l'oeil, which might be seen as a nod to the past, and toward viewing painting as constituting three-dimensional matter, which would bring her art forward—toward a contemporary acknowledgment of its new use as a sculptural element. Her *Rags* asks implicit questions about materials and their art historical use; on one level, it would be easy to group her paint sculptures with the style of the New York School, which still holds sway in some New York circles. But although she acknowledges the possibility, Wayne doesn't quite see it that way. Instead, she is more interested in spanning genres, looking to the moment where a painting can also be considered three-dimensional in its origins and effects.

In the sparse installation at Jack Shainman's 24th Street gallery, viewers have the chance to zero in on one work per wall. The visual complexity of both the surface and its volumes is remarkable—vivid but never showy, painterly without being decorative. The works perform a marvelous feat of self-containment, whereby paint is viewed as raw matter. *Paint/Rag #27* (2013) is a towel-like construction that folds over on itself, its support hidden by the draping of the paint. Exuberant, even extravagant in its beauty, the work consists of blue with orange stripes on the surface closest to the viewer, with the sections beneath painted mostly in orange and red. The riot of colors freely alludes to the New York School's passion for both a physical and painterly surface, but the work is more than that. It is a hybrid painting-sculpture in which hues are built up physically, maintaining an active sense of volume, with the folds resulting in the crevices and partially hidden spaces one might find in a draped fabric. The abstraction is not absolute; instead, the painting, like the others in the show, demonstrates a familiarity with what can be called the rags of time, silently requiring study for intellectual comprehension.



Leslie Wayne, "Paint/Rag #27," 2013. Oil on panel, 15" x 9" x 3 5/8".

Most viewers will be taken with the technical tour de force of paint handled three-dimensionally, a compositional attribute that suggests the art of Lynda Benglis, but they will see, too, that the surface is nearly Pop in its wild variety of colors. Maybe, as well, Wayne's west coast origins come into play; the paintings' broad spectrum of hues is reminiscent of California's outstanding colorist, Richard Diebenkorn. Of course, Wayne's art is not figurative but rather formally determined, concerned with the gap between painting and sculpture, the point at which the two genres meet. This work, then, is congruent with Abstract Expressionism's treatment of paint as a raw material first and foremost, although Wayne keeps the movement at an arm's distance by her decisive move toward paint as a volumetric material. In *Paint Rag #30* (2013), the draping looks like a spattered napkin, with edges of brown, and again a reddish orange at the lowest part of the construction. The works are relatively small—*#30* is just over 18 inches high—but they are filled with painterly events that ask us to appreciate the medium's capacity for abstract beauty even as we regard the compositions representationally, as rags.

Wayne treats the surface of her work as being of interest in its own right, even though it belongs to the gestalt of a rag or weathered garment. Time and again, the viewer is directed to experience paint as more than simple decoration, and for all its deliberate beauty, there is something raw and assertively informal about the series. The level of visual interest is very high—we look and come close, marveling at art whose three-dimensional presence belies our knowledge that what we are looking at is paint. It is rare to see so tangible a painting! But that is the work's open secret, namely, its effortless hybridity. Wayne performs in the gap between painting and sculpture, in ways that pay homage to both. Wayne's paintings thus hold their own in the gallery, reminding us that a bit of progress has been made in the trajectory of painting, which many in the art world no longer trust as capable of new creations. The urgency of form and color in her art reminds us that there is still space for exploration in a field nearly toppling beneath its historical weight.



Leslie Wayne, "Paint/Rag #30," 2013. Oil on panel, 18 1/4" x 12 1/2" x 5".

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JONATHAN GOODMAN is a teacher and author specializing in Asian art, about which he has been writing for more than twenty years.

RECOMMENDED ARTICLES



SHIMON ATTIE *Facts on the Ground*

by Issam Alipour
JUNE 2014 | ARTSEEN After twenty years of meditating on social psyches, Shimon Attie has brought the Israel/Palestine conflict to Jack Shainman Gallery. Celebrated for his experimental approach, which blurs the line between installation and photography, Attie has spent his career moving from one city to the next to explore the trauma and history of the marginalized and to reflect on social memory and the construction of identity.

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