



Art Review: Matthew Satz, Considered

March 14, 2013

by Mike Solomon

"Matthew Satz: Strands" at Glenn Horowitz Bookseller in East Hampton, NY.

Artists offering opinions about the work of other artists can be a tricky business, for a number of reasons. When the artists involved know each other, it can become trickier still, because while it requires a certain amount of sensitivity to be truthful when speaking candidly to a friend about his or her work, it is a much greater challenge to offer an honest appraisal of that friend's work when you know that it will be published and read by hundreds or possibly thousands of people.

I have known Matt Satz and his work since 2001, when our mutual friend Michael Halsband introduced us. Satz was making his big smoke paintings then. The paintings were done by allowing smoke from a burning device to be caught by the surface of his canvases. The surface would entrap the three dimensional spires of soot as they wafted upward through space, sucking them into the top coat like some kind of weird photo process. Pretty cool.



"Untitled By-product" by Matthew Satz, 2002. Oil on paper, 18 1/4 x 14 inches. Photo by Mike Solomon.

Satz was not the first artist to make smoke paintings, but he has certainly done them bigger and with more decorative beauty than anyone else. Surrealist Wolfgang Paalen was the first to use this process, as far as I know, and his "Smoke Painting," done in 1938, is on view in the "Drawing Surrealism" show at the Morgan Library and Museum right now. In the 1960s, Yves Kline made "Fire Paintings," which are somewhat related.

Satz's smoke paintings were "all over" compositions, with some of the canvases tinted with a light color first, before a varnish and smoke stains were applied. The one thing that was certain about the work was the diligence and discipline the artist brought to the process.

For Satz, his regard for process and system is paramount. He has stuck to his guns, working programmatically and abstractly through his entire body of work, yet always exploring boundaries, searching for the edges through various newer formats and materials.

He began to make what he calls "By-product" paintings. By dripping paint, ostensibly from other art objects (like the Strands, which I will come to later), from points directly above papers or canvases, he created these vertically dripped-on paintings.

These versions of his touchless or passive system showed that he understood exactly what he was

doing, expanding the idea of having space and gravity form the materials that fell to the surfaces that captured the actions, that made the marks that created the compositions. In all this, Satz was extending Pollock's original pouring and dripping technique, which was done in the air above the surfaces of floor-mounted canvases.



"Untitled Bouquet (30 Strands)"
by Matthew Satz, 2005. Oil and gesso on linen, dimension to 24 1/4 inches. Photo by Mike Solomon.

As Satz has further expanded his program, he has come to focus on the "Strands," which are the primary focus of this exhibition at Glenn Horowitz Bookseller.

Perhaps, at first, they were sticks that simply functioned as devices that held paint for his By-product paintings. Or perhaps Satz was always conscious of their status as objects, but certainly, he secured them as bona fide "paintings" when he stretched canvas or linen over them and gessoed them, before covering them with paint and color. As "paintings," they are the most eccentric of shapes and that's a good part of their appeal.

In this show, we see the Strands fed into a number of formats. They are installed as single hanging objects, sometimes relating to By-product works, which may be their progeny, juxtaposed nearby.

They are assembled in evenly spaced intervals as wall installations, or they hang bundled together like exotic pea pod bouquets. The smart thing about the Strand structures is that they reiterate the dripping paint that covers them, as they too are thin and linear and free flowing. This reciprocation, between process and form, between paint and support, is one of the more satisfying aspects of this work.

The wall installations also reflect a kind of reiteration, in that the assembling of many single strands across the wall, especially when seen from a distance, makes each strand look like a drip of paint. There's a small drawing in one of the vitrines in the middle of the gallery that supports this view. The wall installations are another aspect of his systemic *regime*.



"Bouquet (11 Strands, Clearcoat)"
by Matthew Satz, 2006. Oil and gesso on linen, dimension to 23 1/4 inches. Photo by Mike Solomon.

In total, the whole show containing so many examples and samples of his system of works—both small and large—is obviously meant to convey that within his system everything is connected, that

there is an overarching process at work. I am sure it's unintended, but at times it makes the work feel a bit like a product line. While I understand and sympathize with the desire to brand one's work, especially in the context of today's art market, it does then emphasize the commercial aspect, which would seem to contradict, or at least mitigate, the artist's deeper purposes. To my way of thinking, systems and concepts are only as good as what they help us achieve.

For me, the best work here emerges when the system is transcended, when the artist goes beyond the concept. Satz does this in most of the Strand bundles, like "*Bouquet (11 Strands, Clearcoat)*", "*Untitled Bouquet (30 strands)*," and "*Untitled Bouquet (20 Strands)*." Satz also accomplishes this in most of the larger By-product works, like "*Untitled By-product*."

In these artworks, the system is simply the platform he launches from and it is clear that he did not stop at concept but worked until he satisfied a more passionate and emotional criteria. This feels more like the private person I know.

These works are invested with enough depth and energy to exist on their own, and are quite compelling, even without the bulwark of theory, concept or system, however developed those may be.

Mike Solomon

BASIC FACTS: "Matthew Satz: Strands" is on view through March 23 at Glenn Horowitz Bookseller, 87 Newtown Lane, East Hampton, NY 11937. www.glennhorowitz.com

The exhibition presents Satz's strands in multiple forms to reveal the ways each single Strand contributes to the creation of a series of By-product paintings. Strands are presented in their singular form as a By-product paintings, grouped in Bouquets, and in wall installations. The exhibition as installation presents variations of the strands to provide a context in which to engage the viewer in each individual object, the relationships found between the objects, and the spatial concerns of installation art and sculpture.

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