



Mathew King Paintings: Dramatic Precision & Industrial Poetry

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by Janet Goleas

Matthew King hits it out of the park in his first solo exhibition presented at Harper's Books in East Hampton, N.Y.

Organized by Chris Mansour, "This Side Down" includes a series of bold abstractions and smaller, collage-based works on aluminum panel. The former is a series of hulking works painted on dense APA woodchip panels known as OSB (Oriented Strand Board). Used in the building trade, OSB is a manufactured substrate stamped on one side with its APA grade, strength and usage; and, since correct orientation is essential for installation, all the boards also come with the printed directive "this side down."



"Utah VII" by Matthew King, 2015. Enamel, lacquer, acrylic on Oriented Strand Board (OSB), 44 1/2 X 35 1/2 X 2 1/2 inches.



"Untitled" by Matthew King, 2015. Enamel, acrylic, cut paper on aluminum, 8 x 12 inches.

King constructs panels from the OSB and meticulously slathers thick stripes of color on the constructions with dramatic precision. As the color bands converge and divide across the face of the painting, each one addresses the "APA" stamp as if it were a magnetic field.

At King's directive, bars of color crash into margins, leaping over areas of stamped text to resume on its other side or to be completely diverted to a new, fractional path. Hugging the edges of this "commercial ratings" text, the terminology becomes a sort of industrial poetry that is both elevated by and subsumed into the artist's compositional meme, where word and image are married.



“Utah VI” by Matthew King, 2014. Enamel, lacquer, acrylic on Oriented Strand Board (OSB), 48 X 36 X 3 inches.

In *Untitled*, 2014, King’s incisive linear pattern is truncated both by a vertical reveal exposing the OSB specifics and by a creamy white bar of solid color that runs along the painting’s top edge. King is drawn to the aesthetic of the stamped text, noting a propensity to “shuffle through whole palettes of plywood just like I flip through hundreds of old magazines.” Here he embraces it, nesting around its circumference as if the text is a calm sea in an otherwise piercing reality.



“Untitled” by Matthew King, 2014. Enamel, lacquer, acrylic on Oriented Strand Board (OSB), 54 1/2 x 43 x 3 inches.

Notably laconic about these aesthetics, King has observed that the textual specificity forces him to make succinct formal decisions, a useful dynamic in charting the course of a painting. For him, this is where the content is. Period.

His craftsmanship and sense of homage to mid-century American painting—chiefly Minimalism—is an ode to painterly conventions that stand in solidarity with formalist concerns. Revisiting the philosophical and theoretical moods of the 1960s and ’70s is an intoxicating rite of passage to be sure, but King takes it further. His paintings are viscous and substantial, asserting a physicality that is both sculptural and performative, with luscious strokes that still look wet to the touch. Instead of hanging on the walls, most of the large paintings lean against them, emphasizing the conjunction of painting and sculpture.

In *Utah III*, 2014, King shifts his compositional axis so the strident trapezoidal form dominating the image field is cuckolded by the whiteness of a larger, more physical rectangle. Dividing it all, that same vertical strip of nude particle board reveals its own make and model, like an X-ray. Relative to many of his other large paintings, the title *Utah III* is fanciful. The Utah works were the offspring of drawings the artist made on a trip to that state’s raw and beautiful countryside.



“Utah III” by Matthew King, 2014. Enamel, lacquer, acrylic on Oriented Strand Board (OSB), 48 x 30 x 3 inches.

In the small, tidy collages also on view, King integrates commercial photographs with bold triangles and other geometries of thick enamel paint. Addressing the image field with brassy assertiveness, the artist slashes through vintage Marlboro ads, moon landings and sundry epic (and not so epic) moments in American history, reordering both the content and formal properties with a cheeky nonchalance.



“Untitled” by Matthew King, 2015. Enamel, acrylic, cut paper on aluminum, 8 x 12 inches.

The sharp edges and severed pictures hint at instability or an unknown danger, as if the artist—or some larger, invisible force—has gone about rearranging our cultural DNA. Some of the works hang in a large grid and this amplifies their shared geometries.



Aluminum panels by Matthew King installed upstairs at Harper’s Books.

The small paintings are seductive and disorienting. Fueled by King’s formal economy and sharp focus, the works re-frame and confound the so-called American dream.

BASIC INFO: “This Side Down” by Matthew King is on view April 18 through June 2, 2015 at Harper’s Books, 87 Newtown Lane, East Hampton, NY 11937. www.harpersbooks.com.

Matthew King is based in Boston, MA.

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