



ART REVIEW: Eric Brown Paintings—Authentic Colliding of Geometry and Color

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by Janet Goleas

Moving through Eric Brown's "Vice Versa" exhibition at Ille Arts in Amagansett, one gets the feeling his painting practice is evolving right there, inside the gallery. In 16 or so small canvasses and works on paper, fields of brushwork collide into blocks of color and casual geometries with a painterly syntax that is not exactly resolute yet is fully and completely resolved.

Relative to Brown's "Monday Paintings," exhibited at Ille Arts in 2013, the new works possess an economy of means that is exhilarating. All created since 2014, the paintings move handily between the provisional and the fixed, embracing an architecture that is both candid and refreshing.

Recently Brown moved his studio from upstate New York to Manhattan, trading in the pastoral for the right angles and tonal neutrality of city life. It shows in his paintings, now infused with a sense of structural reductivism and color relationships that conjure urban design, mid-century textiles and an edge-to-edge, shoulder-to-shoulder consciousness.

In *Ladder*, two orange rectangles straddle a column of gray that ascends in awkward blocks. Truncated by a small yellow plinth emerging from the left, the ladder shape cedes to a soft gray that dominates the upper third of the canvas. Traversing the picture field, pentimenti emerge from earlier events in the painting as they nudge the work from past to present. In the hands of a lesser artist there might be a hint of contrivance here, but Brown's work exudes a sense of authenticity.



"Ladder" by Eric Brown, 2015. Oil on linen, 12 x 9 inches.

In *Shift*, yellow rectangles anchor the composition at the top and bottom while bars of matte gray, black, green and ochre wrestle for placement mid-section. In part, it is Brown's execution that ignites the picture plane. Using a flat brush, he drags layers of pigment across the surface and around the canvas sides, extending the image field with surprising results.

Earlier in the month, Brown and I observed the painting in three-quarter view. He noted the sides of the canvas. As his imagery slips over the curbs of the painting, the narrow canvas edges sink into

shadow, extending the artist's palette with subtle tonal variants.



“Shift” by Eric Brown, 2015. Oil on linen, 14 x 11 inches.

But Brown's visual lexicon is not limited to right angles. In *Twist*, a small work on paper, his brush flies over an expanse of flatness as it warps an upended teardrop into pictorial form. The shape rises from a yellow pyramid, pivoting at its apex into a sprightly balloon that surges upward, its shadow falling across the triangular slope below. Surrounded by a field of plucky gray strokes, the orb is ascendant, exuding a courageous nonchalance.



“Twist,” by Eric Brown, 2015. Oil on paper, 9 x 12 inches.

Likewise, in *The Broken Yellow Line*, Brown employs an affable, intellectual detachment that is spot on. Here, two small canvasses are moored together with a shared, horizontal spine. The painting meets at its margins like bookends, with an insouciance that is as compelling as it is confounding. And like a shirt that's one button off, the structure of the painting is askew.

With such similar component parts the viewer is drawn into its offbeat mirroring—a doppelganger effect—that is cheeky and eccentric. The canvasses may not be exactly twins, but they surely come from the same gene pool. The implementation of subtle visual conundrums is at the core of much of Brown's oeuvre.



“The Broken Yellow Line” by Eric Brown, 2014. Oil on canvas, 10 x 7 inches.

The namesake of the show, *Vice Versa*, is packed with so much information it's hard to believe it measures a mere 9 by 12 inches. Brown is more tongue in cheek here, dangling a chassis of color ingots above an expanse of fitful grid work. Slapstick and whimsical, there is also an element of danger here: will that hulking shape fall into the abyss below? Is the network of unruly lines strong enough to hold?



“Vice Versa” by Eric Brown, 2014. Oil on linen, 9 x 12 inches.

Following painters such as Paul Klee, Stuart Davis, Mary Heilmann and Tom Noskowski, here Brown mounts an examination of joyful esprit as he helps to extend the dialogue of abstraction and the language of paint.

BASIC FACTS: “Eric Brown: Vice Versa,” July 3 to July 21, 2015, at Ille Arts, 216a Main Street, Amagansett, NY 11930. www.illearts.com.

To see more of Eric Brown’s paintings, visit our slideshow:

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