



SOCIAL SCENE: “Highlight: The High Line” Draws a Crowd for Contemporary Abstract Show

May 16, 2019
by Pat Rogers

For a Thursday night, it was a calm one among the galleries of Chelsea. One exception was the Opening Reception of “Highlight: The High Line” presented at the Project Space of Hollis Taggart on 27th Street. It was difficult to find a space to squeeze into the gallery much less maneuver around the packed space.

The effort—to connect with the curator, the artists as well as the art—was well worth it. Independent curator Paul Efstathiou brought together a diverse cross-section of contemporary abstraction that almost seems to be a survey of the type of work that makes up the genre. As is his way, there was a palpable personal touch to every detail in the show.

On view were paintings by Ted Gahl, Clare Grill, Margaux Ogden, Gary Petersen and Matt Phillips. While a group show, the selections were designed to provide a window into the exploration of each artist’s practice, noted both the curator and gallerist Hollis Taggart.

“While each artist is distinct in their vision and approach, subtle thematic through-lines do emerge as one explores the works in dialogue with each other, including interests in the relationships between figuration and abstraction and the significance of repetition and erasure within contemporary abstract practice,” stated gallerist Hollis Taggart in the exhibition announcement.

At the Reception, Efstathiou bounded from guest to guest, powered by excitement and pure joy of the artful place that had alighted there, and seemed to gain fuel from visitor reaction to the art.

“The opening was full of energy and brought together a unique crowd full artists, collectors, family and friends,” Paul Efstathiou wrote in an email a few days later. “All five artists included in the show were at the opening, which was amazing. There was a lot of love and respect in the room.”



Curator Paul Efstathiou (second from the left) with exhibiting artists (left to right) Gary Petersen, Margaux Ogden, Ted Gahl, Matt Phillips, and Clare Grill at the opening reception of “Highline: The High Line” at Hollis Taggart. Courtesy of Paul Efstathiou.



A crowd mingles and examines the art on view during the Opening reception of “Highlight: The High Line” at Hollis Taggart on May 9, 2019. Courtesy of Paul Efstathiou.

In an email exchange, Efstathiou provided insight into the making of the show as well as the series, “Highlight Curate.” The group shows are a way to bring together contemporary art made by artists Efstathiou has formed a connection with over time during his work as an independent curator, he explained. In the “Highlight” series, exhibitions are curated to reveal art in conversation and provide a connection to the space presenting the show.

“The name ‘Highlight’ was borne out of an interest and sense of urgency in bringing together talented artists to create original work that responds to and is highlighted by the collective whole in each exhibition,” he wrote. “Capitalizing on the momentum already gained by emerging contemporary artists, ‘Highlight’ works to provide a further breadth of exposure for these artists, creating thoughtful exhibitions that highlight each individual artist’s work, the work of their fellow exhibitors, and the space in which their artwork is exhibited.”



“Fiddleheads” by Matt Phillips, 2018. Pigment and silica on linen, 20 x 24 inches. Courtesy of Hollis Taggart.



“Pony” by Clare Grill, 2017. Oil on linen, 49 x 44 inches. Courtesy of Hollis Taggart.

So far, Efstathiou has organized and curated five editions of “Highlight Curated.” The series launched in 2016 with “[Highlight: Summer One](#)” at Hollis Taggart in its 7th Floor location on 26th Street. In Spring 2017, “[Highlight: New Canaan](#)” opened at the [Silvermine Arts Center](#) in New Canaan, CT.

Fall 2018 saw the series return to Hollis Taggart with “[Highlight: Chelsea](#)” at the gallery’s new (and now current) Ground Floor Space on 26th Street. This winter, “Highlight: Gramercy” was presented at [The National Arts Club](#).” The current exhibition, “[Highlight: The High Line](#),” is presented at Hollis

Taggart's Project Space, located a half block from The High Line.

Acknowledging the obvious, the title of the current exhibition refers to the proximity of The High Line to the exhibition space. Less conspicuous is another tie: the building that houses the show is called "Highline Nine," the curator offered.



Curator Paul Efstathiou and Jennifer Efstathiou posing with friends at the opening reception of "Highlights: The High Line" at Hollis Taggart, May 9, 2019. Courtesy of Paul Efstathiou.



Hollis Taggart, artist Ted Gahl, Hampton Art Hub Publisher Pat Rogers and curator Paul Efstathiou at the opening reception of "Highlight: The High Line" at Hollis Taggart, Thursday May 9, 2019. Courtesy of Paul Efstathiou.

Preparing for the show was exhaustive in breath and exhilarating to experience, Efstathiou said.

"The hours spent visiting many artists studios in preparation for this exhibition was electrifying," he wrote. "The ideas being explored and the paintings being made showed me that contemporary abstraction is being pushed forward at a very exciting pace."



"Square Eyes" by Terry Gahl, 2018. Acrylic, oil, and graphite on canvas, 84 x 60 inches. Courtesy of Hollis Taggart.

"The current state of contemporary abstraction is quite vital and alive," Efstathious continued. "There is a large emphasis these days on gender, race and figuration in contemporary art but at the same time, some of the great emerging artists continue to bring fresh interpretations to contemporary abstraction."

"It's a vital moment for abstract painting, and to be able to present these emerging abstract painters in dialogue with other seminal exhibitions in Chelsea such as Ross Bleckner at Petzel, Sean Scully at Lisson, and Knox Martin at Hollis Taggart's main space is nothing short of inspiring," he said.



“Cover Up” by Gary Peterson, 2014. Acrylic and oil on canvas, 56 x 40 inches. Courtesy of Hollis Taggart.

Hollis Taggart was a fan of the show as well.

“The range of creative vision and technique across the featured artists is particularly exciting and captures well the ongoing relevance of painting within contemporary practice,” Taggart offered.

He then connected the contemporary abstract show to a solo show in his main gallery featuring an artist inspired by the AB-EX generation: “Knox Martin: Radical Structures.” “This exhibition also provides a dynamic counterpoint to the solo presentation in our primary Chelsea space on the work of Knox Martin, who at age 96 is still producing new paintings that build on dialogues from across his nearly seven-decade career.”

“Knox Martin: Radical Structures” has been extended to remain on view through June 1, 2019. Click [here](#) for details. “Highlight: The High Line” is on view May 9 to 31, 2019. Click [here](#) for details.



Paul Efstathiou, Hollis Taggart, Eleanor Flatow and Gary Petersen at the opening reception of “Highlight: The High Line” at Hollis Taggart. Courtesy of Paul Efstathiou.



Opening reception of “Highlight: The High Line” at Hollis Taggart on May 9, 2019. Courtesy of Paul Efstathiou.

BASIC FACTS: [“Highlight: The High Line”](#) is on view May 9 to 31, 2019 at Hollis Taggart’s Project Space, 507 West 27th Street, 1st Floor, New York, NY 10001. The exhibition is curated by Paul Efstathiou. www.hollistaggart.com.
