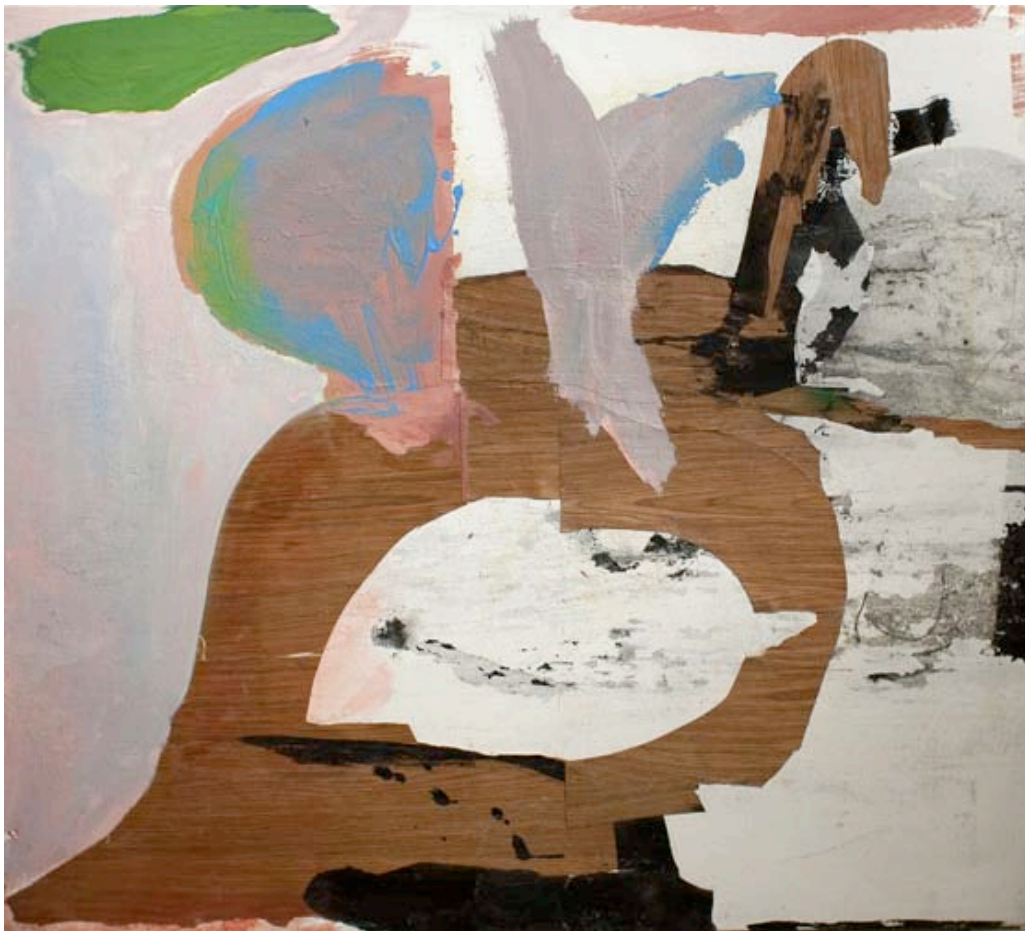


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Going off script with a show called 'Scripted'

Galleries: by Edith Newhall
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Cora Cohen, *Nomad II*, 2009, Flashe, spray enamel, oil, and wood veneer on linen, 34 x 38 inches

If "Scripted" strikes you as an unusually cutting-edge exhibition for Gross McCleaf Gallery, no need to worry that this familiar outpost of contemporary realist painting is changing its focus. It's summer and the gallery's director, Sharon Ewing, decided to let her assistant director, Todd Keyser, a painter who just received his master's of fine art from Maryland Institute College of Art, stir things up.

Keyser has not disappointed. "Scripted" is a remarkable show of 10 artists whose works make ample use of the "arbitrary signifier," a term coined by the French linguist Ferdinand Saussure to describe a fragment of a work that an artist or writer might remove and replace with another, different component, creating an unnatural sequence of images or events. But even if you don't know Keyser's theme - as I didn't when I saw his show - you would recognize that all the works he's assembled have the quality of a jigsaw puzzle in progress.

Some parts are missing, some are filled in correctly, others have been intentionally erroneously aligned.

You can see this immediately in Edward Carey's small, wall-mounted sculptures. *Birds of a Feather* combines a dead bird and a toy jet in one seamless object painted monochrome gray; in *Phorest Fone*, Carey evokes the form of the cell phone using bark, pine needles, and a stick.

Cora Cohen's gestural abstract paintings play with absence and presence, and the idea of painted gestures as language. *Nomad II* combines all these notions in broad brushstrokes of gray, pink, and green, squiggles of blue, and wood veneer cut into pieces and collaged to the surface of the painting so that they don't quite line up. The layers of floating gestures atop each other in Cohen's *Writing Absence* suggest the familiar brushstrokes of abstract expressionism set loose in a new domain.

In two of Joe Ballweg's three paintings, *Gilles* and *Swing Low*, the shape of a human figure looms in the center of each canvas, but the figures are empty forms that seem evanescent or accidental, the result of merging abstract forms and gestures.

Fact and fiction merge in Matt Pinney's oil paintings on photographs. *Miranda* depicts a painted figure of a woman in a red dress dangling in the photographic interior of a neoclassical building flanked by piles of colorful, drippy painted boxes. *De Chirico* and *Mark Tansey* come to mind. In a group of smaller works, Pinney has applied daubs of paint to the same photographic image, of people dancing in a ballroom, but differently in each work, so that faces and figures are alternately revealed and obscured. Oddly, the painted daubs acquire a moving, photographic quality, while the photographic backdrops appear frozen in time.

Bernadine Schroyer takes the currently ubiquitous trend of abjectness to a new level while simultaneously channeling the idea of the "arbitrary signifier" in her photographs of a scarf incongruously positioned in a snowy backyard, and of the same scarf isolated on a tan background, looking like a veal chop painted by Soutine. In each situation, the scarf looks as if it's replaced some other thing in the photograph.

Colleen Rudolf offers the show's only other humorously incongruous piece, a wood construction that balances a potted house plant, a stuffed animal, a piece of bark, and oil paintings of a deer.

I would not necessarily have expected a painting by Celia Reisman, a gallery artist, in this company, but the one painting of hers that Keyser chose, *Gray World*, fits in perfectly. It's a view of an anonymous suburban backyard whose many disparate parts - a pine tree, a garage, a deck off the house - make up a composition of such orderliness you'd think it was at least partially invented by Reisman.

"Scripted" also features videos by Solange Roberdeau and Bart O'Reilly and paintings by Deborah Kahn.



Matt Pinney, Miranda, 2010, Oil on canvas, 68 x 52 inches