

15 Artists to Watch in 2015 (+ 3)



It has been a busy couple of weeks for the medium of painting. I just returned from my annual trip to art world summer camp, aka Art Basel Miami Beach, where thousands of art-hungry viewers were inundated with paintings of every conceivable scale, media and subject matter. Some were good, some were bad, many were derivative and most will be forgotten before the decade ends. On the heels of the various fairs closing, critic and curator Christian Viveros-Faune unleashed a caustic and much passed-around article about art fairs and their negative effect on the type of art currently being produced. He specifically targeted what he calls Zombie Painting, which he identifies as a bland and toothless sort of abstraction that seems to be all the rage. (Jerry Saltz has been beating this same drum for quite a while.)

Meanwhile, in the high temple of modernism -- New York's Museum of Modern Art -- curator and past *New American Paintings* juror Laura Hoptman has just opened *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World*. The exhibition features the work of seventeen painters, including Joe Bradley, Matt Connors, Mark Grotjahn and the young and controversial phenom Oscar Murillo, and is the institution's first serious group show on painting in a number of years. Most of the artists in this show are art market favorites, so stay tuned as the critical writing on this exhibition is sure to be a roller coaster ride.

So what does 2015 hold for the oldest of mediums? As always, it is anyone's guess. Due to my unusual perch atop the thousands of applications that we receive each year for *New American Paintings*, I can offer a few observations. Firstly, and as suggested above, Zombie Painting, or what I have alternately called Process Painting, is running rampant, both in the gallery system and in the halls of America's art schools. There is no doubt that it will continue to be widely exhibited in 2015, even though much of it seems to have little more content than its own ability to circulate. Secondly, I have noticed a lot more representational painting being made in the past year. After a number of years when painting about painting has been all the rage, a large number of emerging artists are returning to imagery as the foundation of their work. Lastly, whatever mode artists are interested in working in, an increasing number seem to be favoring a "skilled" versus "deskilled" aesthetic. That is to say, painters are not being shy about showing just how fluent they can be with the medium. An interesting byproduct of the past decade is that somehow "unfinished" came to represent "serious" in the eyes of many.

Putting together a list of artists to watch in 2015 is a highly subjective and admittedly shallow affair. In doing so, I thought long and hard about all of the exhibitions I saw, studio visits that I made and conversations I had in 2014. Some of the artists on this list are relatively new to me, while others are artists I have been following for years who made such incredibly

strong work in 2014 that it seemed like a breakthrough to me. Some I had made my mind up about months ago, while others caught my attention for the first time or recaptured it while I was in Miami just two weeks ago. As always, I am eager to hear your comments -- do let me know who is on your list.

Sadie Benning

Benning made her first splash in New York's art world as a video artist. She gained attention fast and at age twenty was included in the 1993 Whitney Biennial. Benning's video work was subsequently included in the 2000 Whitney Biennial, and she was given a solo show at the museum in 2009. Given that drawing has been so essential to her video practice, it is perhaps not surprising that Benning has started to produce actual objects. Her recent solo at Callicoon Fine Arts in New York City was my first opportunity to see her two-dimensional work in depth. Comprising a variety of media, including resin, fabric, paint and found photographs, Benning's paintings may seem to fall neatly into the category of "geometric abstraction"; however, she has a lot more on her mind than formal issues. As in her video work, Benning is ultimately interested in exploring and critiquing systems of social order and control. To my eye, the jump to another media has worked out well for her. Susanne Vielmetter will be dedicating her entire Los Angeles space to Benning's work in February.