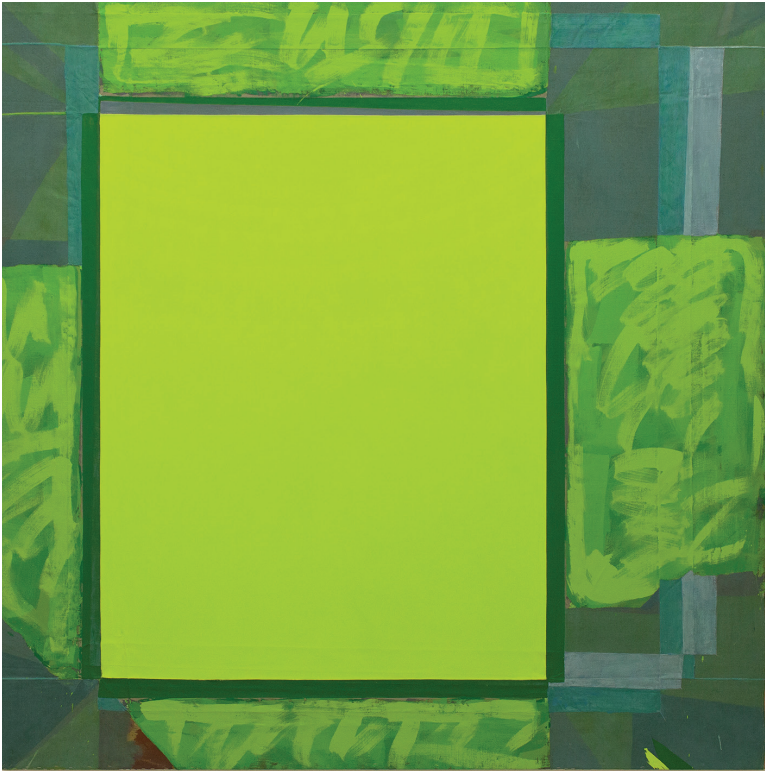


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What to See in New York City Galleries This Week

By ROBERTA SMITH, HOLLAND COTTER, WILL HEINRICH and KAREN ROSENBERG NOV. 24, 2016



Julia Rommel

'Man Alive'

Bureau, 178 Norfolk Street, Lower East Side, Through Dec. 18

The painter Julia Rommel makes what you might call syncopated monochromes: After wrapping canvas on a stretcher and painting the front surface in some luscious color as flat and opaque as plaster, she paints the sides in a more thinly applied, contrasting color and then restretches the canvas to a larger size to pull those usually hidden borders into a single flat composition.

This makes hers a conceptual practice, since a canvas like that becomes a painting of a painting. The folds also create a subtle physical depth that reminds the viewer that painting flat is not a given but a choice. But Ms. Rommel doesn't linger in heady self-consciousness. Instead she uses her approach to generate increasingly rich and even florid experiments in pure composition and color.

In her third show at Bureau, Ms. Rommel has kicked up both the size of her canvases and the boldness and complexity with which she folds them. Large panes of steady blankness still appear in every picture — this time in majestic navy, gaudy lime green, or pale, appealing blue — but they can no longer be counted on to hold the center.

It may be an expansive border region of scribbles and stains that steals the monochrome's thunder, or a multiplication of edge-defining lines, or even a border that runs through the monochrome itself, dividing it into what look like a shadowed face and one more brightly lit.

But in the two most exciting paintings, "Electric Blanket" and "The Unbelievers," distinctions between foreground and background or center and edge are gone completely. As you stand before them trying to orient yourself, you can feel the ground dropping away beneath your feet.

WILL HEINRICH