

Art in America

EXHIBITIONS THE LOOKOUT



Matthew Chambers

at Feuer/Mesler,
through Oct. 23

319 Grand Street, 2nd Floor

In his book *On Fire* (Paper Monument, 2016), Jonathan Griffin interviews ten unlucky artists whose studios burned down, asking what effects the disaster had on their practices. Los Angeles–based Matthew Chambers is one of Griffin’s subjects. He lost eighty paintings when the studio he shared with Brendan Fowler was destroyed in a 2011 blaze, prompting Chambers to start from scratch in a new space. The exhibition “(My) Los Angeles Paintings” presents brightly colored canvas panels that feature an eclectic array of subjects and styles, from floral patterns to figurative images to abstractions. Viewers can also browse unstretched paintings bound in books and kept in open wooden boxes on tables throughout the gallery. In lieu of a press release there’s a personal letter in which Chambers describes the tension he endeavored to create between seeing his works in person and in online reproduction.

While the paintings here look great on Instagram (the artist’s loose portrait of comedian Louis C.K. has been particularly popular on social media), the unusual surfaces and layouts of the works—most notably the use of velvety nylon flocking on the panel surfaces—offer an exceptional in-person viewing experience. Presenting no one coherent thesis or ideology, the exuberant paintings instead evince Chambers’s drive to experiment and work through new ideas, turning ashes into diamonds. —*Julia Wolkoff*

Pictured: View of Matthew Chambers's exhibition "(My) LA Paintings," 2016; at Feuer/Mesler, New York.

ONE-LINE REVIEWS: Pithy Takes on Amanda Ross-Ho, Matthew Chambers, and More

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Courtesy UNTITLED

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Matthew Chambers at UNTITLED

by BLOUIN ARTINFO

Published: April 19, 2013

Matthew Chambers, at Untitled, 30 Orchard Street, through April 21

Open a door painted with a question mark at Untitled and you'll be immersed in the brilliant frenetic bazaar of hotly colored, coolly felt, elongated canvases of Matthew Chambers — depicting a series of seemingly unrelated images, including a painting of a tiger with a bloody arm in its mouth, a still-life of corn-on-the-cob with melting butter, and a snapshot-like painting of a woman dancing, all commingled with textural pieces made from strips of dyed canvas (his “strip paintings”) — whose presentation, mixed and matched in tightly packed rows, seemingly simulates the Internet-trolling habits of a quick and observant mind under the influence of the synthetic drug of choice. — *Rozalia Jovanovic*



Jovanovic, Rozalia. “Matthew Chambers at Untitled.” *Blouin ArtInfo*, April 2013.



Matthew Chambers:
*One of the Effects
of Analogy*, 2010,
oil on canvas,
96 by 48 inches;
at Untitled.

MATTHEW CHAMBERS

UNTITLED

Walking into a room full of Matthew Chambers's paintings, it is easy to feel that you haven't really been living. Hung side by side around the perimeter of Untitled gallery with just two inches between them—each canvas measuring 8 by 4 feet (the size of a standard sheet of drywall)—the 36 paintings (all 2010) conveyed an enthusiasm and wonderfully sloppy immediacy that suddenly seemed to be lacking in other areas of life. Some are representational and others abstract; many of the abstract works are composed entirely of torn, colorful strips of painted or raw canvas.

Chambers, who was born in 1982 and lives in L.A., lifts his subjects from pop culture, movies or art history, and seems to choose them solely on the basis of their emotional appeal. *Arousing the Sense of Pathos* is a straightforward and straight-on depiction of a teddy bear that could be the cousin of a Jeff Koons puppy or bunny.

But the work's unlovely aspects—the awkward format, the student-y modeling of forms—hint that Chambers is equally indebted to earlier “bad” painters like Neil Jenney and Charles Garabedian.

Chambers paints with gusto and seems to feel no need to demonstrate proficiency. What are usually considered flaws of craftsmanship he indulges in with abandon. Stretchers warp. Threads trail from the canvas. Stapling is abysmal. Seams from the drop cloths used as canvas extend across the surfaces. What Chambers has to say is too urgent, his passion too great, for him to get caught up in the niceties of facture. And roughness is part of the appeal.

The drawings are more conventionally beautiful and skilled in execution. Included in the exhibition and left open for browsing were two weighty, hand-bound books of drawings, about 30 by 22 inches each, with rough plywood spines and covers. One contained abstractions, mostly in pastel, and the other representational studies, mainly in pencil. Among the latter it was often easy to connect a drawing with a corresponding painting.

An unmistakable undercurrent of homoeroticism ran throughout the exhibition, most clearly evidenced in *Of Sunless Dry*, depicting a nude man being toweled off by another man in boxer shorts. The study drawing for this work reveals that the nude man's pose is based on the reclining figure of Adam from Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel. *One of the Effects of Analogy* shows a man from the neck to the thighs, lifting up his black tank top to display slab-like pecs and a big bulge in his black briefs. Next to this was a full-length portrait of a

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2009

Art in Review



RENTAL GALLERY

Painterly with Conceptual attitude: installation view of "An Activity So Pure," Matt Chambers's show at the Rental Gallery.

Matt Chambers

An Activity So Pure

Rental Gallery
120 East Broadway, at Allen
Street
Lower East Side
Through Oct. 17

The title of Matt Chambers's second New York gallery show, "An Activity So Pure," seems to invite an ending like "Deserves to Be Violated, Ridiculed and Hammed Up." At least that is what Mr. Chambers appears to be doing to painting, which he took up a few years ago while pursuing an M.F.A. in filmmaking. His paintings are big, varied in subject, painted with remorseless gusto and installed cheek to jowl on the gallery's four walls. The resulting onslaught of 22 8-by-4-foot canvases is both robust and grim: painterly with an overload of Conceptual attitude.

Most of the works partake of a representational style — Pop, Expressionism, realism — all blurred by the thick paint. In one piece, two cute dogs meld with a large ice cream cone, in messy imitation of Jeff Koons's sunny photo-based realism. In another, a stewardess with wings conjures up several generations of the "bad painting" tendency. And in two others, scenes of scantily clad women in interiors are undercut with black in a way that evokes pulp-fiction illustration and Max Beckmann.

Also depicted are an hourglass with bones instead of sand, a stack of cheeseburgers and a silhouette of Alfred Hitchcock made from the letters of his name. Three abstractions consist entirely of failed paintings sliced into strips and arranged on canvases; a painting made of old shirts looks vaguely flood-damaged. And the artist portrays himself as a friendly geek in "Self Portrait" and "Self Portrait With More Difficult Shirt to Paint."

Mr. Chambers also makes zines, the latest of which yields the phrase "An activity so pure it never has to act" — which he definitely refutes. It will be interesting to see where he takes his painting, or it him.

ROBERTA SMITH



Broadway 1602, New York, USA

It was Charles Dickens' Pip who genially greeted us at the outset of Matthew Chambers' recent show. Captured at the moment when he arrives at his new lodgings in London, in David Lean's 1946 film of *Great Expectations* (1860), Pip, played by John Mills, finds his name already on the door. Never mind that he's an orphan boy: unknown persons have great expectations of him and, as though to demonstrate their certainty, these benefactors have ensured that his accommodation will be very comfortable. Like Pip, Chambers was, in some sense, also arriving to test himself in the big city, this being the first New York show for the 20-something artist. However, instead of emerging humble and ignorant from the Kent

Matthew Chambers
1983 (Brooke)
(detail)
2007
Pencil on paper
42x42 cm

marshes, Chambers marauded into New York from his native Los Angeles blaring his intention to conquer with all the subtlety you would expect from an overeducated skater punk with a mean reputation back home.

In Chambers' début show at the Angstrom Gallery in Los Angeles, which took place earlier this year, he took on the voice of a semi-fictional gang-cum-art gallery called Trudi (Chambers runs a Chinatown gallery of that name, although the gang was an invention). Mavis was the name of the leader of this outfit, and also the title of Chambers' New York show: it was rather as though he had put his group identity aside and adopted the persona of this new individual, who has decided to go solo. The problem Mavis faces, however, is the need to find a voice. Chambers

is entirely befuddled by the possibilities open to him, and all he can do is reprocess what has gone before. Thus the centerpiece of the New York show was a series of gaudy, slapdash paintings entitled 'What Do You Do after an Exorcism, What You Deal With, and Cathy Comics' (all works 2007). They draw on various sources: *Exorcism Johnny* delivered a cartoon Garbage Pail Kid in the style of Jonathan Meese, to create a flat, gravelly painting of a chubby young girl; *Venusia* borrows from the cover of Mark von Schlegell's eponymous novel from 2005; and *Outlaw Arnolfini/Snowflake* is a ham-fisted version of Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434), in which the groom, who is flipping us the bird, appears to have been possessed by the spirit of Clint Eastwood, whose face appears in a shadow.

Mavis isn't suffering from anxiety of influence so much as from serious post-influence stress disorder, a disorder so completely unhelping that it has put him/her in mind to flee: thus we have a concluding diptych, *Searching for My Baby*, and *My Baby's Name a Hundred Years Ago Was Miraculous*, which references, on one side, Peter Doig's memorable island dream of a man in a canoe, *100 Hundred Years Ago* (Carrera) (2001), and, on the other, Bas Jan Ader's *Farewell to Faraway Friends* (1971), one of his ironic, saccharine images of loss and longing that became all the more poignant when the artist himself disappeared.

Unfortunately, much of the subtler intention behind these pictures was throttled by the sheer pile-up of reference. The accompanying graphite drawings, some *Untitled Shir*, didn't help, but they did at least point to the nature of the dilemma of influence and over-determination with which Chambers is struggling. All of them referred back to the late 1970s and early '80s, and particularly to a period in New York when not only was contemporary art raiding popular culture with a newly relaxed ease (one image, 1983 (Brooke), revisits Richard Prince's seminal *Spiritual America*, 1983), but popular music was also led by culturally literate musicians who were raiding older art to furnish their self-images (thus 1981 (Bow Wow Wow), revisits the cover of that band's single 'Go Wild in the Country', which has them restaging Manet's *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, 1862-3). Of course, many of these source images had their own source image, which in turn had its own source image - all in an endless chain of recursion that has clearly given Mavis an almighty migraine. Add to this some more images culled from press coverage of the punk band Crass (these pair with that opening image of Pip) and *See You in Court Honkeys!*, which takes the form of a tower of teddy bears, an old jacket with some pin badges and a jaded pair of sneakers, and, well, you've got something truly youthful: wild, energetic, full of grand plans and great expectations, and a whole lot of confusion.

Morgan Falconer

Matthew Chambers

Falconer, Morgan. Matthew Chambers." *Frieze*, May 2008.