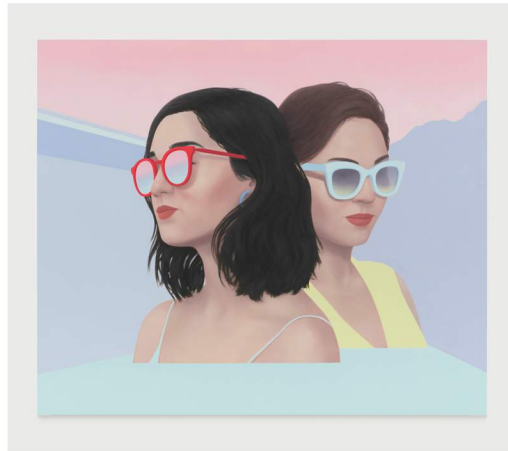


The New York Times

Ridley Howard

Through Oct. 13. Marinaro, 1 Oliver Street, Manhattan; 212-989-7700, marinaro.biz.



Ridley Howard's painting "Pink Sky and Plastic Frames" (2019). Ridley Howard and Marinaro, New York

Ridley Howard's new "[Light Paintings](#)" at [Marinaro](#) are suffused with sunlight, steeped in dusk or suggest deep-black universes. The canvases evoke other definitions of "light," however, reminding you that most of our visual models these days originate outside of art, in popular places like the internet, television or advertising.

The two young women posed against a peachy backdrop in "Pink Sky and Plastic Frames" (all works are from 2019) are reminiscent of an advertisement for sunglasses, while the disembodied profile heads and geometric forms floating through "Shape Visions" are like an '80s demonstration for digital graphic design. Other paintings depict static sunbathers, tepid lovers or an outdoor showing of [Andy Warhol's "screen tests."](#)

The common denominator in "Light Paintings" is a controlled anodyne effect like what you see in [Alex Katz's paintings](#), Warhol's oeuvre or much of the Pop Art canon. What Mr. Howard adds to this art history, however, is the knowledge that, even after the internet, painting can pull off tricks and subtleties no other medium can. His work is cool and calculated like Pop from the '60s, but it's generous, too, veering toward the lightness of a given situation — from a kiss to a modeling session — rather than the existential darkness.

MARTHA SCHWENDENER



ART

Ridley Howard's Voyeur View

Five ways of seeing the artist's chic, uncanny paintings.

By SCOTT INDRISEK | Sep 29 2019, 5:43am

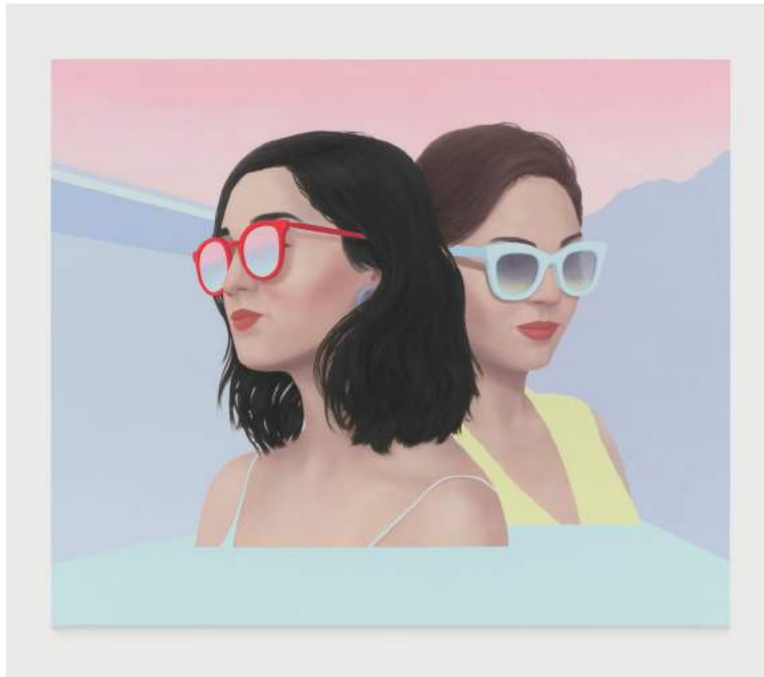
Ridley Howard paints people, but it's not as simple as that. In "[Light Paintings](#)," his current solo exhibition at Marinaro in New York, we find images of leisure—women sunbathing, lovers panting—but the underlying vibe is simultaneously romantic and alienating. Howard's cheery palette, and his sedate subject matter, clash with a certain detachment and uneasiness. How are we to make sense of these loaded scenes? With a little help from the artist, GARAGE teases out five threads running through his surprisingly complex paintings.



"Picture Window," 2019, Oil on canvas

I turn my camera on

In *Picture Window*, we see a naked man and woman in a lusty embrace. The cropping is quite strange; Howard cuts his composition off just below the figures' waists, and at the top of their heads. The overall effect is of a surveillance photo (perhaps one taken by a crafty private investigator who's actually hiding *inside* the house). As a painter, Howard says he's also thinking like a photographer. "The distance of the camera has always been a part of my work," he explains. "I never considered myself a 'realist,' or thought about translating some kind of immediate experience. There was always a sense of removal, sometimes through the lens of film or video, and that has only become more pronounced in the age of iPhone cameras and Instagram. In some ways, contemporary experience is totally voyeuristic. I do think about the people in my paintings almost like characters in a film, and we have access to them in that way."



"Pink Sky and Plastic Frames," 2019, Oil on canvas

The meaning of fashion

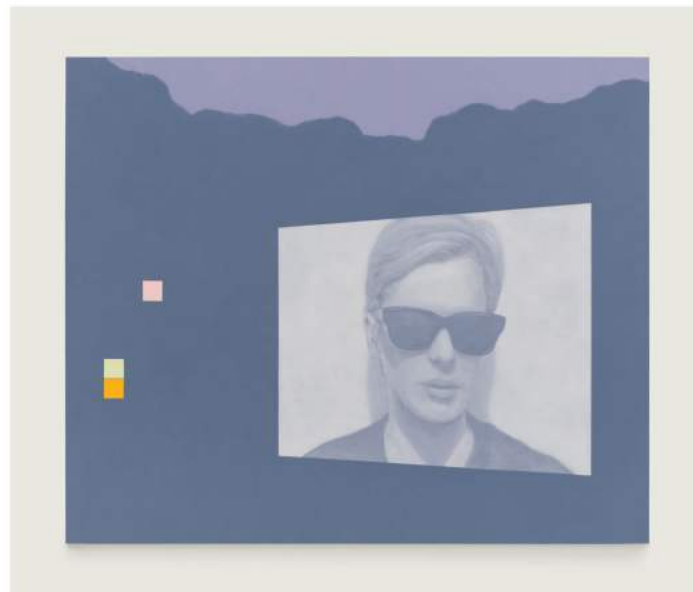
Howard's eye has always lingered on small, fashionable details—the lively geometric print of a dress, a pair of statement earrings. "I think about how there's a longing embedded in the way we dress ourselves," he says, "and even in how we see our relationships, or who we are as individuals. I like that people dress up or want to be stylish in one way or another, and it's funny that historically people would dress-up for their portrait to be painted." Howard is based between Athens, Georgia, and New York, but his newest paintings have an L.A. slickness about them. Hipster shades abound; all that's missing are the CBD vape pens. "When you put on a pair of sunglasses, you are inevitably thinking about images you've seen," he adds. "I'm interested in that fine line between lived experience and image culture, and stylishness is part of that."

How do you capture light?

It's a common sentiment about painters that what they're actually doing is capturing light. Howard's canvases have an inexplicable glow about them, a way of translating the glint of the late afternoon sun or the harsher glare of the beach. "I always think about light when I look at paintings: Morandi, Corot, Alberts, Richter,

and on and on,” he says. “The life in paintings often comes from light, regardless of subject. It’s such a simple idea; it seems basic, but can be everything.”

“The light in these paintings imitates what we might experience in a specific location, even if that place isn’t clear. There is some knowledge of how light actually falls on a face or a hillside, for example, but the logic of the painting is my main focus. The pink in *Pink Sky and Plastic Frames* doesn’t really look like a pink you would see in nature, and the space of the painting [both] does and doesn’t make sense.”



"Outdoor Screening, Persona," 2019, Oil on canvas

Learning from 1960s posters and the French New Wave

Howard is influenced by the aesthetics of classic film posters, and how they “often have a dynamic image that gives a clue about the plot, character, style, or general attitude of the film—but just a glimpse.” *Shades (Rose and Blue)* could be a promotional advertisement for a never-made movie, with blocks of soothing color appearing where one might expect to find the title and production credits. “I’m most drawn to posters from the ‘60s and ‘70s, when modernist abstraction was co-opted by graphic design, and the photography from film was really beautiful,” Howard says. “I have folders on my computer filled with old hand-drawn travel ads and Italian and French film posters.”



"Shades (Rose and Blue)," 2019, Oil on canvas

In terms of a prevailing mood, Howard adds that he's often inspired the French New Wave (particularly Eric Rohmer), as well as by *Blow-Up* director Michelangelo Antonioni. In "Light Paintings," he makes a more direct nod to a very different filmmaker, reproducing an actual still from Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* in *Outdoor Screening* (2019), which depicts a Los Angeles drive-in theater.



"South of France," 2019. Oil on canvas

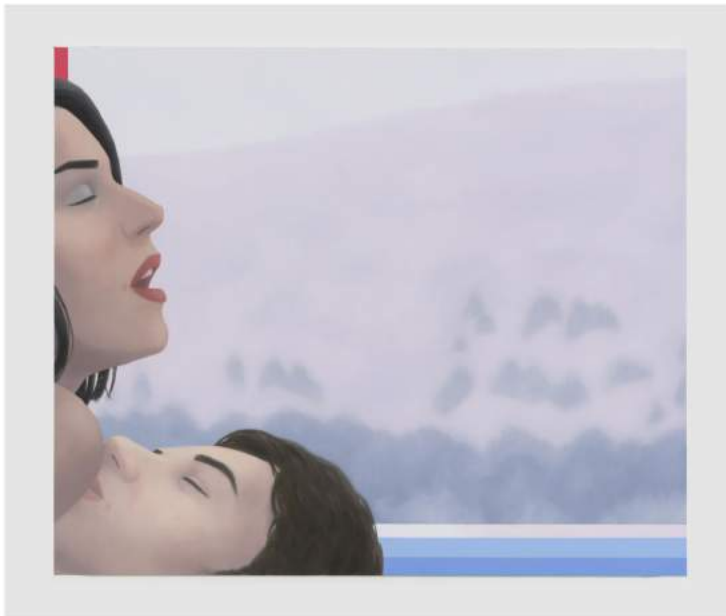
What sort of people are these anyway?

I once [noted](#) that the average inhabitant of a Howard painting has an airbrushed quality, a "blank facial smoothness" akin to the waxy mug of Jared Kushner. Indeed, the painter's subjects can seem more humanoid than human; relatable, but just *off* enough to cause a little friction and discomfort. "I definitely think about the characters in my work as people in paintings, rather than them being paintings of real people," he explains. "There are specific features and traits that keep them from being completely anonymous or symbolic—there's something familiar about them. People always think they recognize someone they know in the paintings. It's kind of like an actor playing your friend in a movie. The pared down flesh tones and rendering makes people think of avatars, but truthfully, that quality in my work probably came from a love for Piero della Francesca, Fra Angelico, and other early Italian painters."

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK: HOWARD, CHAMBERLAIN, AND VAN SANT

All / Contemporary Art / Featured / Reporting / Reviews / See & Be Seen / September 19, 2019

Editors' Picks: New York, September 19th–26th, 2019



Ridley Howard, *Picture Window*, 2019. Photograph courtesy of Marinaro.

RIDLEY HOWARD: LIGHT PAINTINGS

Ridley Howard's latest exhibition in New York "Light Paintings," features the painter's signature cropped anonymous figures against landscapes and geometric backdrops, it is, however, clear that the artist is expanding his work thematically. In "Shape Visions" and "Outdoor Screening," he tackles technology where circles, rectangles, squares, and a lozenge may be catalysts for various glowing screens and indicator lights. "Pink Sky and Plastic" and "Shades Rose and Blue" are both stylized scenes of women wearing sunglasses: Coachella, paparazzi, and Instagram culture come to mind. Howard's work often appears static but in "Picture Window" and "Window Sill" he has painted couples embracing and in "Sundress" the lower body of a woman sitting crossed-legged in a chair with a decidedly sexual charge offers the work a clearer narrative and therein more movement.

Howard's most recent body of work provides subtle, forceful, and a rather brilliant commentary on technology and its connection to posing and being seen.

Marinaro

The exhibition runs through October 13th, 2019.

1 Oliver Street, 10038, NY, NY.

Ridley Howard, “Light Paintings”

Art, Contemporary art [Marinero Gallery](#), Two Bridges

📅 Wednesday September 11 2019 - Sunday October 13 2019



Photograph: Courtesy of Marinero Gallery

Time Out says ★★★★★

The profiles of two women peer from the edges of Ridley Howard’s painting *Shape Visions*, their unblemished features aglow with light that seems to emanate from a group of pastel squares, circles and lozenges floating against a black background. What is this image? An ’80s New Wave album cover? A moisturizer ad? A metaphysical conundrum? That Ridley’s work raises such questions points to its vaguely unsettling weirdness, an effect amplified by the way the artist paints smooth, flattened forms with delicately soft edges, matte surfaces and winking references to vintage commercial design.

Howard’s understated surrealism takes on a (hetero)sexual charge in a small painting of a couple sunbathing topless and another of a naked pair kissing in front of a window. In a third, a man and a woman appear to be having sex, though we can only see their heads jutting from the left side of the composition, which is otherwise filled by a soft-focus landscape. Framing the lovers are sets of stripes—red for the woman, blue and white for the man—forming a right angle behind them. Are these the x and y axes of their ecstasy or just an ill-advised stab at interior décor?

By infusing the everyday with such subtle incongruities, Howard suggests the presence of hidden truths in his canvases that are never revealed. Instead, he quietly prefers to keep us guessing.

BY: JOSEPH R. WOLIN

POSTED: FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 6 2019

Ridley Howard, “Light Paintings”

Art, Contemporary art [Marinara Gallery](#), Two Bridges

Wednesday September 11 2019 - Sunday October 13 2019



Photograph: Courtesy of Marinara Gallery

Time Out says

Given their near-pastel palette and surfeit of faces adorned with sunglasses, these paintings may put you in mind of Hollywood and the dreamscape that is L.A. But the artist behind them, Ridley Howard, is a native of Atlanta, Georgia, who, after sojourns in Boston and Brooklyn, is back to living and working in his home state. Howard combines soft-edged photorealism with geometric abstraction to create cinematically cropped compositions that capture attractive young subjects (male and female) in evocative close-ups.



Installation view of "No Patience for Monuments" at Perrotin, Seoul, 2019. Photo by Youngha Jo. Courtesy Perrotin, Seoul / Hong Kong / Tokyo / Shanghai / Paris / New York.

NO PATIENCE FOR MONUMENTS

EMMA O'NEILL
PERROTIN

USA KOREA, SOUTH

In author Ursula K. Le Guin's 1986 essay, "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction," Le Guin cites writer and editor Elizabeth Fisher's "carrier bag theory," which posits that the earliest tool was in fact a vessel for gathering and not a weapon—as is favored in male-centric historical narratives—pointing to the biases ingrained in the ways that we describe and monumentalize the past. Presented at Perrotin's Korean outpost in Seoul, "No Patience for Monuments" pivoted from Le Guin's text, "[Uniting] artists whose works push against a patriarchal, historical narrative and begin to offer a new way forward," in the words of Perrotin director and organizer of the group show, Valentine Blondel.



With the works of a dozen practitioners, the exhibition demanded agency around female representation, building on the feminist uprisings that have pulsed through South Korea following the global #MeToo movement. Since 2018, the nation—which has the biggest gender pay gap in the developed world—has seen the largest all-female protest in its history, with an estimated 30,000 strong railing against revenge porn, spy-cams capturing private moments without consent, and police bias with these crimes. Women have also spoken up for abortion and against unreachable beauty standards, bringing women's rights to the forefront of societal discussions.

This new ethos was captured in “No Patience for Monuments.” Sharing its name with the exhibition, Brooklyn-based Emily Mae Smith’s oil-on-linen *No Patience for Monuments II* (2019) was a standout work. In the painting, a luscious peak of whipped cream casts its shadow onto a blue-sherbet horizon, while a large hyper-elasticized tongue licks the centrepiece to steal a taste, and a liquified pool of the substance forms on the side. With its soft, sweet and delicate qualities, the treat is antithetical to monuments. Delivered with technical prowess, the imaginary, sci-fi-esque scene radiates with an almost nuclear effervescence, and is at once transcendent, alien, and droll—setting the tone of the show.

With an oeuvre that focuses on the strategic creation of desire, Genesis Belanger’s porcelain assemblage *Breakfast in Bed* (2019) depicts a pale, unglazed ordinary morning meal of eggs and sausages with a wedding ring wedged in a dollop of mustard that mirrors the shape of Smith’s whipped peak. The strange amalgamation of a quotidian breakfast and a treasured nuptial symbol casualizes both and lumps them together as obligatory rituals. Though the breakfast is distinctly American, the sentiment is not, and, with her signature wit, Belanger interrogates our gratuitous and universal adoption of both practices.



EMILY MAE SMITH, *No Patience for Monuments II*, 2019, oil on linen, 96.5 × 76 cm. Photo by Guillaume Ziccarelli. Courtesy the artist.

Ridley Howard’s depiction of cunnilingus considers the corporal desires of women instead of societal projections of female sexuality. By the *Ocean* (2019) yokes together the stillness and detachment of American scene painting, and the surrealist, fictional spaces of second-generation Pop artists such as Ed Ruscha and Rosalyn Drexler, in a taciturn image that stylistically counters the dramatization of sex. Here, the female subject is the sole recipient of gentle sexual pleasure and her erotic desires take priority. As such, the image defies the tropes of eroticism in Western art history, as critic Linda Nochlin problematizes in her 1972 essay *Eroticism and Female Imagery in Nineteenth-Century Art*: “As far as one knows, there simply exists no art, and certainly no high art, in the nineteenth century based upon women’s erotic needs, wishes or fantasies.”



RIDLEY HOWARD, *By the Ocean*, 2019, oil on linen, 13 × 18 cm. Courtesy the artist and Marinaro Gallery, New York.

O’Neill, Emma. “No Patience For Monuments,” *ArtAsiaPacific*, May 2019.

Seoul-born, New York-based GaHee Park's *Chateau de Plaisir* (2018) depicts an equally intimate moment. A nude woman shares her post-coital cigarette with one hand and holds a dog lead with the other, while draped around her lover's body in a quaint, domestic setting. With her dominatrix-style knee-high boots, long black nails and possession of the "lead," the artist suggests the female protagonist's control of the intimate encounter, overturning the conventional portrayal of women as sexually and domestically subservient.

Protesting against both the absence of women as makers in art history and a correction of their portrayal as passive subjects, the exhibition upended gender conventions with a cohesive showing of technical prowess and incisive wit, echoing the growing sentiment of its host-city.

"[No Patience for Monuments](#)" is on view at Perrotin, Seoul, until June 8, 2019.

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THE
NEW YORKER

ART GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

“The Case Against Reality”

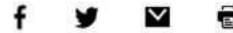
Appearances deceive in this show devoted to cropping and closeups in the work of five American artists. Ridley Howard’s precise, pocket-size “Dream Painting, Lugan” deftly juxtaposes a sleeping nude and a misty gray mountain range; the picture, which has shades of Alex Katz-style cool, plays sly pictorial games with mimesis. Milano Chow contributes intricate drawings of architectural details whose subtly disorienting effects undercut their realism. The show’s breakout stars are three ghostly works by Chris Duncan, pieces of red and dark-blue cotton that he exposed to sunlight for so long that they faded into photograms of curtains and windowsills—sacred relics of the day to day.

Through April 8.

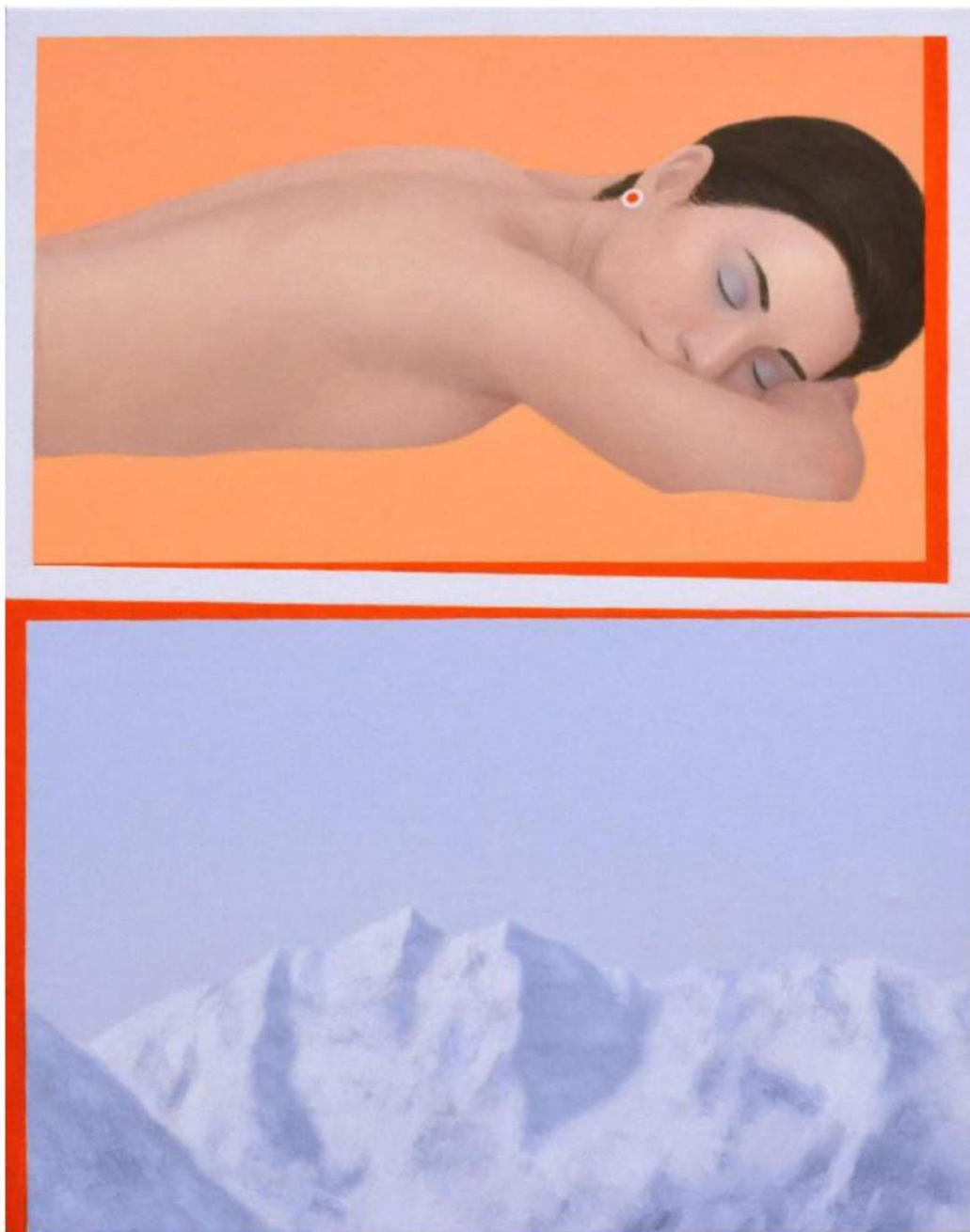
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Downtown

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[Website](#)



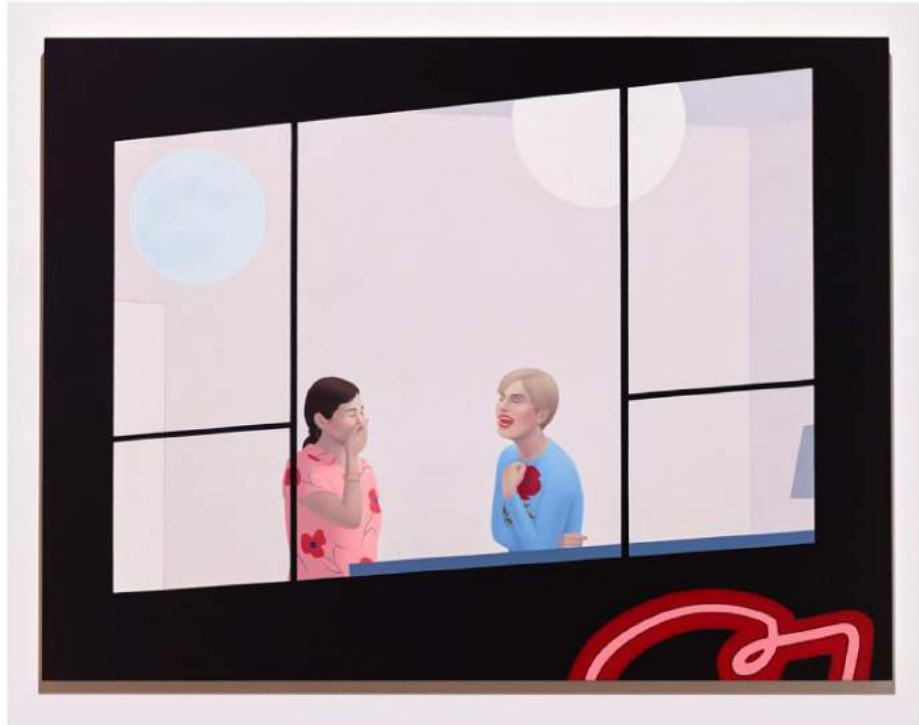
Word & Paint Games: An Association Exercise with Ridley Howard



Suggestion is often more seductive than sheer exposure. Some of the finest artworks in our collective history are mere hints at the dark, sultry corners of our psyche. It doesn't matter if those hints are cast in dark or bright colours: Frida Kahlo, David Hockney, Fiona Rae and Alex Katz

Mason, Shana Beth. "Word & Paint Games: An Association Exercise with Ridley Howard." Frontrunner Magazine, January 2018.

are prime examples of painters who employ vibrant palettes in communicating complex, often hidden scenarios of which the viewer desperately tries to unpick and fill. New York-based artist Ridley Howard follows in that grand tradition, upping the ante even further with splashes of eroticism streaked across airy, domestic backdrops. Howard earned his BFA from the University of Georgia, going on to his MFA from Tufts (School of the Museum of Fine Arts). His work has been seen at venues in Los Angeles, New York, Tel Aviv, Miami, Atlanta and Paris, with solo exhibitions staged at the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), and the Savannah College of Art and Design (Atlanta). A new group exhibition called *Line and Verse*, curated by Howard, runs from 11 January to 17 February at Andréhn-Schiptjenko, Stockholm.



Since Howard's work is so tied to associative exercises, I decided to construct one of my own with the artist. My aim was for Howard to expand on how these words are tied to his work and his own musings on how these words are filtered through popular culture.

1. Side-eye

La Tour first comes to mind. He was the master of the glance. Also maybe Hitchcock and Godard. I do like thinking about multiple layers of meaning, in paintings and situations. A shift of the eyes hints at something bigger. A key to hidden feelings or drives, a thickening of the plot.. a disruption of the obvious. I feel like great films can build incredible drama around a side-eye glance.

Mason, Shana Beth. "Word & Paint Games: An Association Exercise with Ridley Howard." Frontrunner Magazine, January 2018.



2. Flesh Tones

It takes years to learn how to paint flesh tones, and there are infinite combinations. Probably the reason I still use oil paint. I love thinking about subtle shifts in color, reflected light, mid-tones...how light or the color of the room is absorbed. Years spent thinking about flesh-tones definitely influences the way I deal with transitions and paint, even when I am painting a sky or geometric form.

Mason, Shana Beth. "Word & Paint Games: An Association Exercise with Ridley Howard." Frontrunner Magazine, January 2018.

3. Moisture

Temperature and weather were common themes in my early paintings. I was always intrigued by Giorgione's "Tempest", in which you can really sense the humidity. Now I think about conditions, but primarily depicted in color and light. You know, what do pink and red feel like, or lemon yellow?



4. Baby Blue

There is something about gentle masculinity that I associate with light blue. It's silly, and maybe obvious. But in painting, blue is space. It is immediately open and vast, even as a flat block of color. It sort of functions like a blank piece of paper.. you can put a mark or an image down on a blue ground, and it floats. I always think about Giotto, Fra Angelico, Bellini. Even if you paint an object light blue, it will have an openness and depth. It's a space to breathe.

Mason, Shana Beth. "Word & Paint Games: An Association Exercise with Ridley Howard." Frontrunner Magazine, January 2018.



5. Arousal

Humans need escape. We need to spice up existence, an internal charge.. whether with food, drugs, music, another person, a flirtation, a painting, a photograph, drama. I love thinking about those moments when we are lifted, and the basic need for them. I guess my work reflects that somewhat, a tension between everyday banality and some kind of momentary arousal. I love that a painting can offer that as an experience, and also be about it. I guess I think about my paintings as being both hot and cool in that way. Is 'detached arousal' a thing?

6. Polo shirt

Easy living, nice weather.. probably in a pretty good mood. They cut across cultural sub-groups. Everybody probably has one. Casual occasion, and it's sunny and 75.

7. Suntan oil

I think most teenage boys have a Pavlovian response to suntan oil. It was the background aroma of my most adrenaline-filled hormone-raging moments in in the 1980's. I tried to play it cool, but not easy. There is still something sweetly hedonistic about it that gets me, even in my 40's.

8. Mojito

Leisure beverage. Really only something I drink when in good company and the weather is nice. Also likely eating chips with salsa and guacamole.

Mason, Shana Beth. "Word & Paint Games: An Association Exercise with Ridley Howard." Frontrunner Magazine, January 2018.

9. Swimming pool

I love swimming pools. They are often beautiful architectural spaces in pleasurable settings. They elicit the perfect balance of charge and peace, a side stage to the everyday. Sites for mini-dramas of glances, niceties, voyeurism, napping, nostalgia. There is a reason they feature so prominently in films and paintings. Every time I am at a swimming pool, I have the urge to making paintings. They're a perfect subject.. space, geometry, memory, desires. Oddly, I often think more about Di Chirico than Hockney or Fischl.

10. Sunglasses

I'm sure someone has written extensively about the cultural importance of sunglasses. They introduce such a funny power play. It's a cinematic cool, great look with hidden intentions. The older I get, the more I like paintings that function that way.

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BROOKLYN RAIL

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE



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ArtSeen

June 1st, 2017

RIDLEY HOWARD *Travel Pictures*

by Jason Rosenfeld

MARINARO GALLERY | MAY 3 – JUNE 18, 2017

Athens, Georgia, and Brooklyn-based painter Ridley Howard's first show at Marinaro Gallery is consistently compelling and abundantly aware of the history of art—strengths of a painter in his mid-forties with his own fully developed style. He is part of a powerful current of artists who work in finely rendered imagery far from photographic realism, but who present individuated, concise, optical realities. Ellen Altfest, Mathew Cerletty, Orion Martin, Keith Mayerson, and Aliza Nisenbaum come to mind. Of them all, Howard trades the most in both art history and the corners of memory in his placid yet moving works: meticulous paintings marked by a pleasant wistfulness.

The eight works, throughout three rooms and all painted this year, move away from earlier pictures of standing figures frozen in silent conspiracy, that blended Giovanni Bellini's Venetian Renaissance *sacra conversazione* altarpieces with the secular stillness of Edward Hopper and David Hockney. Less one holdover—*Over the Star* (2017), depicting two half-length women spied through a window as they share something humorous—Howard's most striking works here feature floating, disembodied heads, or, as in the gorgeous 6 by 8 foot centerpiece of the show, *Passeggiata, Rome*, a woman's striding legs levitating above the Tiber River. Each oil conveys snippets of intimate memories, but this particular detail calls to mind the most famous torso-less legs in art—those of the trapeze artist shod in mint-green booties in Édouard Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1882)—also positioned in the painting's upper-left corner. The similarly dream-like quality of the French artist's late masterpiece, with its tantalizing reflections of modern society in the mirrored background and vacant expression on the bartender's face, reverberates deeply in the Lungotevere landscape below Howard's gravity-defying walker. Riparian Rome has been the subject of painting from J. M. W. Turner to Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot to the contemporary British photorealist David Wheeler, but here there is no panoramic view, no peaked dome of St. Peter's, no sign of local activity—just a midday stillness.

Rosenfeld, Jacob. "Ridley Howard *Travel Pictures*." *The Brooklyn Rail*, June 1st, 2017.

Adjacent to *Passeggiata, Rome* is the seemingly more resolved *Benvenuti Lovers*, with a cropped *il Tricolore* at top left, the sans-serif letters B-E-N-V-E-N-and half of the U seemingly paused in mid-scroll across the right top, a blurred view of mountainous coastline in the background, and two brunette women, with near identical features, popping up from the lower right. Most delightfully, what look like thirty-seven dashes of paint, representing whitecaps in the sea, reveal themselves to be boats, like plastic game pieces from Battleship. Ambiguities abound. The travel poster aesthetic of the flag and lettering—and especially the women’s stark red lips and unmodeled sweaters that read as flat color shapes in muted neon—contrast with the softened atmospheric perspective of the seascape background. Sharing an openness of expression and a delicacy of intense color, similar features grace the subject of *Movie Star*, a portrait of a woman in a shimmering gold dress standing against a red and white walled terrace. Yet here the *fini* of Howard’s surfaces, their seductive smoothness, is in stark opposition to the delicate and wide brushstrokes that convey a gilded Klimtian iridescence in the actress’s dress. It is a striking work.

The Amalfi Coast, movies stars, snippets of memory, all call to mind the romantic modernism of the Italian post-war Neorealist films of Michelangelo Antonioni and Federico Fellini and their pop progeny in film posters and album covers, or even Peter Blake’s famous screenprint, *Babe Rainbow* (1968). Howard’s careful compositions and chalky tonality are resemblant of Piero della Francesca and the stillness and proto-surreality of Fra Angelico’s frescoes at San Marco in Florence (1440s), which the painter has acknowledged as a treasured site. Echoing the dislocated heads and hands in Fra Angelico’s still mind-blowing *Mockery of Christ* and *Meditation on the Passion*, Howard’s crepuscular *Bologna* features a bust of a stylish woman in lilac shades hovering over a leafy villa-lined road. The surface is characteristically smooth, delicate, but not absent of facture. It is reminiscent of the subtly modulated touch in Gerhard Richter’s blurred realist oils, or the variation in handling in Rene Magritte’s landscapes, but without the discordant treatment of light and inert surfaces.

Howard’s style is richly his own; it is one thing to offer homage to those who have inspired you, and another to have the confidence to make from it a personal vision. To enter Ridley Howard’s distinctive world is to grasp at reminiscences not your own, and surely not quite his, either, but to be enfolded in a delicate scrim of recall—the glint of a seemingly forgotten piece of jewelry, the way a person’s hair momentarily moved in a warm breeze in a far-flung locale, the still surface and reflected trees and clouds on a sluggish river. Forget Proust. Think Bryan Ferry’s grandiose and elegant cover of the standard “These Foolish Things (Remind Me of You)” (1973). Sensual memory lingers in sharply focused appendages and faces, nondescript byways and hazy peaks.

ArtReview

Ridley Howard *Travel Pictures*

Marinara Gallery, New York 3 May – 18 June

Plonking a title as generic as *Travel Pictures* on this group of wonderfully surreal, oddball paintings is a savvy move by Ridley Howard: you expect anodyne, decorative scenes from some grand tour; you get an artist showing off his formal chops. These paintings, some of which are ostensibly set in Italy, put me in mind of the photographs of the late Italian Luigi Ghirri: peripatetic snapshots, colourful dispatches from some land of the weird.

Howard has long experimented with complementary modes of working. Abstract and figurative strains have occasionally entwined, or at least tickled each other. Around 2012 he was showing them side by side: soft-focus portraits juxtaposed with gentle, geometric workouts. A year later, and continuing with *Travel Pictures*, the artist fully collapses these modes into single compositions, the simple-but-revolutionary strategy that seemed to be sitting there all along – a way simultaneously to paint architecture, sex, shapes, the patterns on a dress, cruise ships ploughing through cool blue rectangles of ocean.

Here, the viewer is basically a tourist in the uncanny valley. The archetypal Howard protagon-

ist has always had something airbrushed about him or her, a blank facial smoothness that I can't help but associate, horrifyingly, with Jared Kushner. In these latest paintings, the artist seems even less concerned with verisimilitude: vaguely cyborgian humans cavort in literally dreamy settings. (In *Miami Beach View* [all works 2017], a woman's hand simply dematerialises where it touches her bedsheets: a glitch in the system.)

Howard has previously spoken about his affinity for 1970s European movie-poster design – for films by Jean-Luc Godard, Michelangelo Antonioni, et al – and *Travel Pictures* is often operating in a distinctly Felliniesque groove. What would otherwise be polite, even fusty, landscapes are punctured by illogical cameos. The effect is a bit like what you might find in a travel agency advertising vacations in the afterlife. In *Passeggiata, Rome*, the curve of a tree-lined road is jarred by a pair of legs, sporting high-heeled shoes, that hang suspended in midair. *Kissers in the Mountains* sneaks two paintings into one: a fuzzed-out mountain on the bottom and, up top, two

disembodied sets of heads making out against a pale yellow background. (The two images are separated by a border of grey, white and pink lines, a little Neapolitan moment.) In *Benvenuti Lovers* (the painting here that is closest cousin to Ghirri's photographs), two women pose in front of what is either a picturesque, boat-filled harbour, or merely a picture of a picturesque, boat-filled harbour.

Howard has always had a delicate touch and an eye for the drama of small gestures. That's evident in this exhibition, perhaps nowhere so much as in its smallest painting: *Winter Painting*, a shoulders-up portrait of a young man in hip glasses. A kind of arctic paleness prevails – white walls, white T-shirt – but the eye is drawn to a single red line, like an unfurled Kabbalah bracelet, which is either embossed on the man's shirt or, perhaps more likely, floating in space before him. Lazy journalists are fond of asking artists that hoary question: *how do you know when a work is finished?* I can imagine Howard struggling with this portrait, mulling it over, and then – with that thin, graceful mark – putting it happily to rest. *Scott Indrisek*



Miami Beach View, 2017, oil on linen, 102 × 127 cm.
Courtesy Marinara Gallery, New York

HYPERALLERGIC

INTERVIEWS • WEEKEND

Beer with a Painter: Ridley Howard

by Jennifer Samet on July 2, 2016

Like 735



Ridley Howard, "Kiss in Yellow" (2015), oil on linen, 8x10 inches (all images courtesy the artist unless noted otherwise)

I fell in love with Ridley Howard's painting when I saw his 2014 exhibition at Koenig & Clinton Gallery. The show, as a whole, created a world that one rarely sees in contemporary art: romantic, refined, delicate, and impeccably crafted. In sentiment, the work was full of nostalgia and fantasy, but it was also believable and contemporary, with references to street fashion and specific New York City locations. I joked that his work was my new painting crush, and I think I actually blushed when I met him at an opening a few weeks later.

Recently we talked at his studio, which he was about to relinquish (it was, for fifteen years, its own kind of fantasy — a sun-filled storefront in the heart of Williamsburg, near the water). At one point, I wanted to ask a question about a painting of lovers, and I said, "You know, the one with the rose tattoo," blushing, again, when I couldn't quite get myself to refer to the "from-behind" sex scene. It is telling that the work, which is not aggressive in feeling, color, or paint application, can still be provocative, especially in our shock-resistant culture.

Howard paints couples — kissing, having sex, and going down on one another. He also paints imagined portraits — women elegantly styled with high heels, lipstick, and earrings. He has painted his wife, the painter Holly Coulis, in a patterned dress and glasses. However, the paintings are as much about distilled form and color harmonies as they are about narrative. Howard uses broad, evenly painted color planes and large swaths of abstract geometries to create a symbolic environment for his characters. His colors can be soft and gentle, but the harmonies are charged and highly specific in tone.

Howard was born in 1973 in Atlanta, Georgia, and received his BA and BFA from the University of Georgia, Athens, and MFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. He shows with Andréhn-Schiptjenko Gallery, Stockholm, Sweden and Frederic Snitzer Gallery, Miami. He has most recently shown in New York with Koenig & Clinton (formerly Leo Koenig Gallery). He was also the subject of solo exhibitions in 2013 at the Savannah College of Art and Design and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. A selection of Howard's paintings is currently on view, through July 29, 2016, in the Chelsea location of James Cohan Gallery as part of the group exhibition *Intimisms*.

Jennifer Samet: *You grew up in Atlanta, Georgia. Did you have any family members who were artists, or draw as a child?*

Ridley Howard: My great uncle was a hobbyist artist of sorts. He did wildlife painting and had a basement studio. I was obsessed with that basement, and the fact that he could spend his afternoons doing whatever he wanted. He was involved with the world of wildlife art – both making it and collecting the work of other artists.

I was always drawing and painting watercolors. I remember drawing a lot of sports logos and mascots at age six or seven. My father would be watching the game, and I would draw. I got attention for it, partly because he loved that it was the Bulldog or Falcon or whatever. I also drew a lot of cartoons and did some wildlife paintings to imitate my uncle.

I was lucky to have a great high school art teacher, who introduced me to 20th-century art. I also became interested in contemporary art, and I remember loving the Robert Rauschenberg and the Ed Ruscha at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta. By age 16 or 17, I was enamored with the idea of being an artist in New York, even though I didn't actually understand what that meant.

JS: *Were you also interested in sports? Did you play sports growing up?*

RH: I was a daydreamer as a kid and stared out the window a lot. My parents, who were very athletic, worried about me being uncoordinated and a bit of a space cadet. They signed me up for soccer, which was unusual in the 1970s in Atlanta. The first day of practice I fell off the jungle gym before it started, hurt myself and couldn't play. After a rough beginning, I turned out to be a pretty good player. I had a lot of heart and worked hard.

My friend, the artist Jim Lee, and I have joked about how our friends are either sports fans or painters. The willingness to give yourself up to a fictional space, which ultimately doesn't mean anything, is something that I admire in people. It's about believing in it, and being passionate about it, despite a colder logic. As a kid, you fantasize about the drama of scoring the last second winning goal. I think it's good to maintain some of that irrational romanticism.

JS: *What kind of work were you making in college and graduate school?*

RH: I did my undergraduate work at the University of Georgia in Athens. Most of the conversations at the time revolved around material and process, and a kind of neo-expressive painterliness. I was doing paintings influenced by Frank Auerbach, Eric Fischl, and Lucian Freud. My student work was very typical 1980s British School. I was good at slinging thick paint.

I did my MFA at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which was more of a 1990s conceptual postmodern program. Some grad students were doing painting, but they strongly encouraged multi-media crossover. After struggling through my first year, I arrived at doing some decent Gerhard Richter-ish paintings, which were all about staging and mediated experience. I am still interested in that, but it was pretty heavy-handed back then.

Now, I feel like the work is a combination of those two extremes. On one hand, it is fundamentally

romantic painting, and about a kind of escapism in image and process. But, at the same time, it is a construction of space that feels more cerebral than what we often think of as “expressive.”

JS: *I am surprised that I don't see a lot of images posted on your studio walls. The figures in your paintings seem very specific, and you articulate details like accessories and makeup. What kind of source imagery do you use?*

RH: I do usually have images around, but I never pull from a single source. I look at film stills, I find images online, and I look at old advertisements. Sometimes I take photographs if I need a reference for an anatomical issue. The paintings are a composite of a number of sources, including invention. The eye shadow, earrings, or fingernail polish, or tattoos — you can sort of say it's all imagined, even if I'm finding reference images. The language of photography and film is embedded in the work, but I don't want them to read as replications. When the paintings become more developed, I typically put away reference images. The logic of the painting dictates what happens.

They have the implication of a personal space, but they are also connected to a broader cultural image bank. I'm not so interested in postmodern pastiche, but I do think about a melting of my interests and the influence of external information. How do you navigate this constant flood of images, and also carve out an experience in a painting? How do you make a personal landscape that is also impersonal?

All of the spaces and locations in the work are references to places I have been — Rome, Mexico City, Bologna, New York — so there is an autobiographical aspect, but in the end, they are the fictional version of those places. Part of that comes from the emptying of details. There is a distillation that happens.

JS: *Can you talk more about your process? How do you work out the compositions and the color chords in your work?*

RH: I usually start by working in a Moleskin notebook, doing thumbnail sketches, and thinking about possible compositions. Then I do big drawings. I work out a lot of structural issues in the drawing phase before painting.

I directly transfer the drawing using tracing paper, and loosely block in color from there. The complexity of the paintings really opened up when I started drawing ahead of painting, because I could think about space in a different way. I found that if I was fumbling with a paintbrush to draw a hand, I couldn't think about color and light with the same kind of intensity.

I used to do color studies, but now I figure it out as I go. So I'll start with a general idea of tonality, or a sense of light. It's then a gradual process of building up the density of the paint and adjusting color as I work. Sometimes they change radically, and sometimes it's just the subtle difference between blues that changes the tenor of the painting.

I will easily spend an hour or more just mixing color. Muddy, lazy color drives me crazy. As a painter, the variables are so few. Color is one of those things that is always in play.

I used to be a more freewheeling, sloppy colorist until I worked for Jeff Koons on his color-mixing table. We would be given a swatch and asked to match it perfectly. You could spend three hours preparing a color that would be used to paint a shadow on a cheek or a Cheerio. They were so strict; it was like basic training. I learned a lot about deliberately mixing oil paint.

JS: *I wonder what other artists are particularly influential in your work?*

RH: I think about second-generation Pop artists like Tom Wesselmann, John Wesley, Ed Ruscha, and Rosalyn Drexler. In late Pop Art there is a more personal, almost surrealist fictional space. I

also love the stillness and detachment of American scene painting, like the Ashcan School, Edward Hopper, Fairfield Porter, Alex Katz, and Sylvia Sleigh. And I still think a lot about Piero della Francesca and Fra Angelico.

The Pop artists have the graphic punch that I want my work to have, but the language of romantic painting is also important to me. I think that materializes in the way that edges are teased out. In some ways, you can tell everything about a painter from how they deal with the edges where colors meet. If you think about Raoul de Keyser, Wesley, Morandi, Piero, Manet, or Picasso, you see that the real character of the painting is in the edge. Like in Morandi, there is a kind of trembling line.

JS: *What have you been looking at recently?*

RH: I was in Italy last summer and spent a lot of time looking at Venetian and Baroque painting. It's probably been since undergrad that I thought about Caravaggio or Titian in relation to my own work — it seems to have such a different character. I thought about the high-contrast lighting in that work, and how shadows affect the feeling of a space. I love the tension between rendered forms and the vast spaces around them. I also thought about the landscape elements in Bellini paintings — even in his most intimate portraits. What interests me is how they are like images of landscapes. The mountains function as mountains, but they are also about the language of landscape.

Ruscha does this in an interesting way. On the one hand he is playing with the language of images — it is a quotation of sorts. At the same time, the paintings offer a visual indulgence into the landscape space or the painting space. He has it both ways. This is also true of the recent Ken Price drawing show at Matthew Marks.

JS: *You have mentioned this fictional space that exists in the work, or the work of others. Can you talk more about that idea?*

RH: I like that painting is inherently fictional. I have always been interested in the decisions painters make within that space — the kind of experience they create. I also have real filmmaker envy. I sometimes think of constructing a world that might exist in a film, or a film that I'd want to watch. Occasionally I'll reference facial features of obscure actors or actresses. But it is always a blend of different people, and essentially made-up. These people only exist in the paintings, with a few exceptions.

Sometimes I take cues from actual films, and I love book design from the 1960s and 70s. I'm interested in the graphic designer Lester Beall, and others like him. That period of design feels very painterly. I also love the graphic design around the French New Wave film movement, and the way that Michelangelo Antonioni's films were packaged in terms of design. I like that film posters can capture the essence of the film in an arrangement of graphic elements and image.

JS: *Sex is recurring subject in your work. Why do you depict lovers?*

RH: I like thinking about the love scene as a genre. Even in a movie that isn't a romance, you have to have a love scene. So, I think about the painting that is the love scene. They exist within the broader body of the work and are presented as kind of ordinary. There is a hot/cool balance that is important.

Maybe it is interesting to make paintings about intimacy as a youngish, male painter. A play of masculinity is part of all of my work, I think. It would be easier to make dude paintings about sex. I want them to be more vulnerable, in a way. I've had people think that I was a female painter — and I kind of like that. My first name is slippery. At the same time, the paintings are unapologetically what they are.

I like making paintings that can be read in multiple ways, all in one synthesized image. That concept is most active in some of the lover paintings. In one way they are very banal, in another

way they are charged, in another way they are funny, at times they feel like appropriated images, and they are almost sentimental in their romanticism. I hope they are difficult to pin down. What is happening in "Line Rose" (2016) is so straightforward. The way that it is cropped is abrupt. But it is also kind of sweet and soft. There is no conclusion to the painting or, really, to any of my paintings. There isn't one way I want people to experience them.

JS: *Do you consider who the audience is?*

RH: I guess it's a hypothetical audience, but the reception of the work is important. The audience I think about specifically is made up of a few close friends and my wife, Holly Coulis. They are a microcosm of a broader group. Over time, I have realized there will always be some percentage of people who dislike my work. There will be people who think it's just okay, but maybe not their thing. And then there are people who might like it. I'm not just making work for the people who like it, but also for the people who hate it. I want them to really hate it. I want to understand what they don't like about it, and make sure those elements are pronounced.

There are certainly times when even the clothes people are wearing, or the scenarios they find themselves in, could be more over-the-top or outlandish. But there is something very rich about holding back, which is true for fiction or film or any painting I really love. I think it would be really easy, in an age of pornography, for example, to make sex paintings in a different way. I think about restraint a lot.

JS: *For how long do you generally work on the paintings?*

RH: They can take a few weeks, and a couple of months for the larger ones. I work on multiple paintings at once. For me, the paintings become stranger when they crystallize. There is something about the combination of distance and touch that happens. The immediate payoff of a more painterly painting is seductive. I often quickly block in a painting and think, "That looks pretty good." Then I wrestle with it for a month. In the end I like it much better, because it has become weirder in sneaky ways.

For instance, "Peach Sunrise" (2016), was a difficult color scheme to work out. At one point the sky above the mountains was dark and the space around the figures was light. The blue strip was green, and the woman's shirt was pink. That painting has far more than a typical four layers. Now I like the idea of it being very early morning. Maybe they are in an interior space; maybe they are under the sky. That blue strip can either be a windowsill, or just a graphic moment in the painting. The figures look as if they are lit by the sky. I like the psychological space now, and that has something to do with the time I spent painting it.

I love playing formal games in the work, but I want the figurative elements and the formal elements to inform one another. I hope it all adds up to some kind of larger experience. A blue painting feels very different from a yellow painting, beyond just the color itself. A stripe is never just a stripe; a color is never just a color.

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

‘Intimisms’

James Cohan Gallery

533 West 26th Street, Chelsea

Through July 29

The title of “Intimisms,” an excellent group show of figurative painting, pluralizes Intimism, the early modernist style best exemplified by the small, sometimes fraught domestic interiors of Édouard Vuillard and Pierre Bonnard. At a moment when so much art is for public consumption, the works here convey the intimacy of bodies, faces, emotions, touch and love.

Representing 26 artists from several generations, the show is organized by the gallery and the painter Aliza Nisenbaum. From the past, Jane Freilicher’s “Flowers in Armchair” (1956) and Fairfield Porter’s “The Bedroom” (1949) are exceptional. In an Alice Neel group portrait of the Fugs (1966), the band seems to be singing just for us. Henry Taylor’s forceful “Fawn Rogers” (2015) all but picks up Neel’s mantle.

Like Porter, numerous younger artists take us into the bedroom, often casting us as intruders, as in Benjamin Degen’s close up of a flushed woman sleeping. In rich colors and full forms that distantly evoke Léger, GaHee Park’s “Night Talk” features mysterious meldings of bodies, rooms, old-fashioned telephones and paintings within paintings. Ridley Howard portrays tender lovemaking in settings stripped of detail. Nicole Eisenman’s 1994 “Self-Portrait With Mr. Monopoly” conjures a moment of quiet existential terror, while Joan Brown’s “Twenty to Nine” (1972) depicts a woman who may be weeping sitting at a restaurant table with wine glasses for two. We see only the hands of two people building a fire in a new work by Giordanne Salley. Jordan Casteel zeros in on a woman resting her left hand on her knees; the title, “Mom Hand,” speaks volumes. There is much to linger over, especially Anna Glantz’s portrait of a bare-chested, vulnerable young man. Sylvia Sleigh’s 1970 portrait — the same subject in a different mood — might have been painted yesterday.

ROBERTA SMITH

BOSTON

Ridley Howard

Museum of Fine Arts // May 11–October 27

FOR HIS SOLO museum debut, “Fields and Stripes,” the Brooklyn-based painter shows nine works made since 2011, when he traveled to research the geometric structure of early Italian Renaissance and Modernist masterworks. Howard’s study of paintings by Fra Angelico, Piero della Francesca, Gino Severini, and Giorgio Morandi led him to focus on how formal composition affects narrative. Long known



for large, stylized canvases that allude to cinematic plots, Howard transitions toward less obvious tale-telling and emphasizes conscious abstraction. More intimately scaled works combine studies from life with fictional elements. Pristine, quiet paintings possess a personal yet cerebral relationship with light, color, texture, and form.

As the title suggests, Howard references Color Field painting in these immaculately rendered images. Treating his canvases as a single plane in such key works as *Trattoria*, 2011, and *Rain*, 2012, the artist applies color in expansive flat areas and eliminates distinctions between subject and background. Elsewhere, figures appear to be placed atop spare two-dimensional fields of closely keyed hues and simple shapes, such as rectangles and chevrons. A variety of stripes figure as

lovingly placed decorative patterns on the dresses of seductively beautiful women, while a generic Modernist building is made more imposing by black vertical stripes on its front and side.

Howard demonstrates his recent fascination with color perception in two identical compositions varying only in color choices. In *Orange Diamond Kiss*, 2012, and *Sky Blue, Diamond Kiss*, 2013,

he uses careful, velvety strokes to depict reclining raven-haired lovers in swimsuits positioned atop a blanketlike minimalist arrangement of a diamond and a rectangle. The tanned young female kisses and caresses her partner as she unknowingly penetrates the rectangle below her with the smooth curves of her foot. According to Howard, “There was a compositional harmony that was intentional yet disrupted by the lover.” The vibrant warmth of the orange surrounding

a cool gray diamond in the earlier work heightens the heat of the tryst, while the bright-yellow diamond in the more recent piece provides a luminous focal point.

Howard moves toward the reduced language of abstraction in his monochromatic depictions of skyscrapers, and *Tan Blocks*, 2012, approaches pure abstraction. The inner logic of brown, tan, black, and blue rectangles and parallelograms is vaguely architectural, recalling American Cubism and Precisionism. Still, there is the suggestion of human presence in Howard’s use of tans and a fleshlike pink form.

These works favor strong composition, spatial clarity, and everyday subject matter. Howard’s understanding of the fluctuations between form and space elicit emotional content from a reductive language of color and design.

—Francine Koslow Miller

Art in America

Ridley Howard

NEW YORK,
at Leo Koenig

by Amanda Church



To use the parlance of Herman's *Hermits*, there was a kind of a hush that pervaded Ridley Howard's exhibition, aptly titled "Slows." The work resonates with a palpable silence that's hard to pinpoint. Divided between figuration and geometric abstraction, the show consisted of 20 small-scale, pristine paintings, all oil on linen from 2011, which, when not completely abstract, emphasize and extract geometry from representational imagery. With their soft, velvety surfaces that seem to glow from within, the figurative paintings depict either people or landscapes. The abstract canvases seem to function as a foil to the other work and, although cleverly interspersed throughout the gallery, are ultimately less interesting when viewed individually.

The representational work focuses on things normally overlooked. In *Nudes*, which is a partial view of an entwined couple, the dominant elements are the yellow-sheathed legs of the

woman and the freckles on the man's back. Howard's emphasis on these details allows for sensuality but overrides outright sexuality. His figures have a gentle luminosity that recalls Seurat's charcoal sketches.

Trattoria, a compelling study in ambiguity, is essentially three planes of differently tinted whites against a dense yellow ground. Is that long rectangle at the bottom a table, and the one to the left a window? Only four upside-down glasses anchor the scene to the restaurant interior referred to by the title. The flatness of Will Barnet's imagery comes to mind—his screenprint from 1970, *Woman Reading*, reduces a frontal image of a woman in bed under an orange blanket to four planes of color.

The painting 156 shows a woman's head and shoulders against a horizontal expanse of light

green gridded with thin white lines, but equally important is the enigmatic off-white numeral six that appears in the painting's upper left-hand corner, coolly balancing the tiled background. A large, pale-blue, diamond-shaped earring reveals as much about the woman as her detached gaze does, and also functions as a counterpoint to the numeral. Similarly, in a painting of Howard's wife (also an artist), titled *Holly, Rose Dress*, the bold pattern of the dress is as significant as the neutral affect of the woman, whose head is cropped at the eyes by the top of the canvas. The black dress's colorful vertical stripes and splashy orange and yellow flowers stand out against the creamy off-white slices of space between her arms.

Harking back to the brushy softness of Howard's earlier paintings, *Track* portrays a lush group of trees; at the bottom a horizontal band of watermelon pink and, below it, a strip of solid green asserts the abstract geometries that are a theme of this show. In the current arena, in which so many artists are working with a combination of abstraction and representation, Howard provides a unique and intriguing point of view.

Photo: Ridley Howard: Nudes, 2011, oil on linen, 24 by 30 inches; at Leo Koenig.

ARTFORUM

Ridley Howard

KOENIG & CLINTON

459 West 19th Street

January 19, 2012–February 25, 2012

"Young girls? I don't give a damn. I like small feet, I like my fabulous house with cool stuff in it." This was John Currin's impression, from a 2001 interview, of the staunchly antimodern painter Balthus. Currin enlists Balthus on behalf of his own postmodernist gambit, yet it's Ridley Howard in his second exhibition at this gallery who brings Balthus's earnestly sensed joy full circle after modernity's linear exhaustion.

In "Slows," Howard's twenty paintings jubilate through thrumming color planes and a slight drafting curvature that owes as much to Botticelli as it does to Adrian Tomine. Howard's predilections are emphasized by art-historical cross-referencing, but also by slyly referencing his own work. For instance, *Nudes* (all works 2011), depicting a tryst that becomes a structured arrangement of interlocked bodies (evinced by a constellation of moles on a man's back), is clearly indebted to the kindred films of Michaelangelo Antonioni. To its right, *Mint Green*, a lambent abstraction punctuated by an archipelago of black dots on a cream ground, shows Howard mining color theorist Joseph Albers (particularly his little-known album covers). Not coincidentally, Antonioni's 1964 classic *Red Desert* owed much to Albers and his Color Field disciples. The comparable moles and black dots show Howard employing both representation and abstraction in an effort to further digest—as well as convey—his penchants.

Despite the humility of these images, "Slows" offers a range of esoteric associations. *Liquors*, for example, is a cluster of grayed geometries fronted by the painting's titular store sign that evokes Ralston Crawford's deserted scenes of industrialization. Howard deftly allocates his appreciable influences, but quotation is hardly the point; his adroitness is as much a component of his style as is his line or color sense. All these elements are on display in this richly innovative show, which profoundly accents the beauty of everyday life.



Ridley Howard, *Nudes*, 2011, oil on linen, 24 x 30".

— Ryan E. Steadman