

# Pour It On

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in New York City

## Pour, Trudy Benson, Canan Talon, and Abstraction

Go ahead: pour it on.

The nine artists in "Pour" do that and more. For one thing, they combine techniques and media to mine the potential of poured paint. They also look to back color-field painting, when stained canvas for many critics came fraught with lightness and excess. They allow me to start again on my regular gallery tour, with a dozen versions of abstraction's toolbar. Trudy Benson, for one, means that literally, with an illusionism inspired by software as much as history. Meanwhile Canan Talon, Bob Zoell, Wyatt Kahn, and others rein in the excess, leaving past models as present-day enigmas.

### More than pour

The artists in "Pour" do much more than pour. They also work with lines and traces, like Ingrid Calame in colored pencil as intricate and obsessive as laboratory studies. They work with collage and transfer, like Jackie Saccoccio blending mica into oil or Kris Chatterson with patterns receding into murky perspective. They work with media resistant to stain at all, like Calame or Carrie Yamaoka on reflective Mylar. They leave their mark or its illusion, like thumbprints for Carrie Moyer or the brush itself for David Reed as the subject of his art. And then they fix those marks in place as pouring never could, like Yamaoka in lacquered slabs.

They do not even look that much like the classic drips and pours of Jackson Pollock and Helen Frankenthaler, and they hardly exhaust the possibilities. Right on opening night in Chelsea, Sofia Maldonado elsewhere was spilling so much paint that it landed in the corners of the room as well as on canvas. In "Pour" alone, Angelina Gualdoni recalls the ragged edges of Pollock's black enamel, but in acrylic, and Carolanna Parlato recalls Frankenthaler's fluid primaries. Roland Flexner, though, works in a medium that postwar Americans never knew existed unless maybe they worked as locksmiths, liquid graphite. Moyer even speaks of turning to pours in order to leave painting's history behind. If she ends up associated with precisely the last generation for which a painter's gesture mattered, enjoy the overflow.



They mark a revival of abstraction, the kind that led to at least half a dozen coordinated summer group shows in 2011, although not simply a return to the past. Flexner appeared in the 2010 Whitney Biennial, Gualdoni in a 2006 group show called "The Trace of a Trace of a Trace." I have singled out eight of nine before, including two solo shows each for Ingrid Calame and Carrie Moyer. (I guess great minds think alike.) Reed's early oil and alkyd at Max Protech, on a high floor in Soho, was one of those gallery shows that changed everything for me—and I can hardly see the picture of a single brushstroke from James Nares, Mark Sheinkman, or (in video) Anthony McCall without him. And yet, for all that (and I have borrowed the two images here from past reviews), I never thought of these artists together.

Elisabeth Condon and Carol Prusa did, enough to curate the exhibition in a slightly different form for the Schmidt Center Gallery of Florida Atlantic University. (See, if you cannot find a museum in New York, you may yet find the resources, although in smaller spaces three miles apart.) And the artists look so obvious together, to the point that one can have trouble telling them apart. But alike in what? To ask is to raise the question

of what has changed since the 1950s. This is not your parents' (or Clement Greenberg's) color-field painting.

For one thing, it represents the shift to other media, starting with thinned acrylic in the 1960s but also with Minimalism's industrial materials. It also points to the breakdown between media. As with Sam Moyer, Scott Lyall, or Jacob Kassay, abstraction draws on photography. Almost all prefer the acid colors of a negative, and Flexner's graphite black looks obviously out of a darkroom. (Carbon is an impressive molecule, even apart from buckyballs.) They can revisit the sincerity of poured paint, but only through the appropriation of the "Pictures generation."

They also move easily between abstraction and representation, as with Calame's organic structures, but also in representing brushwork with or without a brush. Frankenthaler did begin with landscape, as with the breakthrough poured paint of *Mountains and Sea*, but Flexner's earth is on the scale of geologic time. They also push all-over painting hard enough to squeeze out almost all of Pollock's or Frankenthaler's bare canvas, although Gualdoni uses gaps and concentric black circles to suggest a bursting through. Most of all, though, this is a revisiting of the pour. For these artists, pour it on becomes as much metaphor as medium. It is that eternal dance between presence and absence and then some—that trace of a trace of a trace.

