

Los Angeles I'm Yours

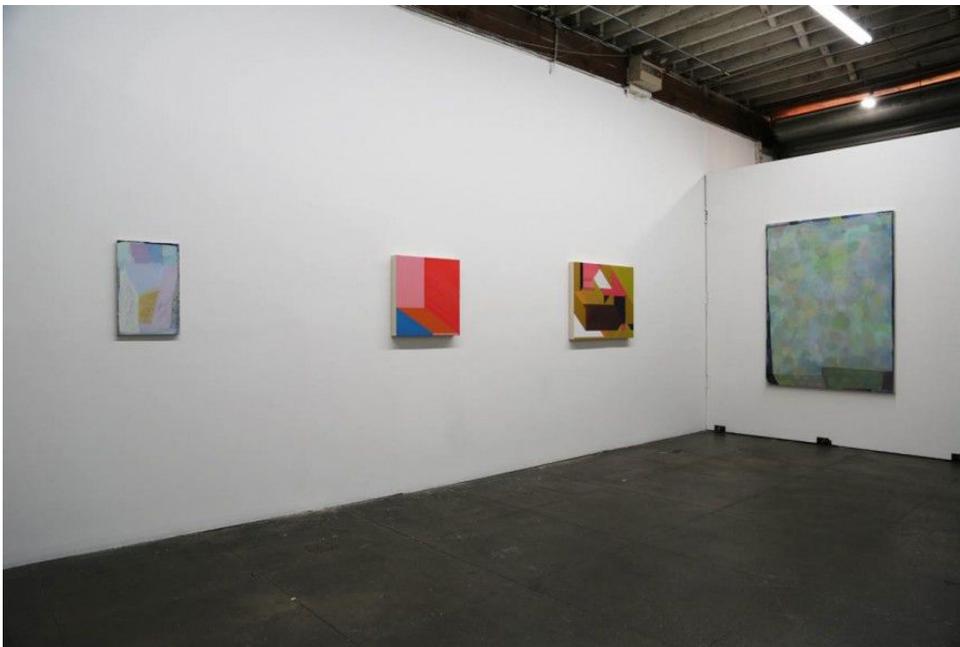
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SONCE
ALEXANDER
GALLERY

LOS ANGELES
I'M YOURS

By Cliff Eberly

Last Night, Expression Saved My Life



On July 31st, the last day of the month, there was a crescent moon waxing in Virgo. I don't pay much attention to the moon phases unless I feel weird. I felt disconnected all day on that Thursday at work. Continually interrupted, I made mistakes. Nothing major but still, errors were made.

When I did a little research, since the moon was in Virgo, I was supposed to take more time to be critical and to avoid rush jobs. Isn't that how it should be always? I failed majorly. After leaving work, I felt relieved and headed downtown to enjoy an evening of visual and performing arts. First stop though was Pizzanista on 7th – my favorite pizza place in L.A. After ordering a Meat Jesus and the special slice (which was pork with some sweet/hot sauce) with a Blenheim Ginger Ale, I found two seats, one for me and one for my man bag which held colored pencils and a sketchpad among other personals. After adding some bright hues to a drawing, I wondered what was taking so long for my food to arrive. Craning my head around the corner of the drink case several times, the head of house so to speak came over to ask if I was still waiting on my food. I said, “Yes” (duh!?) and told her what I ordered. Apparently the cook lost my ticket. Again, my patience was being tested—but I let time slide by. They were nice enough to give me a huge order of fragrant and pungent garlic knots. I saved those for Friday's lunch. There was no way I could have eaten that much bread in one sitting.

Walking back to my car on Wilson, the setting sun blinded me but the breeze from Skid Row or more hopefully, Santa Monica, cooled my perspiring face. After dumping the spongy, garlic knots in a somewhat empty food container that still had a few sweet remnants of the morning's oatmeal in it, I sauntered over to **PØST** where I expected to encounter some seriously righteous painting from two artist friends I had come to know over the course of the last three years since I moved to California. I was not disappointed.

Rema Ghuloum is an artist, educator, curator and all around massive force of positive energy whom you want to be on your team. Seeing her paintings alongside those of talented, steadfast and stalwart Kevin Scianni, my mind switched gears to visual engagement mode. It was difficult not to take the show partners' art in at the same time but the wide differences of aesthetic style, mark making and colour palettes enabled me to surely hone in on each one individually. Void of narrative, each painter approaches their maximized, edge pushing surfaces in contrasting gestures of detailed mark making (RG) and by weaving color fields, blocks and stripes with crisp forms mounted on top of one another (KS). Seeing the artists paintings in one space, the extreme polarities of post-Fordian spectrums of contemporary painting are clearly visible.

It is apparent that both Ghuloum and Scianni are not interested in whimsy, self-congratulation nor confession. They may provoke self-absorption in the viewer by presenting the opposite—meditative compositions that dare I say

come across as universally somber on one hand and analytically celebratory on the other. Ghuloum for instance mixes colour to a breaking point that at first glance comes across as largely grayed—a neutralizing effect that riles enough affect in me to ponder, “Where does neutrality exist these days?” Scianni on the other hand uses color more homogenized to prove that hue brilliance and spatial integrity could be right around the corner. Neither artist draws from the past at least overtly. (I think about Morandi and Albers respectively) Their cynically quixotic experiments are however genuine, welcome and vital in our maxed out cultural cornucopia.



Rema Ghuloum. Close Up, 2014. Oil on canvas.



Kevin Scianni. Quandary V, 2014. Acrylic on canvas over panel.

In the shower recently I got to thinking about the term abstraction when associated with painting and decided that it fails to describe Ghuloum' s and Scianni' s paintings because I do not intuit that they are abstracting any thing, feeling, story or even space. Scianni' s canvases do pictorialize physical space vs. data volumes but that is a jumping off point and for me not essential. Both artists are very realistically painting surfaces with a substance bound with pigment and color.

Our eyes deceive us and we see things, perspectives and even conjure little narratives. But, I saw nothing in or on Ghuloum' s nor Scianni' s paintings that revealed anything about the physical realm - and that I suppose is something. (That something being non-representational painting.) Now I finally have a handle on what abstraction and non-representation looks like.

I' m only recently arriving to the locus where I can look at a painting or material as nothing more than it is, a substance spread, dotted, scraped or brushed across a surface that can leave me wordless or speechless which later I write about and try to explain with words. I didn' t stay long at the opening—maybe 20 minutes. But, that was time enough to have a very palpable experience that created a strong memory and feeling. I have learned from Ghuloum' s and Scianni' s paintings to be very careful when looking and ascribing meaning and categories to art. Curators naturally create categories to pander to a demanding public that needs to be spoon-fed. I have been fleeing categorization all my life; not to be cool or hip but out of necessity. I have a physical reaction to categorization-anxiety. Even for a quick dose, Ghuloum' s and Scianni' s art changed the cogs in my cerebral cortex for good.