

frieze

Garth Weiser

CASEY KAPLAN GALLERY, NEW YORK, USA



Garth Weiser, *My love is chemical* (2009)

Here's a good argument for painting: Garth Weiser. Graced with a candid intelligence, a solid craft and a shrewd sense of composition, the 17 paintings and one work on paper in this exhibition seem less painted than engineered. For this is some sturdy stuff. If it had an odour, it would be pungent and structured. If it had a sound, it would be that of things ineluctably clanking into place.

Inspired by graphic design, modernist painting, corporate logos (the show's press release goes so far as to cite two: Halifax Bank and Valvoline Oil) and a general sense of ungainly '80s corporate culture, these paintings could be characterized by a kind of 'corporate abstraction'. Each canvas is structured around a horizon line, and is orbited either by circles or a series of slanted groups of black-and-white striations. The tension that animates the compositions varies. For instance *My love is chemical* (2009) could hardly be more taut; the coexistence of an almost sculptural space and painterly flatness galvanizes the picture with an extraordinary tension. This is subtly produced by the placement of three flat circles (one black, one irregularly graded colour wheel, and one a dark shade of orange) against an orange ground, the edges of which taper towards the top and the bottom, revealing a white margin, such that the horizon-line seems to jut out like a pack of matches lying open face down. The tension of the composition is doubled by the multiple painting techniques, varying from hard-edge to sprayed-on to brushed, not to mention the anachronistic-advertising palette of orange, white and black, which makes for a raw and homely sophistication.



Exhibition view. Left:
Hyper Tight Light (2009);
right: *Teeth Grinder*

Other paintings, such as *Hyper Tight Light* (2009), take the push-pull to another level. Slanted groups of striations, created by combing thick white paint over a black ground, run parallel or into one another and meet on a horizon-line, next to a flat black hexagon, thrown in for good compositional measure. Like an early Bridget Riley, the white striations are liable to make you dizzy when looked at straight-on, though when viewed from an angle they are relieved of their dizzying power and a blue layer of under painting, full of doodles, emerges. Geometric hard-edge abstraction is blended with messier matters. While this shift could be seen as an optical gimmick, it invests the picture with a spatial presence, requiring the viewer to partially

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circumnavigate the painting, like a sculpture. Not all of the paintings are as successful though; works like *Cardio* (2009) or *Cooper Union* (2008), both of which are dominated by rectangles and void of the vertical angles that vitalize the rest of the show, feel slack in comparison, lacking the compositional vibrancy of their coevals. But this show looks so good that a few less than captivating canvases hardly affects the general impression.

One of the more compelling things about Weiser's work is its refreshing lack of subterfuge; it is confident in its right to exist. Not in thrall to self-deprecation (which is not say that it is humourless: these motifs are, after all, largely recycled corporate recuperations of modernism), it seems untroubled by the 'to paint or not to paint' quandary that haunts so much contemporary picture making. Weiser's work proves that painting does not have to be consumed by strategy, and can still just get down to the business of painting.

Chris Sharp

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