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"State of the Arts: Liam Everett," *San Francisco Magazine*, December 2023

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## editor's note

# Powered *by Art*

If we assess a city or region by the art it produces and supports, it's safe to say San Francisco is as close to a cultural Oz as anywhere on the planet. From our galleries to our stages, the city is flourishing.

I was thrilled to chat with two Bay Area artists for this issue. The first is our cover star, Adrian Burrell (@adrianburrell, "The Stories We Tell Ourselves"), who says he feels a little like an artistic Forrest Gump—he has traveled and experienced so much in his short life. He served in the Marine Corps, attended Stanford and traveled across four continents to work with nonprofits. During all of this, Burrell, a multimedia genius, created. His work has appeared across the globe, from SFMOMA to China's Pingyao International Photography Festival. This month, you can see his work at SF's Minnesota Street Project (minnesotastreetproject.com) and Art Basel Miami.

I also spoke with painter Liam Everett (@leverettstudio, "State of the Arts"), whose brilliant work is greatly influenced by contemporary choreographers and minimalist theater. "My interests in both disciplines lie in the act and process of rehearsal as the primary subject rather than the performer or the plot," the Bay Area abstract artist told me. He works with New York's Kasmin Gallery (kasmingallery.com) and Kamel Mennour (mennour.com) in London and Paris.

Art patrons will see Everett's solo exhibition of new paintings at San Francisco's Altman Siegel Gallery (altmansiegel.com) and a curated two-person presentation at Art Basel Hong Kong (arbasel.com) with Galerie Greta Meert in March.

We created an arts bucket list ("Here for the Art") of large and small SF galleries and museums for the next 60 days. Here's a challenge: How many venues can you see before February? Talk about an enriching New Year's resolution.

My best to you and your families for the holidays!

*Michael McCarthy*
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Liam Everett, "Untitled (and lastly of course the sound of it)"; Adrian Burrell, "Modernity Blues"; Adrian's Burrell, "Venus" is part of the *Venus Blues* exhibit at the Minnesota Street Project through Dec. 3.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT, PHOTOS: COURTESY OF LIAM EVERETT; BY HENRIK KAM; BY ADRIAN BURRELL

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PORTRAIT BY MARIE TOLLON; OTHER PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Clockwise from top: Liam Everett, "Untitled (sans pain in cirque)"; the artist in his studio. Everett moved his studio to Sonoma, Calif.

# Liam Everett

Liam Everett's studio practice is influenced by movement: contemporary choreographers and minimalist theater. "My interests in both disciplines lie in the act and process of rehearsal as the primary subject rather than the performer or the plot," says the Bay Area abstract artist, who works with New York's Kasmin Gallery (kasmingallery.com) and Kamel Mennour (mennour.com) in London and Paris. The overriding message of his work, says the artist, doesn't attempt to convey, represent or dictate content. "It's instead an ongoing engagement with the invisible and that which avoids contextualization."

Everett's recent shows include the *sun is their drum* at Paris' Galerie Mennour and *the four corners* at Brussels' Galerie Greta Meert (galeriegretameert.com). Next month, art patrons will see his solo exhibition of new paintings at San Francisco's Altman Siegel Gallery (altmansiegel.com) and a curated two-person presentation at Art Basel Hong Kong (artbasel.com) with Galerie Greta Meert in March. "I'm also co-curating a three-part exhibition featuring artists working on the West Coast of North America whose work shares a tendency to evade identification and the referential and occupies a position of physical ambiguity," he says, adding the project will debut in New York City next October and in Brussels and Los Angeles in 2025.

MENNOUR

# LIAM EVERETT

THE SUN IS THEIR DRUM

JUSQU'AU · UNTIL 18 MAR., 2023
5 RUE DU PONT DE LODI, PARIS

*untitled (in the shadow of Thales)*, 2022
Encre, huile, sable sur toile en lin · Ink, oil, sand on linen canvas. 134,6 x 198,1 cm

*untitled (the turn)*, 2022
Encre, huile, sable sur toile en lin · Ink, oil, sand on linen canvas. 91,4 x 61 cm

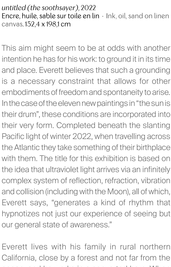
**ENG** What do you have, Liam Everett asked me recently, when the world falls away? When the ground, the sky, the trees, your home, the chair you're sitting on, the table before you, all of it, when it all ceases to exist? Not nothing—never nothing—but space, at least. Expansive space. And possibility.

Into that space something else can emerge.

Everett was talking about meditation, and his own daily practice of clearing psychic and imaginative space. But he was also talking about painting, and how and why his work ends up looking the way it does. His paintings, which I find uncomfortable, discordant, glitchy, restless, and permanently unresolved, are certainly not meditative, not in the usual sense of that word. They do not bring me calm; quite the opposite: they light a fire behind my eyes, and in my mind. They demand that I look closer, and be more attentive to what—and how—I am perceiving. They are hard work. And they are rewarding.

Everett has said that "Art should be about nothing," an idea, to me, more obstinately challenging than the commonplace, moralistic assertion of art's responsibility to mean something, of its duty of service to social and political efficacy. Everett's convictions are not politically derived, but philosophical: he is not interested in manifesting pre-existing ideas, formulated through language. Instead, he wants his art to forge a path into an otherwise inaccessible realm of phenomenological wilderness. "It should be an encounter with a U.F.O., an unknown object you have to work out how to come to terms with."

But nothing comes from nothing. A few years ago, Everett told me, he became uncomfortably aware of how his every mark, his every gesture, was mediated by the constant flow of stimulation around him. Learned language structures (virtually) all knowledge, and culture is threaded, like an invisible mycelium, around everything we can see or imagine. Everett considers this the "noise" he aims to silence in order to make his art. That is an impossible aspiration, he knows; "It will always be there, because no human can be human without the other. I can't erase that."



*untitled (the soothsayer), 2022*
Encre, huile, sable sur toile en lin · Ink, oil, sand on linen canvas, 152 x 198.1 cm

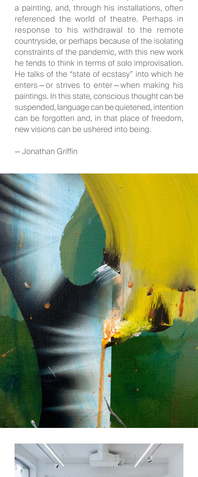
This aim might seem to be at odds with another intention he has for his work: to ground it in its time and place. Everett believes that such a grounding is a necessary constraint that allows for other embodiments of freedom and spontaneity to arise. In the case of the eleven new paintings in "the sun is their drum", these conditions are incorporated into their very form. Completed beneath the slanting Pacific light of winter 2022, when travelling across the Atlantic they take something of their birthplace with them. The title for this exhibition is based on the idea that ultraviolet light arrives via an infinitely complex system of reflection, refraction, vibration and collision (including with the Moon), all of which, Everett says, "generates a kind of rhythm that hypnotizes not just our experience of seeing but our general state of awareness."

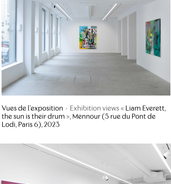
Everett lives with his family in rural northern California, close by a forest and not far from the ocean, and he works in a converted barn. When he moved into the space, he found all manner of tools that had been abandoned by the previous owner: saws, knives, axes, buckets, garbage cans, and other metalwork. He still regularly unearths such objects when digging his land. As with previous bodies of work, made in other studios that harboured different abandoned objects, here Everett arranges these items on his canvas and uses them as compositional devices, often misting ink or paint over them to reveal their silhouettes. He uses earth, dust and sand in a similar way, scattering it onto unstretched canvases placed on the floor. While his work clearly engages with the history of abstract painting, Everett does not think of it as abstract, but as almost painfully literal.

Titles, too, locate the paintings in the world of language, even if Everett insists that the words he appends to particular paintings have nothing to do with the external qualities of the work. To distinguish between one painting and another is mainly a practical convenience, he says. "I really see them all as different parts of the same process."

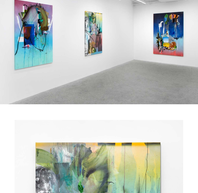
In earlier bodies of work, Everett focused our attention on the performative aspects of making a painting, and, through his installations, often referenced the world of theatre. Perhaps in response to his withdrawal to the remote countryside, or perhaps because of the isolating constraints of the pandemic, with this new work he tends to think in terms of solo improvisation. He talks of the "state of ecstasy" into which he enters—or strives to enter—when making his paintings. In this state, conscious thought can be suspended, language can be quietened, intention can be forgotten and, in that place of freedom, new visions can be ushered into being.

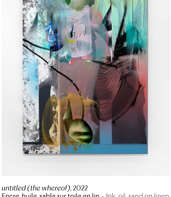
— Jonathan Griffin



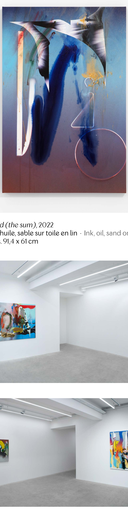


Vues de l'exposition · Exhibition views « Liam Everett, the sun is their drum » Mennour (5 rue du Pont de Lodi, Paris 6), 2023





*untitled (the wheeler), 2022*
Encre, huile, sable sur toile en lin · Ink, oil, sand on linen canvas, 94 x 149.9 cm



*untitled (the sum), 2022*
Encre, huile, sable sur toile en lin - Ink, oil, sand on linen canvas. 91,4 x 61 cm

LISTE DES ŒUVRES EXPOSÉES
LIST OF EXHIBITED WORKS



*untitled (the soothsayer), 2022*
Encre, huile, sable sur toile en lin - Ink, oil, sand on linen canvas
152,4 x 198,1 cm



*untitled (in the shadow of Thales), 2022*
Encre, huile, sable sur toile en lin - Ink, oil, sand on linen canvas
134,6 x 198,1 cm



*untitled (the tum), 2022*
Encre, huile, sable sur toile en lin - Ink, oil, sand on linen canvas
91,4 x 61 cm



*untitled (cool memories), 2022*
Encre, huile, sable sur toile en lin - Ink, oil, sand on linen canvas
94 x 149,9 cm



*untitled (the whereof), 2022*
Encre, huile, sable sur toile en lin - Ink, oil, sand on linen canvas
94 x 149,9 cm



*untitled (the familiars), 2022*
Encre, huile, sable sur toile en lin - Ink, oil, sand on linen canvas
129,5 x 198,1 cm



*untitled (the sum), 2022*
Encre, huile, sable sur toile en lin - Ink, oil, sand on linen canvas
91,4 x 61 cm



*untitled (the divers), 2022*
Encre, huile, sable sur toile en lin - Ink, oil, sand on linen canvas
94 x 149,9 cm

*untitled (the call), 2022*
Encre, huile, sable sur toile en lin - Ink, oil, sand on linen canvas
91,4 x 61 cm

*untitled (as the tone drew away), 2022*
Encre, huile, sable sur toile en lin - Ink, oil, sand on linen canvas
134,6 x 198,1 cm

*untitled (the passenger), 2022*
Encre, huile, sable sur toile en lin - Ink, oil, sand on linen canvas
94 x 149,9 cm

TRAILER DE L'EXPOSITION
EXHIBITION TRAILER

**FR** Né en 1973 à Rochester, New York, Liam Everett vit et travaille au nord de la Californie. Ses œuvres ont fait partie d'expositions au San Francisco Museum of Modern Art ; à la Biennale of Painting, Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgique ; LC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive ; San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art ; CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco.
Liam Everett a reçu le SECA Art Award au San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2017), le Richard Diebenkorn Teaching Fellowship au San Francisco Art Institute (2013) et le San Francisco Artadia Award (2013). Ses œuvres font partie d'importantes collections publiques internationales, telles que celles du Metropolitan Museum of Art; New York ; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art ; Dallas Museum of Art ; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes, France ; Fondation Carmignac, Paris ; Kistefos Museum, Jevnaker, Norvège; Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive.

**ENG** Born in 1973 in Rochester, New York, Liam Everett lives and works in Northern California. His work has been included in exhibitions at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Biennale of Painting, Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgium; LC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive; San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art; CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco.
Everett is the recipient of the SECA Art Award at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2017), the Richard Diebenkorn Teaching Fellowship at the San Francisco Art Institute (2013) and the San Francisco Artadia Award (2013). Everett's work is included in significant international public collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Dallas Museum of Art; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes, France; Fondation Carmignac, Paris; Kistefos Museum, Jevnaker, Norway, and LC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archives.

Pour toutes les œuvres · All works :
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Courtesy the artist and Mennour, Paris

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DATEBOOK
SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

# Bay Area museums, galleries back with big experiences this summer

Tony Bravo | June 17, 2021 Updated: June 19, 2021, 1:39 pm

Most art-going shrunk to screen-sized in 2020, as virtual exhibitions became pandemic stopgap measures during lockdown. But this summer, Bay Area museums and galleries are open, with plans to unveil big exhibitions featuring works by famed artists including Diego Rivera, Judy Chicago, Diane Arbus, teamLab and Hung Liu.

Some exhibitions were planned for 2020 and are finally getting their turn, interest aided no doubt by anticipation. Other offerings approach timely themes including identity, activism and the environment. Many also aim for the kind of in-person wow factor — either in scale, abundance of work or ambition — that reminds us why seeing art in person is essential.

It's enough to make you put away your smartphone.

Summer will also finally see the debut of two awaited museum expansion and remodel projects. This month, the **Oakland Museum of California's refreshed garden spaces** open to the public as the museum reopens for the first time since March 2020, with newly installed art and performance areas overlooking Lake Merritt. In July, the Asian Art Museum will finally open the new Akiko Yamazaki and Jerry Yang Pavilion with the immersive teamLab exhibition "Continuity."

If you haven't been going back out to museums and galleries yet, remember to pace yourself and check on any updates in their individual protocols. You've got the entire summer ahead of you to take it all in.

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Installation view of "Blanketing the Bay" by Liam Everett, 2021, Altman Siegel Gallery.
Photo: Impart Photography

# Altman Siegel

## 'Blanketing the Bay'

The exterior mural installation by artist Liam Everett seeks to bring the inside of his studio outside. The gallery's facade is wrapped in images of Everett's paintings while in progress, while blown-up black-and-white photographs further reveal the studio setting. Color images in the mural show details of paintings like brushstrokes and impressions on the canvas. The project is a collaboration between ICA San Jose, Altman Siegel and Minnesota Street Project.

*On view through Aug. 28. Free, by appointment. 1150 25th St., S.F.* ***altmansiegel.com***

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San Francisco Chronicle

Desmarais, Charles, "Gallery roundup: Altman Siegel," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 12, 2018

**Altman Siegel Gallery**, 1150 25th St. (www.altmansiegel.com), is presenting "Liam Everett: 'Fais semblant qu'on n'est pas ici'" through March 3. Painted cloths draped, apparently haphazardly, over large frames suggest stage backdrops. Or, perhaps, they are personages in tattered veils, formally dancing or facing off. They are surrounded, as if being observed (surveilled? or watched over?) by Everett's signature abstract canvases, remnants of painterly decisions made and reconsidered, enhanced by oxidized metal scars and other controlled accidents.

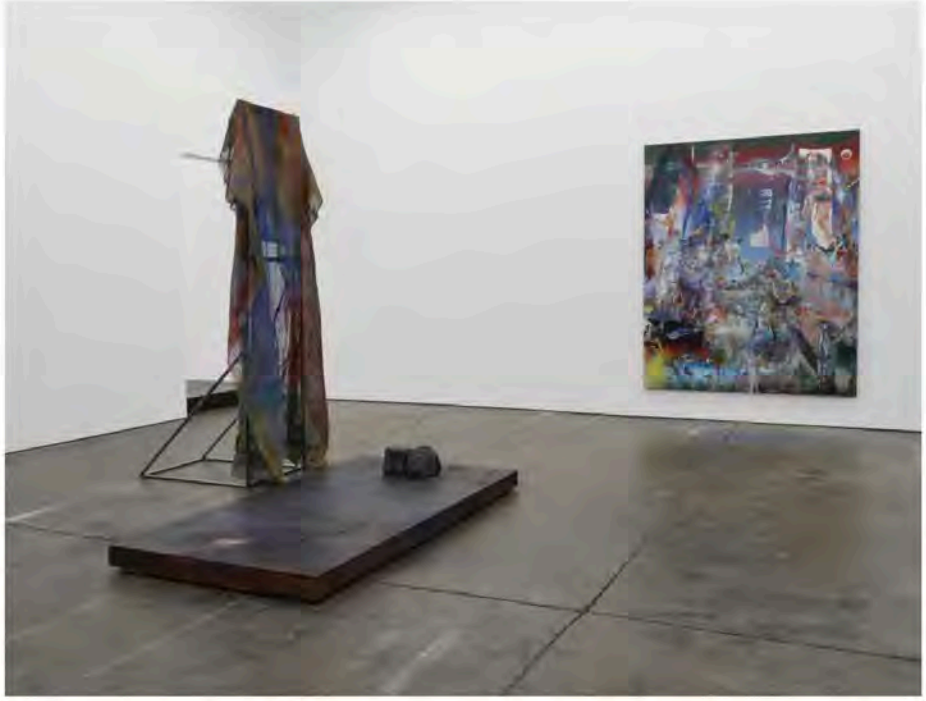


Photo: Altman Siegel

An installation view of Liam Everett's "Fais semblant quon nest pas ici" (2018) at Altman Siegel, San Francisco.

# ALICIA McCARTHY

# LINDSEY WHITE

# LIAM EVERETT

# K.R.M. MOONEY

# SEAN McFARLAND

2017
SECA Art Award

# LIAM EVERETT

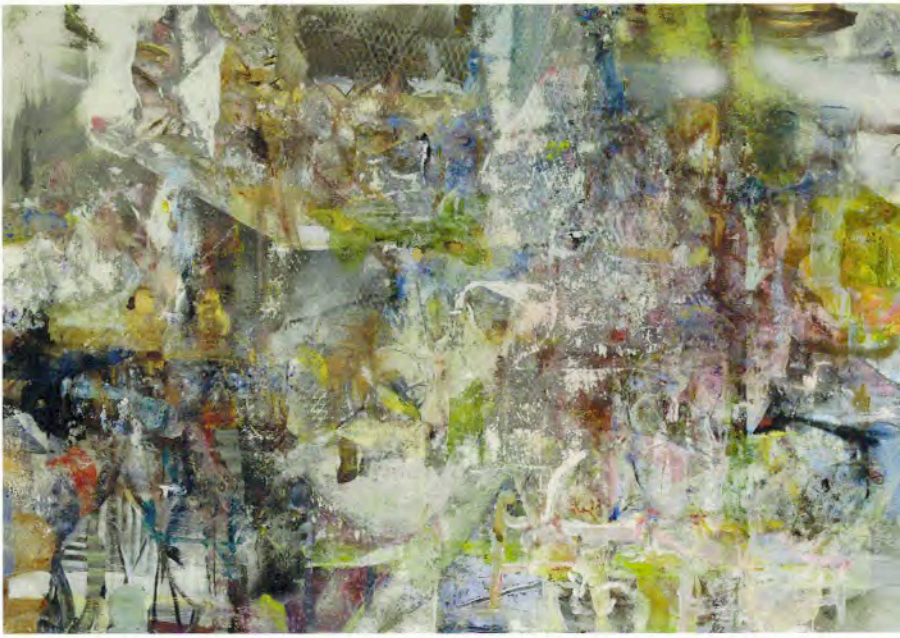
01 – Liam Everett, *Untitled (Naxos)*, 2015 (detail). Acrylic paint, enamel paint, alcohol, and salt on linen, 77 × 60 in. (195.6 × 152.4 cm). Courtesy the artist and Altman Siegel, San Francisco

In Samuel Beckett's play *Endgame* (1957), each of the four characters has a physical restriction: One cannot see or stand, and another cannot sit. Two are missing legs and live in garbage cans. All are caught in a circuitous loop of repetitive rituals, even though the first line of the play—"Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished"—seems to signal imminent completion. Beckett's writing has become an increasingly important touchstone for Liam Everett, whose working methods and philosophy of continuous rehearsal reflect the concepts of restriction, repetition, and endless progression that drive *Endgame*.[1]

Everett's studio is structured around constraint and persistent movement. The tables, which are at "gut level," have wheels affixed to their legs; a stool and a ladder serve as "props" or "obstacles," not places to perch. At the beginning and end of each day the space is cleaned and organized. Everett always has several paintings in process, and they too must stay in motion, frequently shifting from the floor to the wall to the tables outside—a practice that inevitably alters his physical relationships to his compositions as he works alternately on top of, up against, or leaning over them. Influenced by contemporary dance, his gestures are deliberate yet immediate responses to his studio environment. His intent is to stay in the moment, encouraged by a rule-based armature. Instead of brushes he uses objects that he finds near his studio such as metal fencing, sticks, or debris, which he positions in such a way that he is forced to make marks with or through them, yielding unpredictable shifts in rhythm and speed. These changes keep him destabilized, spontaneously pushing him toward the materiality of his paintings and away from conceptual frameworks and ideas.

Everett's compositions are built up with and worn down from these improvised actions. And like the physical process he sets up for himself, the materials that he employs are meant to incite instability. Marks are made with a combination of acrylic and enamel paints, alcohol, and salt. Typically used to preserve or clean, salt and alcohol have acidic properties and act as dissolving agents. They weaken the binding agents in the paint, stripping the color and distressing the surface. His works often spend time outside and are thus further shaped by the landscape and weather of Northern California.

Adding to this is Everett's layering of mark on top of mark, painting on top of painting. As he sands and scrapes, traces of previous states cause unexpected fluctuations in line and tone. "Where is the threshold?" is a question the artist frequently asks of himself and his compositions. He works the surfaces until he no longer recognizes them, explaining, "There's an opening, something reveals itself, and what's revealed is foreign to me. Then I can learn something from it. Then I can let it go."[2] When he paints on canvas—rather than on Masonite boards, on vinyl, or on other fabrics that are supported by the wood and sticks he used to apply the pigment—he sends it out to be stretched. "Almost 99 percent of the time I don't see the paintings until they arrive in the gallery," he has said.



"And this is the final restriction for me because if I stretch them myself I have control somehow. I have what I think of as 'the finish.'"[3]

Everett's compositions often stand, lean, or hang freely against the wall or on the floor (see fig. 04), lending them a distinct dramatic sensibility. For his installation at SFMOMA he has covered the floor with plywood panels on which he once rested props and tools in his studio. The wood has absorbed the outlines of the color-soaked implements, stained by numerous random encounters. Installed edge to edge, this stage-like platform transforms the neutral gallery environment into an emotive space where the dark hues beneath visitors' feet shift alongside the natural light emitted from the openings in the ceiling above.

Such stage-like structures are familiar for Everett, who performs and has a background in theater.[4] He has likened his artistic practice to a continuous rehearsal, exemplified by the importance he places on constant movement and "releas[ing] work that is still working."[5] Twice a week his installation incorporates performative actions that embody this philosophy of rehearsal and "invite a permanent state of evolution."[6] In the first, a man

03—Liam Everett, *Untitled*, 2013. Acrylic paint, ink, salt, and alcohol on maple panel in artist's frame, 17 × 12¾ in. (43.2 × 32.4 cm) (framed). Courtesy the artist and Altman Siegel, San Francisco

02 (opposite)—Liam Everett, *Untitled (Cloghanmore)*, 2016. Oil, acrylic paint, salt, and alcohol on vinyl, 78 x 112 in. (198.1 x 284.5 cm). Private collection

positions his body in relation to one of Everett's paintings. Everett sees the canvases themselves as taking on physical movements—the large horizontal work is "in recline or falling," the rondo "signals the 'turning-returning' figure," and the painting that leans is a "body 'up-against' or 'on-reserve'"[7]; they are thus, in a sense, partners in their activation. On a second day San Francisco–based choreographer Hope Mohr rehearses alongside two of her dancers. By bringing movement into the gallery, Everett pushes the dramatic potential that has been building in his work further than ever before.

**—Jenny Gheith**

1
The title of Everett's exhibition *If I could sleep I might make love. I'd go into the woods. My eyes would see . . . the sky, the earth. I'd run, run, they wouldn't catch me* (2012–13) at Altman Siegel, San Francisco, was taken from *Endgame*.

2
Liam Everett in Kenneth Caldwell, "Liam Everett" (interview), Kenneth Caldwell: Communications for the Design Industry, May 1, 2014, http://www.kennethcaldwell.com/liam-everett/.

3
Liam Everett in Jeff McMillan, "Liam Everett" (interview), *SFAQ* no. 16 (May–July 2014): 98.

4
Everett's first stage performance was in Peter Sheridan's staging of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1952/1953), in which he played the boy.

5
Liam Everett in "Liam Everett—panem et Circen," YouTube video, 7:01 min., posted by Kamel Mennour, Paris, February 14, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10OldoDKpcQ.

6
Liam Everett SECA exhibition proposal, January 31, 2017. Exhibition files for *2017 SECA Art Award: Alicia McCarthy, Lindsey White, Liam Everett, K.r.m. Mooney, Sean McFarland*, SFMOMA Department of Painting and Sculpture and Department of Photography.

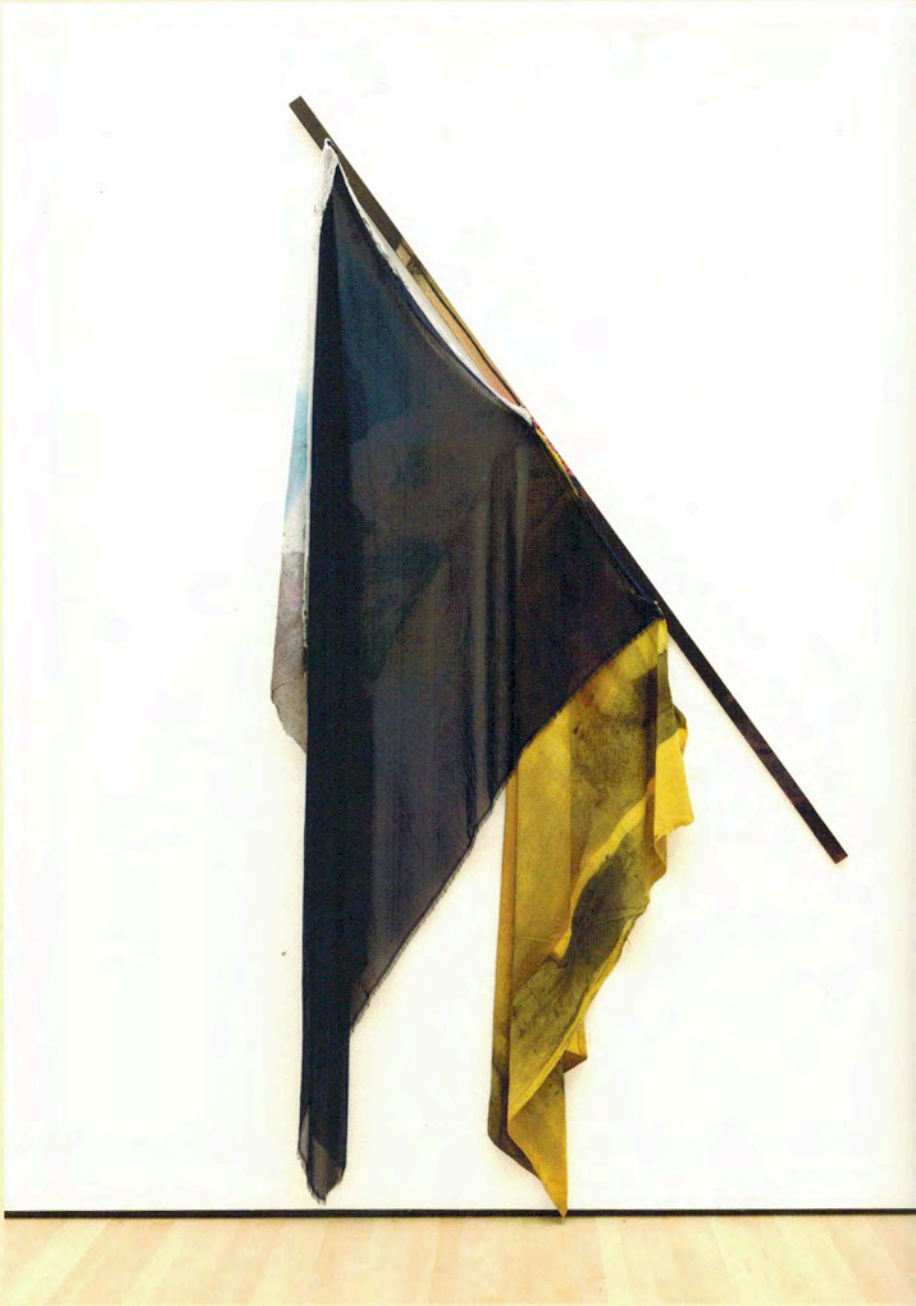
7
Ibid.

# In Conversation with Liam Everett

Excerpted from an interview conducted at Everett's studio in Sebastopol, California, on February 3, 2017.

**Erin O'Toole: I've heard you say that you work without preconceived ideas guiding what you create. Why do you resist ideas, and what do you do to prevent them from creeping into your practice?**

Liam Everett: For years I was chasing ideas. Perhaps I wasn't a Conceptual artist per se, but I was definitely cultivating ideas and then executing them. I found that I began to live in a vacuum in which perhaps the ideas were potent but the actions weren't, because they were secondary.



04—Liam Everett, *Untitled*, 2012. Fabric, poplar, ink, and salt, 115 × 55 in. (292.1 × 139.7 cm). San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Accessions Committee Fund purchase

I prevent ideas from creeping in by applying a series of flexible restrictions that are always changing. Originally the inspiration came from contemporary dance. There are moments in a performance when a dancer makes a movement, and if you're watching carefully, you can see the intention of that movement and the action itself happening simultaneously. When the idea and the action are fused, a kind of power arises. This is exactly what I want to incite in the studio. I don't want to be before the work; I don't want to be after it. I want to be right up in it.

**So it's primarily a question of being present?**
Hyper-present. And I'm not a yogi, I'm not Zen, so I have to come up with these primitive regulations or restrictions. The irony is that out of this restrictive practice, a freedom rises up. And this can only happen when I am present. This immediate channel turns into what we might call, for lack of a better word, "pre-time."

**It's interesting that you say you're not a yogi because your practice seems analogous in some ways to yoga—you learn a series of poses, you do them over and over again, and through that practice you come to find nuance.**
I say I'm not a yogi because I don't have a yoga practice, but the philosophy of yoga has had a huge effect on me. I find if I set up my practice in such a way that I'm using my body, a balance is achieved. If, for example, I put a steel fence between myself and a painting, I can't simply think through it. I have to physically push through it. It calls up this other way of seeing, one that is directed by the body. And I feel that if I don't set up a practice that calls for this kind of labor-intensive process, that other way of seeing becomes dormant. When one engages "body-seeing," one invites the potential of being seen by the world, which can be incredibly powerful and frightening.

**I think a lot of people have trouble being present these days. It's part of the current condition: with so much of our lives conducted virtually, people feel a little disembodied and less present. Do you feel like you're reacting against that, specifically?**
Absolutely. Not that I saw this coming, but I've been reacting against it, I feel, my whole life. When you asked that question you were actually being a little light on it, because I don't think we are a little bit not here; I think we are not at all here. This is not a defect—it is now an integrated part of our existence. We're ahead, or at the very least we're elsewhere. My practice is a reaction to this condition.

**You've said that you make several paintings at once and that each is composed of many layers. What is your process for building them up?**
I don't allow myself to work on one piece at a time because if I do, I start moving into a concept-based formula in which my actions are always lagging behind ideas. The layering has nothing to do with process. It is actually staked in a practice related to rehearsal. I want to recognize the presence of repetition, to witness a series of returns. I'm rehearsing and redoing until I don't see where I'm going with the work or until I'm confronted with something that is uncomfortable, something other, something that can only be inherent to the work itself. It is not motivated by a visual or formal interest. Instead my intention is to incite a mood, a kind of physical-emotional state that is almost overwhelming or destabilizing.

**Whereas yogis do their asanas over and over again, without striving toward an end, you are making paintings that eventually go out into the world. Even if you are not consciously working toward the idea of completion, you do stop working at a certain point. How do you know when to stop?**
I don't want to move toward completion or conclusion. I stop when I don't recognize the work or, rather, when I don't recognize myself in it. Ideally there is a confrontation that arises, a point when the work confronts me, refuses me, and appears to be questioning my very presence in the studio.

**When you're thinking about an installation that will exist in a specific place for a particular period of time, and your practice is ultimately about working against completeness and conclusive statements, how do you create an installation that is open enough for you?**
I ask myself this question all the time. If I had an answer for it, I would probably stop practicing. This question is at the bottom of every project. What I try to do is look for other questions as a response. If I can respond with more questions to that kind of pivotal concern, it becomes even more exciting, daunting, challenging, and intimate.

**Liam Everett**

Born in 1973 in Rochester, New York, Everett received an MFA from California College of the Arts (CCA), Oakland (2012). He has had solo exhibitions at Kamel Mennour, Paris (2017); Altman Siegel, San Francisco (2012–13 and 2016); Eleni Koroneou Gallery, Athens (2015); Office Baroque, Brussels (2015); On Stellar Rays, New York (2014); Paul Kasmin Gallery, New York (2011); and White Columns, New York (2009). His work has been included in group exhibitions such as *A Slow Succession with Many Interruptions*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2016–17); *Biennale of Painting*, Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Deurle, Belgium (2016); *I Know You Got Soul*, Arndt Singapore (2015); *The Presence of the Present*, di Rosa, Napa (2014–15); and *Color Shift*, UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (2014). He has also exhibited at venues such as Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito, California (2013); San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art (2013); CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco (2012); and 303 Gallery, New York (2010). Everett has received the Richard Diebenkorn Teaching Fellowship at the San Francisco Art Institute (2013) and the San Francisco Artadia Award (2013). He lives and works in Sebastopol, California.

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SFMOMA

# Context and Meaning: Looking at Art through a Post-Election Lens

*by* Craig Corpora

> "Every meaning requires a support, or a vehicle, or a holder. These are the bearers of meaning, and without them no meaning would cross from me to you, or from you to me, or indeed from any part of nature to any other part."
>
> GEORGE KUBLER, *THE SHAPE OF TIME*

In his 1962 book *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*, art historian George Kubler describes the interconnectedness of objects through shared ideas across time and examines how the past can influence the creation of new "things." He explains that meaning requires a physical form for content to be expressed; without its representational object — or in the case of language, words and sounds — meaning would not exist. Artists often use physical forms and formal elements as a "support, vehicle, or holder" to express the content of their works, which can be linked to larger cultural or political ideas. But meaning is not static; it continues to evolve over time in relation to the historical context in which the work is viewed.

Taking its name from a passage in Kubler's seminal book, the exhibition *A Slow Succession with Many Interruptions*, organized by assistant curator Jenny Gheith, considers artworks created in the twenty-first century from this perspective, looking at how they embody time and how they have been shaped by cultural and personal events from the recent or distant past. I worked closely with Jenny on the exhibition and have found my understanding of the works on view shifting since we began preparing the show — more specifically, since the presidential election last November and the emergence of widespread resistance against the new administration's policies. Two works in particular stand out.

Liz Larner's gangly seven-foot-tall sculpture *RWBs* (2005) is composed of countless aluminum tubes that the artist found in a Los Angeles salvage yard.

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Larner has said, "There's a direct relationship between the material I chose to make the form of the sculpture and the aluminum-tube story that brought us to war." The story she refers to is the claim by the Bush Administration in 2001–2 that the purchase of aluminum tubes by the Iraqi government provided "irrefutable evidence" that Saddam Hussein was gathering materials to enrich uranium for a nuclear bomb. This false information was used to justify the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Larner's twisted, tangled mass of tubes reflects both the contortions of the truth that led to the war and the chaos that followed Hussein's overthrow, while the outstretched tentacles, reaching beyond the confines of the work's monstrous form, suggests the U.S. government's interventionist tendencies in the world. Larner outfitted each of the tubes with a hand-sewn red, white, and blue fabric sleeve — a reference, she has explained, to flag-draped coffins, cheerleading outfits, gas-station banners, and other aspects of our everyday lives that are imbued with concepts of patriotism, nationalistic fervor, and American hegemony.

Installed near *RWBs* is Liam Everett's *Untitled* (2012), consisting of three swatches of ink-dyed fabric that are delicately fastened to a poplar pole. Everett used salt to bleach color from the textiles and then hung them on this support to dry. The colors aren't fixed; they are fugitive, staining the wood. The artist has stated that his work is guided by practice, not ideas, and the resulting object can be thought of as an indexical record of its own making. However, with its loosely draped forms adhered to an angled pole, its relationship to a flag is undeniable.

Liam Everett, *Untitled*, 2012; collection SFMOMA, Accessions Committee Fund purchase; © Liam Everett

But signs are slippery, meaning is mutable, and content is intrinsically connected to context. Since Donald Trump's election, he and his administration have promised increased military spending, threatened another nuclear arms race with Russia, and hinted at a war with Iran, which has ushered in a new wave of domestic and global anxiety. Concurrently, there has been an unprecedented wave of protests against Trump and his policies. An estimated five million people in more than eighty countries took to the streets for the Women's March in January. Large demonstrations erupted in airports all over the United States the day after Trump signed an executive order banning travel and immigration from seven Muslim-majority countries. Banners, handmade signs, and flags have become an increasingly visible symbol of resistance. In this context, Everett's *Untitled* and Larner's *RWBs* take on new meaning, particularly as they relate to each other within the exhibition.

Women's March on Washington, January 21, 2017; photo: David Atkinson

Like Trump's America, *RWBs* clumsily makes its presence known. We are confronted by the sculpture's gargantuan size, out of proportion to its surroundings, hinting at the perception of the United States elsewhere in the world. Like our new president, *RWBs* appears threatening, dangerous, and unpredictable. (Presciently, Larner included a few red power ties among the tubes' sleeves.) In direct opposition to the sculpture, Everett's *Untitled* becomes a flag — not of a specific country, ethnicity, or religion, but one that represents the unrepresented, a flag of defiance and dissent. The gauzy material looks distressed and worn, and its colors have bled. It has been to battle but is still standing strong. Though pinned against the gallery wall, *Untitled* is positioned in direct resistance to the oversize, tangled mess of American imperialism and aggression.

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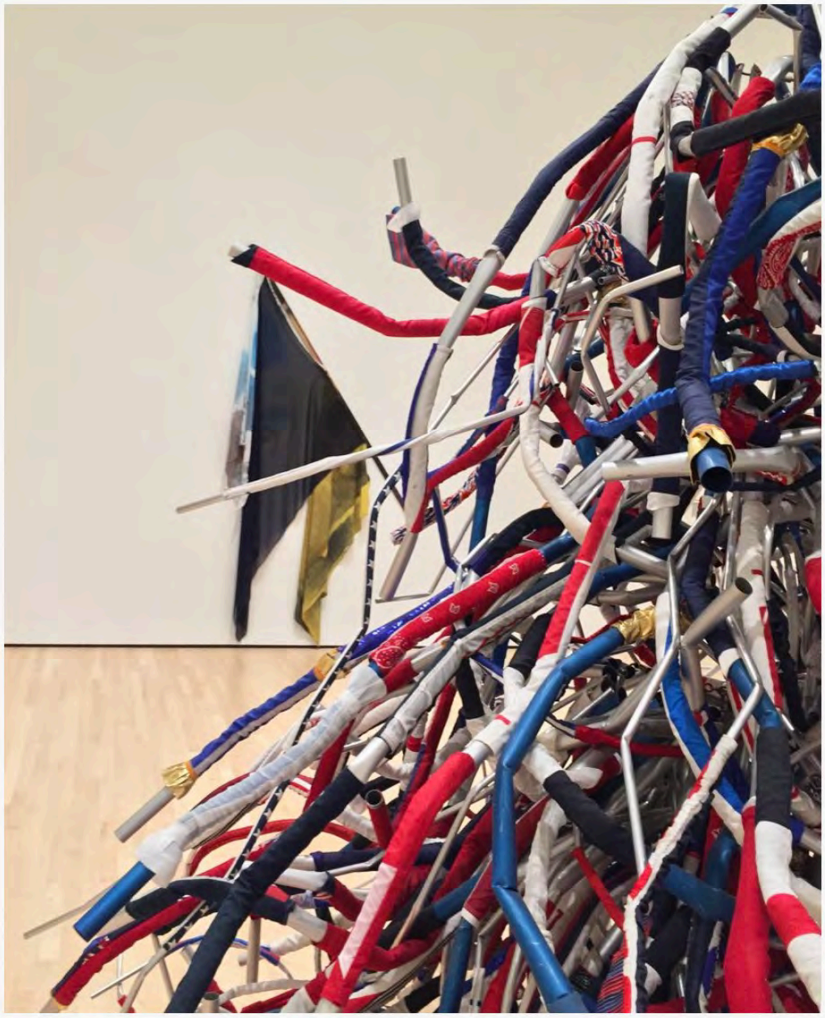

Liz Larner's *RWBs* (2005, foreground) and Liam Everett's *Untitled (*2012, on wall), installed in *A Slow Succession with Many Interruptions*, SFMOMA, 2016–17; photo: Craig Corpora

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Whiting, Sam, "Meeting the winners of 2017 SECA Art Award at SFMOMA," *The San Francisco Chronicle*, June 29, 2017

# Meeting the winners of 2017 SECA Art Award at SFMOMA

By Sam Whiting | June 29, 2017 | Updated: June 30, 2017 2:31pm

Photo: George Wells

IMAGE 3 OF 7
Liam Everett, Untitled (The tide came up to his knees), 2017, from the SECA Art Awards at SFMOMA.

The Society for the Encouragement of Contemporary Art Award was created by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1967. Every five years since then, SFMOMA has recognized five emerging Bay Area artists and given them a group show at the museum.

This year, 250 applicants were winnowed to 16 finalists, from which five were selected to make their major museum debut on July 15.

To honor the 50th anniversary of the award, we reached back to the late 1960s when the famous "Dewar's Profiles" advertising campaign was launched, and put the 2017 winners through a similar line of questioning.

*Sam Whiting is a San Francisco Chronicle staff writer. Email: swhiting@sfchronicle.com Instagram: @sfchronicle_art*

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Photo: Russell Yip, The Chronicle

Artist Liam Everett, who is one of this year's SECA Art Award winners, works on a piece in his studio in Sebastopol.

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ARTDEPENDENCE
MAGAZINE

"An Interview with Liam Everett," *Artdependence Magazine*, Dirk Vanduffel, March 19, 2017

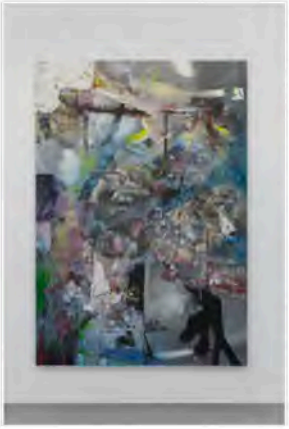
**March 2017, Cover Stories, Interviews**

## "My paintings are constructed forms that shift between light and dark..." - an interview with Liam Everett

**By Dirk Vanduffel** ***Sun, Mar 19, 2017***

10

*During a January visit to Paris I had the unexpected pleasure of visiting the Kamel Mennour Gallery to view an exhibition of the works of Liam Everett. The gallery's warm hospitality combined with Liam's fantastic work made the entire experience unforgettable.*



During a January visit to Paris I had the unexpected pleasure of visiting the Kamel Mennour Gallery to view an exhibition of the works of Liam Everett. The gallery's warm hospitality combined with Liam's fantastic work made the entire experience unforgettable.

Sometimes, not often, you fall totally "in love" at first sight. Standing in front of Liam's work in Kamel Mennour Gallery, it happened all over me.

It had everything and nothing, the paintings were more realistic than any realist paintings I know and yet more abstract than the work of leading abstract artists. It was an intriguing experience. During my visit I had the privilege of speaking with Liam. I was struck by the passion and depth of his words, the clarity he used to explain something that feels almost unexplainable. I realised instantly: I need him in our magazine. I need to follow him.

I hope you will be as curious as me to follow the path of this great artist. Thanks Liam! "Tu autem vade".

***DV: Liam, I would like to start by asking where your interest in painting comes from. I understand you were not educated in an art school.***

LE: My interest in painting developed out of an early experience with the theatre. When I was a teenager, I landed a part in Samuel Beckett's play Waiting for Godot. It was during this time that I began drawing and building things, perhaps as a way to make sense of a play that, at the time, appeared completely abstract to me. A few years later I began painting. It appealed to me from the very beginning because of the immediacy and physicality involved. Many of the things I do today in the studio can be traced directly back to the methods of practice I learned in the theater.

***DV: I want to avoid asking you about the most important moments in your career, those that have defined you up to this point. What I would really like to know is what, if any, were the most difficult moments in your career?***

LE: The most challenging moments of my career came when I first moved to NYC. They are likely to be the same problems that most artists face at the beginning of their career: lack of financial stability, difficulty finding a proper studio, problems establishing a community in order to generate dialogue and critical support. Looking back, it seems that whenever I have been able to work through a challenging period with my practice, there is always another potential difficulty waiting around the corner. Over the years I've become more flexible with this, maybe even embracing the various forms of resistance as a method of growth.

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Liam Everett, Untitled (Eightercua), 2016. Huile, acrylique, sel, alcool sur vinyle enduit de gesso / Oil, acrylic, salt, alcohol on gessoed vinyl. 200,7 x 139,7 cm. Vue de l'exposition / View of the exhibition « panem et Circen », kamel mennour (47 rue Saint-André des arts), Paris, 2017. © Liam Everett. Photo. Julie Joubert & archives kamel mennour. Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour, Paris/London

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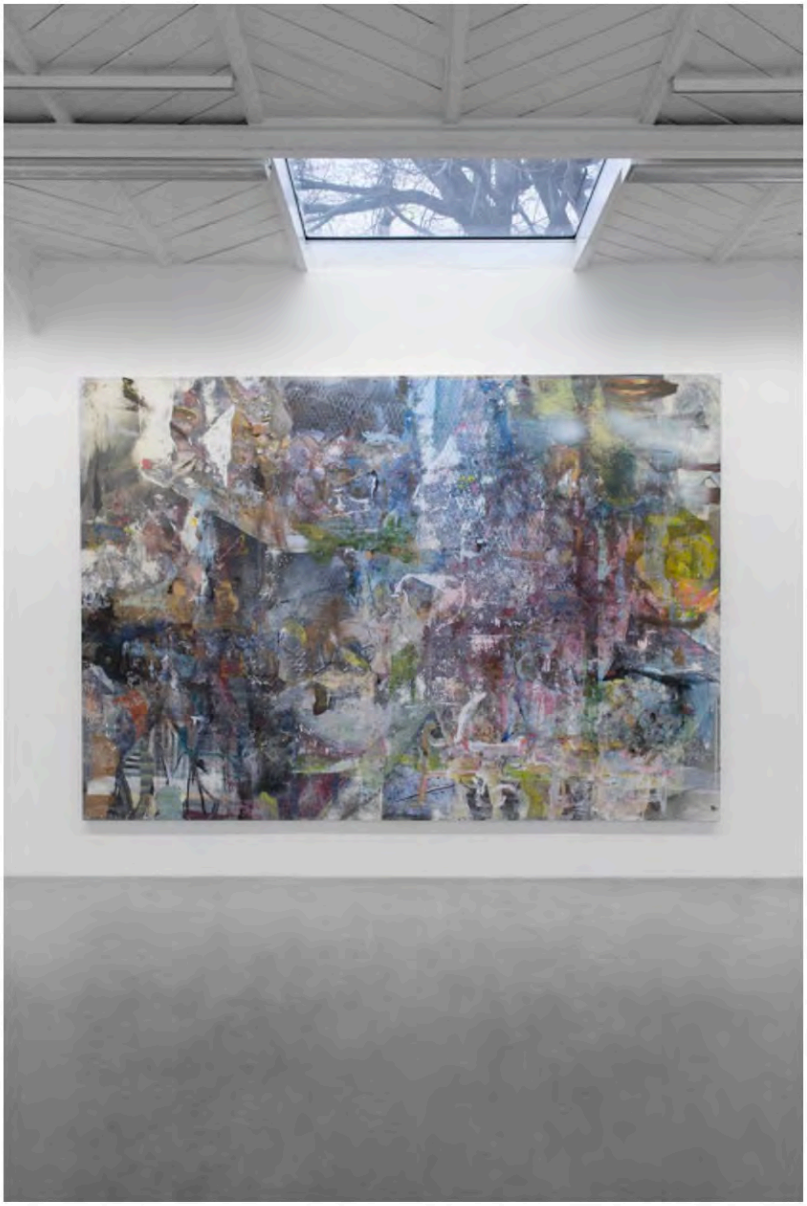
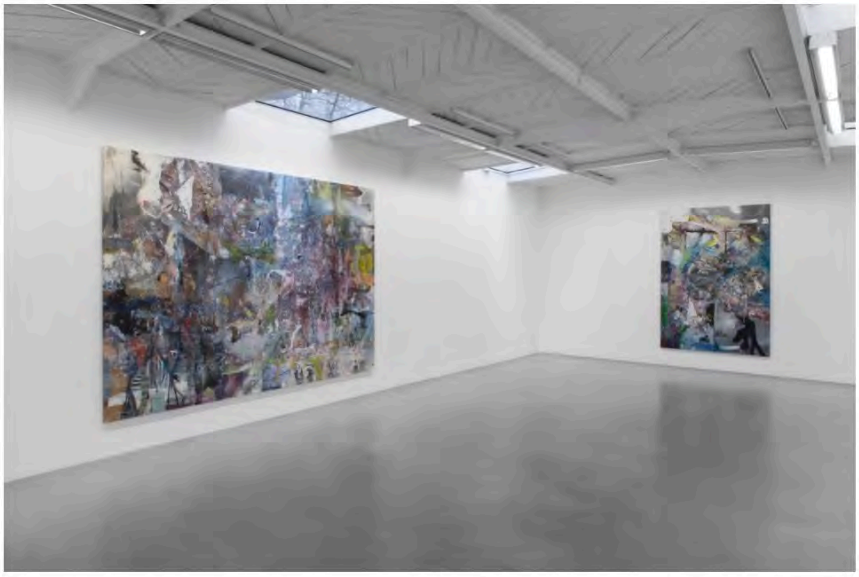


Liam Everett, Untitled (Cloghanmore), 2016. Huile, acrylique, sel, alcool sur vinyle enduit de gesso / Oil, acrylic, salt, alcohol on gessoed vinyl. 198,1 x 284,5 cm. Vue de l'exposition / View of the exhibition « panem et Circen », kamel mennour (47 rue Saint-André des arts), Paris, 2017. © Liam Everett. Photo. Julie Joubert & archives kamel mennour. Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour, Paris/London



Liam Everett. Untitled (Cloghanmore), 2016. Huile, acrylique, sel, alcool sur vinyle enduit de gesso / Oil, acrylic, salt, alcohol on gessoed vinyl. 198,1 x 284,5 cm. Untitled (Eightercua), 2016. Huile, acrylique, sel, alcool sur vinyle enduit de gesso / Oil, acrylic, salt, alcohol on gessoed vinyl. 200,7 x 139,7 cm. Vue de l'exposition / View of the exhibition « panem et Circen », kamel mennour (47 rue Saint-André des arts), Paris, 2017. © Liam Everett. Photo. Julie Joubert & archives kamel mennour. Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour, Paris/London

***DV: Looking at your impressive CV there are so many activities and exhibitions. How do you keep this organized?***

LE: Over the past few years I've been extremely fortunate to be working with galleries that are supportive and conscious of prioritizing projects in such a way that the practice is protected above all else.

***DV: Your work is being collected and shown by many museums around the world. Do you remember the first time a museum collected your work? And your first exhibition in a gallery? How did this change you? How did you feel?***

LE: My first gallery show and museum acquisition brought an undeniable sense of affirmation, but what was most significant to me was that they provided the opportunity for the work to engage in a conversation with the work of other artists and viewers, thereby giving it a critical context. That couldn't have happened in the studio.

I recently had the pleasure of seeing one of my works (having been acquired by SFMoma) included in the exhibition "A slow succession with many interruptions", curated by Jenny Geith. The experience of seeing this earlier work within the context of the exhibition and the museum had an incredible effect on the way I view my present work, so much so that I have begun to change course and re-examine earlier questions that have now been abounded.

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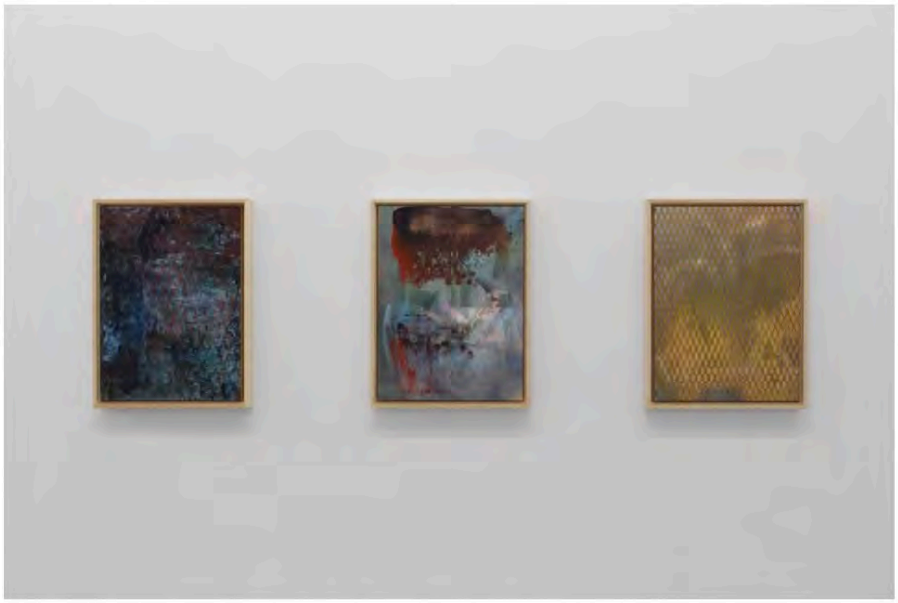
***DV: I looked extensively at your work at Kamel Mennour Gallery in Paris. It is a fantastic exhibition. I've thought about it a lot in the past few weeks. In a way, your work is abstract, it is absolutely not realistic but yet, I was able to see figures in it. Would you allow me to say your work is abstract realism, or impressionist realism?***

LE: Abstract realism sounds relevant, although I don't really think of my paintings as images or visual documents. Instead, my experience is that the paintings are grounded entirely in the present and therefore completely derived from the immediate environment and/or original reality of the studio itself. They are constructed forms that shift between light and dark, hot and cold, fast and slow. Certainly there are figurative elements that appear and disappear, although this occurs more as a by-product of my actions and process.

Liam Everett, Untitled (Actinolite), 2016. Huile, acrylique, sel, alcool sur vinyle monté sur panneau / Oil, acrylic, salt, alcohol on vinyl mounted on panel 40,6 x 30,5 cm (panneau / panel). 43,8 x 33,7 cm (encadré / framed). Vue de l'exposition / View of the exhibition « panem et Circen », kamel mennour (47 rue Saint-André des arts), Paris, 2017. © Liam Everett. Photo. Julie Joubert & archives kamel mennour. Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour, Paris/London



Liam Everett, Untitled (Baotite), 2016. Huile, acrylique, sel, alcool sur vinyle monté sur panneau / Oil, acrylic, salt, alcohol on vinyl mounted on panel. 40,6 x 30,5 cm (panneau / panel) 43,8 x 33,7 cm (encadré / framed). Untitled (Tinzenite), 2016. Huile, acrylique, sel, alcool sur vinyle monté sur panneau / Oil, acrylic, salt, alcohol on vinyl mounted on panel. 43,8 x 33,7 cm (panneau / panel). 43,8 x 33,7 cm (encadré / framed). Untitled (Helvine), 2016. Huile, acrylique, sel, alcool sur vinyle monté sur panneau / Oil, acrylic, salt, alcohol on vinyl mounted on panel. 40,6 x 30,5 cm (panneau / panel). 43,8 x 33,7 cm (encadré / framed). Vue de l'exposition / View of the exhibition « panem et Circen », kamel mennour (47 rue Saint-André des arts), Paris, 2017. © Liam Everett. Photo. Julie Joubert & archives kamel mennour. Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour, Paris/London

***DV: At Kamel Mennour Gallery you described your painting process to me. It was a pretty "complicated" or "different" approach. Can you explain it to me again?***

LE: As a way of working without a true beginning or a proper idea, each painting is generated out of a series of initial layers in which I am simply place random objects that are native to the studio (buckets, sticks, string, wood scraps etc) on top of linen or whatever other substrate I am working with. After different arrangements, I spray ink and soak acrylic mediums around these objects, leaving the outlines and silhouette of their form. The result of these first layers is a kind of crude archive of all the objects present in my surroundings. Following this first phase I begin to apply paint, salt and raw clay in such a way that the marks are being guided by the first series of sprays and stains made from the studio objects. After several months of accumulation, during which each painting has upwards of 30-40 layers on the surface, the works reach a threshold. The linen itself begins to buckle and in some instances even collapses due to the accumulation of paint and debris. It is this 'threshold' that I'm always working towards. It is also at this point that I begin to subtract and remove, layer by layer, via sanding and various forms of abrasion, as well as sun bleaching, and salt/alcohol washes. This aspect of the practice is grounded in a desire to review or back track, to intimately re-discover how a painting becomes a painting and has the potential to remain a painting as opposed to a thing that has been painted.

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***DV: How is working in New York different to working in Northern California?***

LE: The single biggest difference for me has been the physical space. Once I began working in Northern California my sense of scale was radically altered and things opened up dramatically. This was partially due to the dynamic landscape of my immediate surroundings - the ocean, mountains and tree line. Before moving here I had been living in New York City and working in a tiny studio in the heart of Chinatown. Intellectually there are also several differences, although I have found that these are dwarfed by the environmental shift.

***DV: What are your upcoming plans?***

LE: I'm now working on new paintings for a solo show at Eleni Koroneou gallery in Athens. It's set to open in April. Additionally I am developing an installation for the SECA exhibition that will open in July at SFMoma.

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Lutz, Leora, "Liam Everett: 'The Elephant Calf' at Altman Siegel," *Art ltd*, May 2016

Archeology can loosely be defined as the study of civilizations and the history of people through the examination of excavated geological sites. In contrast, architecture is the process of designing and constructing habitats. Reminiscent of both architecture and archeology, artist Liam Everett approaches his new series of paintings through a rigorous process akin to building and excavation. Like an historical documenter, he works on all the canvases at once—each individual piece becomes complete in its own time as if stopping at that moment when sacred ground has been discovered. Everett's new large-scale paintings are on view at Altman Siegel gallery in an exhibition titled "The Elephant Calf," after Bertolt Brecht's 1926 play of the same name. The play was originally presented as an appendix to a longer play "Man Equals Man," a surrealist farce. Brecht envisioned the smaller play presented in the foyer of the longer play; a "play within a play." As such, Everett approaches his art practice as "play/farce" with materials and process, foregrounded by the context of a larger whole: life and our surroundings. His indoor/outdoor studio in Sebastopol is the perfect habitat to use discarded pieces of the suburbs as tools for his expeditions that take place on the canvas.

Techniques such as pressing painted plastics and peeling them away, using grates or pieces of construction sites as stencils, and applying industrial spray paint as well as thick brushstrokes all form his lexicon of gesture. Throughout the blasts of color, white shows through after vigorous sanding, creating a texture that causes the eye to jump around the canvas. In this way, there is no focal point but instead a pulsating rhythm that creeps forward and recedes at each gaze, on par with the Mark Rothko's contemplative near-monochromes or Helen Frankenthaler's energetic color fields. All of the work is untitled, with subtitles referencing Native North and South American tribal lands, seemingly linked to abstract ideas of place and identity with a nod to the concept of archeology. *Untitled (Nakbe)*(2016) is the most stunning piece, particularly poetic as it is bold, with vivid blue and purple tones dominating a field scattered with glints of white where the paint has been sanded all the way down to the primer. It is as if digging to unearth buried treasure only reveals solid marbleat the bottom to be the most beautiful discovery of all.

Image: *Untitled (Nakbe)*, 2016, **Liam Everett**
Acrylic, enamel, alcohol, and salt on oil primed linen
77" x 56½"

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SF WEEKLY

"Art: Elephant in the Room," by Jonathan Curiel, *SF Weekly*, March 16, 2016

Liam Everett jokes about all the behind-the-scenes "neuroses" that go into making his otherworldly paintings. During the many months it takes to complete a series of works, Everett never sits down — there's no place to sit in his studio, anyway — as he puts things on wheels, and prods, chafes, scrapes, sands, and dabs his linen canvases over and over again. When the process is complete, Everett has someone else stretch his canvases into the finished versions that show up in galleries — which deliberately distorts the paintings in ways that will shock Everett.

Then there are the paintings' names, like *Untitled (Tikal)*and *Untitled (Mitla)*, that suggest tangible connections to historic geographies but are chosen randomly and designed to play with art-goers' imaginations — and with Everett's. What you think you see with Liam Everett's painting is not quite what you get. The works are both complete and*incomplete* — inhabiting a state of existential limbo that borrows from Everett's theater background, which includes a childhood stint where he performed in Samuel Beckett's most famous play, *Waiting for Godot*.

"I'm very interested in the possibility of a work that's always working, instead of a work that's been worked," says Everett, who's also a playwright, and whose father produced theater in Ireland and in the United States. "My studio looks like a theater set, with everything in motion. The performance and the painting are completely integrated — one leads to the other, in this kind of self-generative form of practice."

Everett's latest exhibit at Altman Siegel gallery, "The Elephant Calf," which references an absurdist Bertolt Brecht play about law, features some nine large-scale paintings, each one a multitude of overlapping, crisscrossing layers that let you peer into the tiniest recesses and come away with something enthralling: blotches, fragments, lines that fade here and there, particles that circle each other. None of the paintings has a recognizable center. And that's exactly what Everett wants.

"A lot of 'The Elephant Calf' paintings spent time with mini-stages that I built in front of the paintings," he says. "I put contents from my studio, like buckets and sticks and lamps and stools, on top of these mini-stages, as props — really crude, agitprop theater sets. And then I'd reflect light on these objects, and they'd cast shadows on the paintings. And then I'd use these shadows to direct my gestures — another elaborate, neurotic way so I don't allow myself to make a gestural, emotional mark. They're led by the content of the space."
Each canvas in Everett's new exhibit has what he describes as "movement" that can take the eye in any direction, and which "implicates" the art-goer in a kind of participatory experience.

This involvement also borrows from the theater works Everett loves, where actors speak directly to audiences and break down the barrier between stage and seating. One of Everett's most recent performance works, *On the Wall*, showcases an actor (sometimes Everett) who drags himself by his forearms on a public street before entering the art space and the waiting audience. He admits his methods are unusual, as with having a framer-carpenter stretch his canvases into shape.

Liam Everett: The Elephant Calf. Through April 23 at Altman Siegel, 49 Geary St., San Francisco. Free; 415-576-9300 or altmansiegel.com.

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"They show up foreign, and it's very unsettling," Everett says. "It's not this kind of self-flagellation or self-destructive force. As idealistic as it sounds, I grow from this experience — that there is this deeper evolution that occurs in the practice when I'm confronted. That's really what it is — especially with this group called 'The Elephant Calf.' They went straight to the gallery, and to see them in this presentable condition, I found really intimidating. I was very anxious. I had a few weeks of high anxiety. I'm *still* having trouble reading them and figuring them out. When I see a painting, things like velocity and direction are the first things I think about. What is the pace at which the painting is moving? Which direction is it moving? Is it right to left? Is it a diagonal or vertical? Every time I've gone back to the gallery, they present themselves in a different condition."

Then, chuckling, Everett adds: "I probably spend a little too much time looking at paintings."

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ARTFORUM

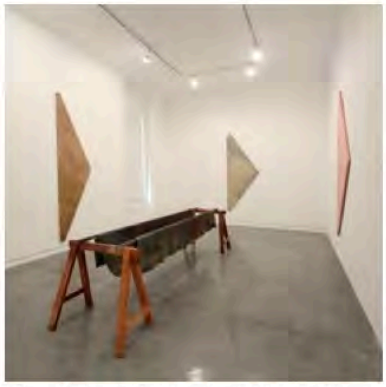
Melendez, Franklin, "Liam Everett," *Artforum*, 2012

# San Francisco

## Liam Everett

**ALTMAN SIEGEL**
**49 Geary Street, 4th Floor**
**November 1–December 22**

There is something solemn, if not almost funerary, about Liam Everett's solo debut at Altman Siegel, which might be appropriate given its subject matter. The show features a series of paintings on Masonite, wool, cotton, and organza that have been stained with ink and acrylic, and then meticulously worked over with various corrosive agents like alcohol, lemon, and salt to create luminous abstractions that also depict the residue of erasure. The most emotive of these are draped loosely onto wooden supports and propped against the wall, where they resemble a lineup of four richly hued ambulance stretchers.



**View of "If I could sleep I might make love. I'd go into the woods. My eyes would see... the sky, the earth. I'd run, run, they wouldn't catch me.," 2012,** Altman Siegel Gallery, San Francisco, CA.

If not quite a requiem for the medium, Everrett's thoughtful intervention is certainly aware of the mortality of that legendarily stubborn artistic idiom: four stretcher bars and a canvas, a formal limitation the artist attempts to think through rather than around. There is something of this driving a piece like *Killing Floor (or a proposed action plan)*, 2012, an expanse of mottled olive wool draped horizontally on bars and supported by wooden horses. Upon sustained viewing, the elegant depression of the fabric comes to evoke the imprint of a reclining body.

Through these simple and decisive gestures, Everett resists the allure of the purely optical or abstract. Instead, he offers something much more honest (for lack of a better word). His surfaces remain as afterimages—not records of a vain search for a zero degree of painting, but simply marks of labor. The literal imprints of the artist's work animate these pieces, the drips and stains underscoring the phantasmatic presence of a body repeatedly working through a singular idea into multiple iterations. Perhaps this impulse best accounts for the protean nature of the exhibition, from the panels and the draped paintings to the triangular supports—all of which achieve a stubborn, if enigmatic, physicality. It is a strange sort of poetry, made all the more effective by its rigorous logic.

*— Franklin Melendez*

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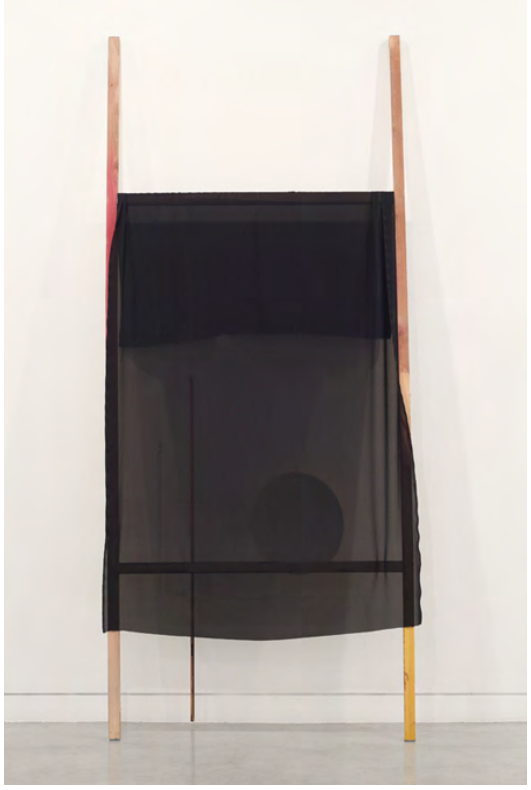
frieze

Griffin, Jonathan, "Liam Everett," *Frieze*, 2012



*Always inside a world where the light discloses the structure that shows us the 'movement' of always falling*, 2012, mixed media, 244 x 97 cm

Liam Everett's art stands, first and foremost, as testament to the processes of its making. In spite of their rich optical pleasures, his art works claim a solemn dignity as battered survivors of previous punishments. It is fun to imagine just what these wild, intense forces might have entailed.

Sun evidently plays a major role in Everett's work: the dyes of the fabric of his baggy constructions (not quite paintings, but too painting-like to be sculptures) are unevenly but expressively faded. Wind, too, seems to have been involved. Some, such as *The way we slip over from one to the other, there and no where* (all works 2012), appear to bear the gridded impressions of wire fences; you can picture them flapping in the breeze as they dried. Elsewhere, crusts of salt crystals imply that heat has also had a hand in their making, causing quantities of seawater to evaporate, perhaps, until sweaty white tidelines build up across the fabric. These works, though they make reference to the indoorsy, post-Minimal assemblages of Richard Tuttle as well as artists such as Sergej Jensen and Gedi Sibony, are infused with the landscape of northern California.

In the main gallery five of these large fabric works are lined up against one wall. The extended wooden frames on which the panels of wool and organza hang remind us that the word 'stretcher' is more commonly associated not with paintings but with hospitals. A dynamic of unabashed romanticism emerges: the battered pieces of fabric are invalids, victims or survivors of the artistic process, recuperated only by their unwitting beauty.

A sculpture in the adjacent space, titled *Killing floor (or a proposed action plan)*, hints at how these paintings may have been made: a woollen blanket is slung between two long planks resting on sawhorses. It is a pragmatic, workaday arrangement – a far less picturesque process than one might have imagined from the works next door. They may look effortless, even lazy, but there is clearly plenty of elbow grease involved. They do not make themselves, nor are they formed naturally by the wild Californian landscape. It is Everett himself who controls them, even if he goes out of his way to make it look like he does not.

A series of untitled smaller paintings more openly derive from the artist's labour. Everett has applied dark ink and acrylic paint to Masonite boards, and then rubbed them clean with alcohol and salt until they are almost – but not quite – returned to their original white. Again, however, the process is far from arbitrary, and distinct areas of white or residual colour reveal the works to be subtle abstract paintings made in reverse.

Throughout this exhibition there is a tussle between what is revealed and what is hidden; what is left on the surface and what is discarded along the way. Everett titles his works as if hoping to lose the reader halfway through; one sagging panel of crimson wool is titled *The threshold question that arises in connection with the concept of establishing a language without the problem of speakin*g. I've read these words a dozen times and I can still make no sense of them. Two of the organza panels have mysterious objects – a piece of dowel, a ceramic disk – dangling, half-glimpsed, behind them. As to their significance, we are left in the dark. As if to acknowledge this game of interpretive hide and seek, the exhibition is called 'If I could sleep I might make love. I'd go into the woods. My eyes would see… the sky, the earth. I'd run, run, they wouldn't catch me.'

**Jonathan Griffin**

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SFAQ, Issue 16, May-July 2014

# LIAM EVERETT

## Interviewed by JEFF MCMILLAN

*Liam Everett lives and works in San Francisco. He is currently represented by Altman Siegel and is also Visiting Faculty at San Francisco Art Institute. I met with him at his Headlands Center for the Arts studio in March 2014 to discuss his most recent paintings and a set of new prints he recently completed at Paulson Bott Press.*

***I wanted to start off with your painting practice. When I last visited your studio you were working on several large canvases that you said some people called 'sanding' paintings. Tell me about these paintings and how you create them?***

This is a very primitive way of talking about them, but I keep doing this so I'll just say that they start out additive. Even before I'm adding paint on them, they're primed, which sets up essentially the tooth that I have to dig into when I'm subtracting. So after I have the three, four or five layers of primer, I'll start to add. If I just say I start adding paint, it's not really true—I'm adding it very intentionally. I'm drawing with the paint and I'm building up these grids that are between hot and cold color schemes—building up three or four columns of cold and then I'll intersperse those columns with warmer tones. In many ways, I feel more than ever that I'm building paintings rather than painting paintings. And eventually I begin to subtract but the reason why I mention that now is because I'm not adding just to have this surface to subtract. I'm trying to build a painting that is conclusive—that at some point arrives at this resolved state where I can recognize why it's doing what it's doing and I'm excited by it. It's really at that point when there's comfort that I begin to subtract the paint and that's why they get referred to as the "sanded" paintings because to subtract I sand. But I'll use many different ways—alcohol, salt, steel wool, a power sander. I use different gradations of the sanding paper, some are on blocks, some are wrapped around foam and the reason why I have several different ways of removing the paint is because some are much more aggressive than others and I don't want to strip more than one layer at a time. I want to take off one painting and then take off another because there are maybe fourteen to fifteen different paintings on each painting. So, as I'm subtracting, I don't want these to show up as expressive marks—they're more kind of excavational. And as you cut into a stone—I'm thinking geologically—I want to be able to cut into this landmass of paint and see what led to what. What I'm discovering when I finally exit these paintings is that they show up completely different than how I imagined them to be.

***So previously you've mentioned the word 'foreign' when you are getting to the end of that subtractive process. Can you talk a little bit more about that?***

It's probably the wrong word. The other word I was using was "otherly" but that just sounds too hokey. There's always this question—I think everyone who makes a painting at some point gets asked this question, "How do you know the work is finished?" It is actually a very strange question for me, because I don't think of these as finished. It's probably the reason—the motivation—that has sent me into this way of practicing—to avoid a finish or a problem of finishing. So it's a long way to say it but essentially "otherly" or "foreign" is what I'm looking for. I'm looking for this to appear. Not show up but to appear and I make a differentiation between showing up and appearing—for me to show up happens much faster. For a painting to appear is something that's very gradual. It's like this Greek term *aesthesis*—I'm butchering that but essentially it's "becoming," "arriving to." When the painting stands in front of me after all this addition and subtraction, if and when it arrives at this point, I literally don't recognize it. I can tell you I did this and this and this, but I can't make it happen again.

***I think when many people look at your work they would call it abstraction. But you said in an interview with Hunted Projects, "I don't think of my paintings as abstraction. Inside the studio they are only work to me. I mean that literally. Work as labor." I was wondering if you could talk a little more about that?***

Maybe this sounds like it's motivated by an idea or a concept, but it isn't. I would say none of this is born out of idea or concept. It's born out of practice and for lack of a better term, labor. How I do that, how I avoid the idea, is through these restrictions in the practice, in these limitations that I set up. For example, I don't allow myself to stand back from the painting while I'm working on it. I pull this table up about three feet away from the wall and then I put out the paint and start at the top and move to the bottom, always the same way. What I do is limit my art from autobiographical expression, emotion, or, for lack of a better word, self. And so in doing this, what is left is practice—put paint on surface, take paint off, put paint on—it's very primitive. For me, why these are not abstract is because they are very much of this reality—the studio. They are born out of this reality of practice and process and addition and subtraction. And so what they look like to me, if and when they appear, are that which they are—practice.

***So when I was here last time you also mentioned that when you're done with the works you send off the canvases to the fabricator and then often times you don't actually see the stretched canvas until it's in the gallery. I was wondering if you could talk a bit more about your relationship to the work after it leaves your studio?***

Almost 99% of the time I don't see the paintings until they arrive in the gallery. And this is the final restriction for me because if I stretch them myself I have control somehow. I have what I think of as "the finish." When you are stretching a painting, you are really cropping an image. By divorcing myself of this very conclusive act, I essentially pull the rug out from under myself. I essentially take away this control. And I create the possibility of being disturbed when I finally meet this painting in its stretched form.

***Let's talk about your prints that you did at Paulson Bott Press. When were you there?***

Maybe about three months ago. I've been there at two different short residencies and I'm actually going back in a few weeks to finish this group. I went in thinking we'd make one or two editions and we ended up making several. What's amazing about Renee and Pam is that they came out a few times to the studio—they tried to get a sense of the way I work—and basically we set up the same system at the press, an environment where everything is moving and there is a constant state of flux and possibilities. That was the atmosphere we created at Paulson.

***So was the process that you went through—did it still entail an addition and subtraction like your paintings?***

I'm probably abusing this term and misleading you because when I say "subtractive," for me it's actually very additive. As soon as you start to take away an area of paint you lose the paint but you gain many other things—you gain volume, you gain light source, you gain depth, you gain all these other kinds, and subtle modes of information. So you can erase an entire painting—*quote-unquote* "erase"—but what you have is content. If I was Zen, I would say something like this is the content of absence. But I'm not Zen so I can't say this. But this is essentially what it is. How they are similar is that everything I do in the creative process I find two points—you can call it between A and B. To establish this is a foundation. It's like two pillars that hold up a space or a support that holds a painting. When I have these two points then my job is just to move from one to the other, back and forth. And if you do this fast enough and for long enough with rigor and intention, then every now and then you have combustion. Viscosity makes sparks makes heat makes energy. And this is what I'm trying to hold in the work. The heat or whatever you want to call it—the energy that arrives because of this friction. So it's the same process—different tools, different environment, same process.

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*Untitled (Khonsu)*, 2013. Edition of 35. Color flatbite, softground and aquatint etching with sanding, 26 X 21 inches. Courtesy of Paulson Bott Press.

*Untitled (Montolieu)*, 2013. Edition of 35. Color flatbite, and aquatint etching with sanding, 26 x 21 inches. Courtesy of Paulson Bott Press.

*Untitled (Net)*, 2013. Edition of 35. Color softground etching, 26 x 21 inches. Courtesy of Paulson Bott Press.

*Untitled (Ahnur)*, 2013. Edition of 35. Color flatbite etching with sanding, 26 x 21 inches. Courtesy of Paulson Bott Press.

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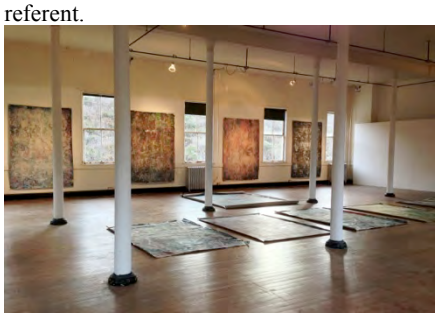
Stevenson, Jonathan, "Liam Everett's unmooring machinations," *Two Coats of Paint*, April 2014

**Liam Everett's unmooring machinations**
By Jonathan Stevenson
April 3, 2014

Liam Everett, *Untitled (Larrun)*, 2013, acrylic, oil, salt and alcohol on primed linen. 77 x 54-1/4 inches.

Liam Everett's large paintings – on display in his show "Montolieu" at On Stellar Rays – are insidiously provocative. At first glance they just look unevenly worn and washed-out, perhaps casualist or aimed to simulate relics that might be found on the walls of an abandoned cathedral or museum. Then it becomes clear that Everett is after neither the agitation of the provisional nor the security of any clear historical referent.



Everett's method hints at his intent. On unstretched linen, he layers oil and acrylic paint in thick and uniform quantity, but then strips and sands the surface of the painting to lay bare, in erratic patches, the linen's surface and fibers. When a kind of detachment or foreignness is achieved, and any hint of intentional marks is adequately obscured, he considers the painting to be done and ready to stretch. Extremely physical yet mimicking the passive effects of aging, the process yields an undulating effect that is eerie and inscrutable but comfortably short of forbidding.

Liam Everett, *Untitled (Baltinglass)*, 2013, acrylic, oil, salt and alcohol on primed linen, 77 x 54-1/4 inches.

The more exposed portions of the linen invite the viewer to look into (and beyond) the painting as the extant color cues the apprehension of its content. The level of visual abstraction and deliberate obscurantism generate uncertainty about just what is on view, while providing sufficient information to insist on speculation. Everett seems to be angling for a sense of transience coupled with existential anxiety and perhaps the gnawing of self-doubt. Paradoxically, the paintings seem exultant in their humility.

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Liam Everett, *Untitled (Seefingan)*, 2013, acrylic, oil, salt and alcohol on primed linen, 77 x 54-1/4 inches.

"Liam Everett: Montolieu," On Stellar Rays, Lower East Side, New York, NY. Through April 6, 2014.

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San Francisco Chronicle

Baker, Kenneth, "Liam Everett's ghostly fabrics at Altman Siegel," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 7, 2012

Liam Everett summons references to art other than his own with a touch so light as to appear unintended.

Consider the large fabric pieces in the Bay Area artist's show at Altman Siegel. Each one has swathes of organza or wool slung between slender vertical timbers whose residue of stains suggest that they also served as supports during the works' making. An apparently related work in the adjacent room, spanning a pair of sawhorses, hints ambiguously at Everett's studio practice.

Even from a distance, these pieces stir memories of Robert Rauschenberg's "Hoarfrost" series of the mid-'70s. Their faint suggestion of battlefield stretchers brings to mind the use of similar forms by Salvatore Scarpitta (1919-2007) and the self-mythologizing Joseph Beuys (1921-1986).

Ghostly imprints of folds and overlays in Everett's pieces might even recall the Shroud of Turin that, Christian lore has it, captured the image of the crucified Jesus. But if Everett would own that association at all, it would probably be as an example of the projection of desire. Meanwhile, his working process, which involves ink, acrylic, alcohol and salt, remains mysterious, as do the objects hanging veiled in a couple of pieces.
Untitled works on Masonite hint that they also might have originated as by-products of other studio output. They have peculiar internal auras - of light seemingly creased with shadow - dimly reminiscent of early 20th century modernism.

Everett undermines his art's air of lightly borne education by attaching wordy titles that, whether he has written or borrowed them, feel like lyric frosting on well-cooked fare that does not want it.

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SFAQ INTERNATIONAL ARTS AND CULTURE

Ito, Gregory, "Liam Everett at Altman Siegel," *SFAQ*, November 5, 2012

**Liam Everett at Altman Siegel, San Francisco**
**San Francisco Arts Quarterly Online**
**November 5, 2012**
http://www.sfaqonline.com/2012/11/05/liam-everett-at-altman-siegel-san-francisco/

Liam Everett is currently on view at Altman Siegel, and is worth a visit if you're in San Francisco. A collection of Everett's stretched triangular paintings hang vertically in the gallery, resembling sails to boats departing on their voyages. The larger draped works can be viewed as sculptural painting, beautifully displayed using a combination of textile and painting practices, displayed on propped planks of wood that effortlessly rest on the stark white walls of the gallery. Everett's smaller flat works use masonite surfaces and have a much more vibrant presence in the space. Contained within the rectangular format we are accustomed to, Everett manages to create a body of work that is mesmerizing to first look. During further investigation simple relationships between fading textures and a high contrast pallet, the work begins to resemble over exposed film negatives of faded memories. Find time to view this exhibition before it comes down December 22nd, 2012.

**- Gregory Ito**

*Installation view. All images courtesy Altman Siegel.*

*Liam Everett, Untitled, 2012 Ink, acrylic, alcohol and sea salt on masonite panels 24 x 18 in.*

*Liam Everett, The remains of gardening plans, gathered to ensure the space necessary for the event characterized by an uncertain departure, 2012 Ink, acrylic, alcohol, sea salt on organza with wooden beams, ceramic, cotton, and wooden dowel, 96 x 38 in.*

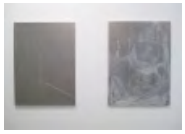
*Installation view.*

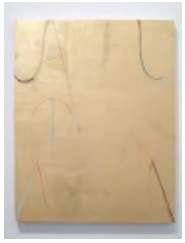
May. 26 – Jul. 11, 2009

*White Room Liam Everett*

White Columns is pleased to present a solo exhibition by the New York-based artist Liam Everett. Everett's installation consists of a recent group of nine paintings on birch supports. Working with acrylic, salt and alcohol, Everett's paintings both record and arrest a seemingly alchemical process. Modest in scale, and working with a reduced palette of silvery-gray and iridescent gold – with hints of color submerged beneath these surfaces - Everett's paintings occupy an interstitial territory between hard-edged modernism and its 'other': a loose territory of art making formally related to Jean Francois Lyotard and Rosalind Krauss' notions of 'l'informe.' Everett's work can be understood as a part of a recent, ongoing, and unfolding conversation around the possibilities and potential of 'abstraction' – an inter-generational tendency shared with artists as distinct and diverse as Tomma Abts, Richard Aldrich, Gedi Sibony, Jacqueline Humphries, Charline von Heyl, amongst others.
Liam Everett lives and works in New York. He received an MA from S.U.N.Y. Empire State College in 2004. Recent solo projects include: Geoffrey Young Gallery, Great Barrington, MA (2008); Cynthia Broan Gallery, New York (2007, curated by Michael St, John); Kunstler Haus Bremen, Bremen, Germany (2003); amongst others. Recent group exhibitions include: 'Bad Moon Rising', ISCP, Brooklyn (2009); MetLife, Morgan Lehman Gallery, New York (2007); amongst others. Everett has staged a number of performance works, most recently at 179 Canal Street, New York (2009.)

Installation view


Installation view


Liam Everett