

# ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com



**Alex Olson**

*A Platypus Glows Under Blacklight*

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*The title of this show paraphrases the headline of a recent New York Times article describing a new discovery about one of the more unlikely creatures on our planet, the platypus. An animal assemblage of sorts, it's seemingly part duck, part beaver, and part reptile. It's a mammal, but lays eggs. It has venom. And now it's known to glow fluorescent, possibly, beautifully, for no reason at all.*

*The possession of these seemingly contradictory traits along with this newfound surface attribute, which has yet to be codified into purpose, metaphorically describe much of what I've been thinking about in making this show. Before and now, the paintings revolve around surface: how surfaces are read perceptually but also socially, as a text. This show focuses specifically on the role of written text as external signage or as inscribed layers beneath veneers, obscured but still affecting. It considers our reliance on text to summarize and solidify at the risk of eliminating complexity and nuance. Embedded in this process is the question: what if these texts were taken apart and then rewritten in other visual forms, or with another choreography? Perhaps they could give way to a looser, more generative alphabet: a concrete script would become a calligraphic pattern, still telling but more open, expanding further into an array of potential logics without set conclusions.*

-Alex Olson

Altman Siegel is pleased to announce *A Platypus Glows Under Blacklight*, a solo exhibition of new paintings by Los Angeles-based artist Alex Olson. The selection of new works, while consistent with Olson's signature controlled materiality, mark-making, and collage-like approach, introduces a new element of script patterning and "text" components. *A Platypus Glows Under Blacklight* marks the artist's second solo exhibition with Altman Siegel.

Within Olson's new painted works her mastery of surface is evident. Through the use of color, layering, and texture (both in terms of three-dimensional impasto and in terms of implied textures within visual

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patterning), she controls surface tensions in a manner simultaneously meticulous and playful. Layers appear to peel away to reveal peaks at other layers, suggesting several paintings imbedded in one, some of which remain forever concealed, at least in part, like a Russian doll. Her mark-making pushes and pulls from both historical abstraction and contemporary design.

Another strategic yet playful recurring element in Olson's practice is cross-referential nods between works. An example of this is the subtle dialogue between separate works, *Page* and *Cover*, both of which contain layers of painted effects that physically obscure a ground layer inscribed with carved marks, resembling notations and scribbles from Olson's sketchbook. Text-based elements like jotted show notes, calligraphic scrawl and the Roman alphabet primer, seem to be attempting to reaffirm their own legitimacy or permanence by carving into the surface, only to be wryly obscured by the artist both materially and conceptually.

Whether partially revealed, hinted at, or otherwise resisting full literal consumption, the text components embedded in Olson's new paintings dance just outside the grip of the legible, leaving us in a perpetually contemplative state, ever-hovering amongst the aesthetics of decipherability.

Alex Olson was born in 1978 in Boston, and she lives and works in Los Angeles. In 2008 she received her MFA from the California Institute of the Arts and in 2001 her BA from Harvard University. Olson has had solo and two-person exhibitions at 12.26, Dallas; Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago; Park View/Paul Soto, Los Angeles; Laura Bartlett Gallery, London; and Lisa Cooley, New York. She has shown in group exhibitions at Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, and her works are included in their respective public collections. Other selected group exhibitions include University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor; Blue Projects, London; Mary Mary Gallery, Glasgow; Public Fiction, Los Angeles; Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles; and Wallspace, New York.

For more information please contact Altman Siegel at [info@altmansiegel.com](mailto:info@altmansiegel.com).