



SHAPES IN SPACE

By Bridget Donahue
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The seams in Joseph Hart's finished paintings and drawings reveal that his compositions were once disrupted. In the process of making, the artist often extracts significant portions of the drawing, rotates them and grafts them back in to complete the work. In some cases, separate drawings are taped together to form false Rorschachs or super-collages. By displacing large areas of controlled, crucial content, Hart fabricates dramatic moments where marks are severed or truncated. These ruptures elevate an ever-evolving tension in the Hart's new, spartan paintings.

Labor lies in Hart's practice of self-restraint after he puts his initial utterances of line and form to the page. Beyond his consistent play of shapes in space, Hart is refining subtle moves that are leading a thrifty economy of mark-making. In repeating actions and by using a limited visual vocabulary his marks are taking on new meanings in new contexts. A choreography of gestures has emerged. In earlier excursions he sought out the physical limits and boundaries of the page: the edges. He cropped sprawling territories, uprooted vegetation and bifurcated abstract constellations. Further exploration led Hart to the pulverization of colorful petal-like bits of paper and wood -- collage shrapnel he blew around amidst hand-drawn body parts and stars. Recently, he has begun to abrade his built world and is sanctioning a new approach.

Hart is literally making new work from a new perspective: the wall. He is, however, still employing many of the same survey techniques: mowing over the blank page with a graphite stick, carefully editing a selection of paper debris, dried paint, wood slivers before they are scrupulously arranged in the picture. Small fragments, layered onto the paper, amalgamate and create Hart's gritty surfaces. As his work progresses, and since he has shifted his making-process from table to wall, the paint-embedded surface trappings have fallen from the page.

A deconstructed landscape has come into view. There are fewer recognizable signs in recent pictures; no representational depictions nor cultural artifacts. This is not to say that Hart's work is any less tenacious. Marks now arrive in direct dialogue with Hart's spatial and corporeal relationship to the tableau. From the shoulder, a charged black line of oil stick rounds the paper's bottom-right corner. Extending his arm from self to surface, Hart creates a fleeting architectural set-up. He acknowledges his initial impulse to find the paper's edge and demarcate the perimeter of the plane. Working within these drawn borders, a bend of his elbow maps imagined trajectories. Hart scrawls looser lines from the wrist, carving paths - or is it a letter 'A'? He makes hairpin turns until eventually stumbling off the page. His hand, clutching a brush full of paint, touches down to mark an 'X' or to stick a two-dimensional stake in the pictorial ground.

Hart's painterly moves are efficient. Wayward dashes of paint and staccato flecks of paper ricochet across the page. Strokes and lines are growing heavier. Bursts of spray-paint along with other decisive moves have energetically quickened the pace of his abstractions. Labor is becoming more of a tool, less a methodology. Worked parts function as formal elements (defined by characteristics such as small strokes or intricate assemblage) within the larger composition. One could purport that Hart has delineated his own marks into a symbolic alphabet. The viewer is encouraged to bring their own associations to these unofficial characters as Hart's new objective is to strip notions of representation from the curly brackets, hieroglyphic serpents, chevrons and smiley punctuation marks as they bounce and skip across the page.

Bridget Donahue has worked with artists at Gladstone Gallery, as the Director of D'Amelio Terras, the Associate Director at Gavin Brown's enterprise, and is the founder and director of Bridget Donahue Gallery. In 2008, she co-founded Cleopatra's, a curatorial art project with storefront spaces in Brooklyn and Berlin. Donahue has taught at The City College of New York and has been invited for public lecture at Hunter College, Columbia University and Savannah College of Art and Design to discuss collaboration and professional practice to art students at the graduate level. She serves on the New Art Dealers Alliance Board of Directors and consults for Creative Capital. She holds a Master of Arts degree in Contemporary Textile Culture from Norwich University College of the Arts (UK) and a BA in Anthropology and Journalism from Boston University.

Image: Cyclops, 2012, collaged paper, acrylic, enamel, oil crayon and graphite on paper, 94x64"