

TimeOut

Abstractionist Garth Weiser chats with Time Out about his latest exhibit at The Contemporary Austin



Photograph: Brian Fitzsimmons. Garth Weiser's "Diptych #1"

Curator Louis Grachos is effusive when talking about New York painter Garth Weiser, the subject of a career survey exhibition at the Contemporary Austin's Jones Center. "Every once in a while, you see a painter who comes out and really moves the needle," says Grachos. "Weiser is such an artist."

"Garth Weiser: Paintings, 2008–2017," which opened in April and runs through the summer, tracks the 37-year-old artist's evolution through the last decade. Viewers can follow chronologically, across two floors, the Arizona native's work from the flat, hard-edged Moholy-Nagy–like geometric pieces of the late 2000s to the increasingly complex pieces produced in more recent years. The painter's large-scale works make the survey a perfect exhibition to showcase the Jones Center's renovations, which were completed last December and added almost 3,000 square feet of space.

We chatted with Weiser about his artistic journey, the benefits of audiobooks and what it's like being married to another artist.

The 22 works [in this exhibit] chart ten years of your career. What journey do you think audiences are going to see?

I think one painting leads into the next as I make them. I work, to a certain point, in one mode of

painting until I feel I've exhausted that vein and then hopefully move in a new direction. The earliest work in the show is from 2008 by the title of *I wouldn't have worn mascara if I knew I was going to be taking a trip down memory lane*, which actually has a lot in common with my latest works. Its underpainting (in this case tempera paint) physically affects the paint applied on top of it. The tempera is an unstable base that the white acrylic can't adhere to—or mixes with when wet. In effect, the underpainting bleeds through the final layer. In more recent works, such as the large-scale diptych in the exhibition, the underpainting is textured with pits and gashes. These recessions function as locations of collection for the final layer of oil paint. Much like tempera, the recessions create a composition that rises up from beneath, breaking up the final layer. This process allows a sense of controlled spontaneity as well as a conflict between the spectrum of techniques used, and is motivated by a larger relationship to painting—my interest in the expressive marks of Frank Auerbach, the cold restraint/aggression of Christopher Wool and the order of early Frank Stella.

It can be hard to focus the eye on a single element of one of your works. The exhibition curator describes your pieces as “the sum of all noise reducing to a...magnificent drone.” Is that intentional?

I think drone or static (as in TV static) is defiantly in the works, but there is also a shift that occurs. By this, I mean the viewer can be met with what appears static, but if looked at closely an underlying topography or random composition emerges. I am dissatisfied by either component as it stands alone (the field-like nature of the drone or the romantic nature of composition) but when the two intersect you get an unstable painting that flickers between hard-edge restraint and expressionistic instinct. This is what I am after.

I was reading that you have an interest in comics. Any comics in particular? How have they influenced you?

I wouldn't say I am really interested in comics, but I am interested in their formal nature in terms of mark-making. I use them as a way to make a mark that does not feel at home in the composition or to add a figurative element that fights against the ordered surface of the painting. I would say it fits with the underlying theme of contrast that runs throughout the work. I do like R. Crumb [an American cartoonist] very much though.

I feel there's a real musical quality to your work, but I read in an interview you listen to audiobooks, not music, as you work. What have you been listening to lately?

I listen to both music and audiobooks in the studio. They are really just a way to have something going on in the background when I'm working. I'm sure there is some effect, like AC/DC may cause you to work more frenetically and Tangerine Dream may slow you down with a more contemplative approach, but it's a small change, I suppose. The books I listen to are mostly lowbrow noir novels or non-fiction. Lately what comes to mind is a novel by Marisha Pessl titled *Night Film*. It's a well-crafted noir mystery that I would not call lowbrow.

Your wife is also a celebrated artist. Does it help to live with/work with someone who understands what you do?

My wife and I talk a lot about what we are working on. Though our work is formally very different, conceptually we are after similar objectives.