

Celia Neubauer and Joe Fleming's exhibition *Tales of Tomorrow* at the TAKSU Singapore Gallery comprises paintings that are not quite figurative and not quite abstract, but populated with floating shapes, curving planes and layered surfaces. Each work appears to be in a temporary state, held together in an elastic equilibrium, in which at any moment everything could change.

At first glance, Joe Fleming's work resembles an amateur science experiment conducted in the back of a garage. He uses familiar household products, scraps of metal, salvaged wood, polyurethane foam and enamel paint. These materials yield unexpected results - toxic colours inhabit bulging forms, which appear like organic waste or chemical compounds - leaving the viewer to speculate about the artist's methodology and materials. Fleming leaves an occasional clue to his process, in *White House* for example, one recognizes sprayed enamel paint in graffiti-like lettering, and particleboard beneath the gouges and scratches that scar its surface. Other rectangular planes are fastened on top of this baseboard and each subsequent panel appears to be a reconsideration of the one before. In this work, one can follow a basic logic, a rhythmic progression of planes, shapes and colours, but also of lines and curves, which start as engravings and end as bold, uneven streaks and splatters. This process is made more effective by the sculptural aspect of the work; as it literally extrudes from the wall, even shadows function to underscore a sense of rhythm and progression.

But a destructive force seems to govern the creative process too. *Cheese Salvation* for example, appears like a miniature shipwreck, with broken wood sandwiched between oozing polyurethane foam and washed over with pale teal, while a mustard-yellow sail-like plate conceals the remaining debris. In *Yellow Rose of Texas* slivers of wood and foam attached to a series of stacked planes seem ready to tumble off their mount. By the time this raw, industrial heap is presented on a gallery wall, like volcanic lava, it appears to have cooled, its well-defined gray and yellow tectonic shapes settling, slowly fitting into place. Guided by the artist's methodology, but also by gravity and accident, these paintings never appear completely static. Each part of this heterogeneous mixture occupies an uncomfortable position. Deceptively frozen, seemingly pacified, they offer a lingering resistance in that one can still predict their unsaid trajectories, one can still sense their movement. Residual, perhaps, of a contemporary disposition towards the capitalist politics of our time, Fleming's practice consistently involves a kind of resistance in his avoidance of common art materials, just as the works themselves resist overall stability.

Movement is also an important issue in Neubauer's work, and is suggested in her titles: *Sweep*, *Flutter* and *Shake, Rattle and Roll*. The latter presents a floating field of black, winding swerves and various geometric shapes, tangled in an array of paths, splitting off into diverging directions, about to break with the frame of the canvas and seep off the picture plane. In *Sweep*, anthropomorphic, feathered figures are caught in a trunked vortex which slowly compresses, ready to fold over into the corner of the painting. These objects seem to be circumventing each other, reacting to each other's mass, as if each had its own gravitational pull. Neubauer treats these shapes like physical objects, as though they could be manipulated, recaptured and reanimated. Like actors on a stage, they play

different parts, react to their environments; even the background performs like a theatrical backdrop, evocative and easily changed. Neubauer borrows images from commercial photography, and her role is in some ways similar to a director or set designer. Through a gradual process, she creates countless images, processes them through Photoshop, considers the slightest alterations in her compositions, constantly editing and rethinking. She recycles images in different forms from one painting to the next, often working on more than one painting at a time. Upon entering the gallery, one senses this interconnectivity as though joining in to a busy dialogue between the paintings. For, through slight adjustments in colour and form, each painting attempts to reformulate what the preceding one has articulated. In *Flutter* for example, a bristly silverfish-gray pattern fills the shape of a circle and resembles a moon, while in *Sweep* the same pattern reappears as a flushed out, non-defined field, like moving water under a bridge. Neubauer allows for the reading of the work itself not to be fixed to one painting, but to flow through the whole body of work, where the viewer is encouraged to move forward, then back, to seemingly move right through the work.

In this exhibition, each painting can be thought of as a kind of a multi-painting, and not just a simple, individualized entity. Neubauer's canvases offer multi-faceted references to her past work, and to the distant photographic sources of her imagery. Meanwhile, Fleming's pieces are departures from conventional painting techniques, from the wall, from the rectangular confinement of the stretcher. His paintings rely on a constant reframing, where the repeating rectangular shapes in *White House* or *Yellow Rose of Texas* protruding from the wall can easily be read as a painting within a painting, within a painting. For these artists, the act of painting provides the opportunity to constantly reframe what painting is: something always shifting, referencing its own subjective past, only to expand out to a new tomorrow and begin anew.

Wojciech Olejnik

*Wojciech Olejnik is a Canadian artist and writer, currently based in Toronto, Canada. His art criticism has been published in Frieze Magazine Blog, C Magazine, NABROAD Magazine and Canadian Art. In 2007-2008 he received a writing fellowship from New Research in Abstraction, under which he published several texts in collaboration with Micheal Murphey, Boris Groys and Robert Linsley.*