

THE RICHARD STOCKTON COLLECTION NEW JERSEY.



INTIMATE FRONTIERS OCTOBER 25 - NOVEMBER 20, 2009 curated with essay by Margaret McCann



CHRISTOPHER BAGG BRETT BAKER **BRIAN CHU** SARAH DUETH JOHN JACOBSMEYER TRENT MILLER SHIAO-PING WANG

GALLERY TALKS

Brian Chu and Shiao-Ping Wang-Thurs. Oct. 29, 2:30 pm Brian Chu and Shiao-Ping Wang in Chinese-Thurs. Oct. 29, 5:30 pm Margaret McCann-Mon. Nov. 16, 12:30 pm

GUEST LECTURE

John Jacobsmeyer - AS 102 Thurs. Nov. 5, 2:30 pm



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Ken Miranda, catalogue designer, will graduate with a BFA in Visual Communications in spring 2009 from The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey.

front cover: Clubhouse John Jacobsmeyer 22" x 24" oil on canvas 1996 title page: Ayers Rock Sarah Dueth 22" x 22" oil on canvas 1999 back cover: Axel's Forest Brett Baker 16" x 14" oil on canvas 2006-2008



Journey Shiao-Ping Wang 11"x 14" acrylic on panel 2008

"Life is short, so we must move very slowly." - Thai proverb

INTIMATE FRONTIERS showcases a range from figuration to abstraction in contemporary painting in the work of Christopher Bagg, Brett Baker, Brian Chu, Sarah Dueth, John Jacobsmeyer, Trent Miller, and Shiao-Ping Wang. However divergent, each of these painters ventures poetically within the oxymoronic space of painting, as the title of this exhibition suggests: to boldly go where no one else has gone, from the private comfort of one's studio or surroundings. Painting takes time, and the process of composition, like the viewer's comprehension, proceeds elliptically. Imagery represents the interface of one's artistic horizon and the personal journey toward it. This essay explores how different styles of painting approach the problems of composing three dimensions in two, through four, and looks into the power of painting's methodical observance.



THE PAINTING FRONTIER

is activated by a mark, like the first word on a page or a pebble dropped in a pool. The mark transforms the blank slate of the canvas into a radiating spatial realm, bounded by geometry in two dimensions but limitless in three. Figurative (representational) painters turn this into a vista looking outward. For non-figurative (abstract) painters the canvas mirrors the imagination, mapping the interior horizon of the mind's eye. These approaches bookend a continuum.

Deferential to appearances, representational painting depends on drawing conventions placement, diagonals, overlapping, diminishing size, atmospheric perspective—to describe space. The one-point perspective in Brian Chu' *Two Bridges* sweeps the eye to the vanishing

Rain Sarah Dueth 16"x 14" oil on canvas 2001 Chu's

point, where thick, opaque paint reinforces surface and contradicts depth. This dialectic between space and flatness is at the heart of painting. As *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space* analyzes perspective's threat to the integrity of the picture plane, and applauds the balancing act a cleverly placed foreground object performs in a Renaissance painting: "The eye is called back to the surface at the very point of greatest penetration."¹

Space in abstract painting assembles as imagery is generated. In Shiao-Ping Wang's *Journey* dots and circles commingle in an arabesque; positive and negative shapes meander within a wavy grid. Viewer orientation shifts between elevation and plan as atmospheric textures recede, and bright, opaque colors pop the way goldfish intermittently appear in a pond. Imagery rising to the surface eludes definition; word bubbles take shape and disappear. In her native Chinese, calligraphic characters are painted as much as written. When Wang decided "like Cezanne, I wanted more 'permanence' in my paintings," she turned away from representation, searching for forms that resonate with the way "a Chinese character is word, code, symbol, icon, and drawing or picture." She sees her paintings embodying landscape space, noting the "pictographs and ideographs...underlying the development of Chinese landscape painting". The punctuation symbols she often paints, as in *Hyperbole*, wax nostalgically and ineffably.



Two Bridges Brian Chu 34" x 34" oil on canvas 2004



Hilton Park Brian Chu 30"x 28" oil on canvas 2005



View of Cummington Spring Christopher Bagg 24" x 38" oil on linen 2002

WHILE PORTRAITURE, STILL LIFE AND NARRATIVE PAINTING

demarcate figure from ground (a person, some things, an event against a background), the landscape motif can't be so decisive: Any section of it, tiny or grand-this twig or flower, that tree, road or mountain, those clouds, the sky-is part of a greater whole beyond apprehension. Figure and ground are relative, shifting and contextual. Landscape encompasses and metaphorically inspires something like the dynamics of field in physics: "an area or region within which force exerts influence at every point"². Its indefinite perimeters suggest the arena of the painting search, and like those of abstraction, require unique gestalts - more conscious compositional (albeit less conceptual) innovation.

Sarah Dueth's Ayers Rock bridges landscape and abstraction through memory. The exotic mountain manifests as contrasting textures cast its vague shape as both volume and void. The painterly urge of a dark line issuing from it emotes, as the generic colors of sand and sky describe vastness. Quick shifts from a foreground rock to the distant mountain, from near to far away, omit details of travel, as though space and time were absorbed by dense paint. Evoking Louise Bourgeois's biomorphic forms, minimalistic Rain and Lava further contract the middle ground. Often provoked through observation, exciting spatial tensions occur as natural phenomena are captured in paint.



Portrait of Richard Wilbur #1 Christopher Bagg 20"x 18" oil on linen 2007



Painter's Table Brett Baker 14"x 16" oil on canvas 2004-07

Brett Baker's introverted abstractions commit to surface, where color space is manipulated. Moving toward a conceptual frontier that master mark-makers like Philip Guston—who explored the meta-physical places "between presence and absence"³—reveled in, the language of painting explores itself. Thick stripes assiduously accrue as though marking time without expectation in *Axel's Forest,* named after an Auguste Villiers' play in which the hero chooses the purity of ideas over reality and death over treasure. Close tones of complementary color in varied temperatures and saturations fluctuate mesmerizingly, opposing the order in which they fell in line. The image is tactile evidence, the flnal layer of a search shielding its motive. Baker says, "I often feel like I am painting the studio... walling up the space around me. In the smaller pictures I try to plug all the deep space, the holes, [and] get rid of any windows. I'm always trying to bring the paint in closer." *Hand* venerates touch; the elemental image is confronted the way a cave painter might have marveled at a handprint.



Injection John Jacobsmeyer 25"x 14" oil on canvas 1992

Painter's Table pays homage to a familiar irony discarded paint is merely homeless, never dirt—in the accidental beauty found when studio fixtures accumulate stray color. A lone lavender offsetting a collection of ochres in carefully stacked rows intimates another kind of table, a list of data. The image is an account of authenticity sought.

Wang uses the rational grid with more levity, like Paul Klee's playful inquiries. In calibrated array and proportion, color harmony predominates in *Windows*. Warm, saturated hues advance and subtle, cool ones recede, while flat textures pose impasse and atmospheric ones open up—the way windows mask their contents when reflecting, then unexpectedly reveal them. Viewing velocity varies, syncopated in a game of eye-pinball.

John Jacobsmeyer uses traditional techniques in his existential and surreal, postmodern narratives. Illusionism trumps the expressive marks that make it. In the self-portrait *Injection*, the artist attempts the magical, impossible repair of a chopped-up tree. Human mastery over/exploitation of nature contrasts with inept yet hubristic action, echoed in cool glazes over warm undertones.

In *Clubhouse* a tiny shack nestles in opulent greenery. Started on-site, Jacobsmeyer was inspired by "the forest's swallowing-up of the narrative in Altdorfer's *St. George and the Dragon*". Color was later exaggerated in the studio in droll reference to Thomas Kinkade's kitschy, mass-produced, cozy cottages in comfy settings. But Jacobsmeyer delivers a better beauty—hand-honed and metaphorically fertile. However uncamoflauged, his hideaway insinuates habitat theory: evolutionary survival prefers landscapes offering both prospect and refuge, vision and protection⁴. This atavistic desire to see without being seen pertains to painting's omnificent voyeurism as well. While any of Jacobsmeyer's supposed clubmembers possess a neatly cultivated, framed window on the wilderness, none could be aware of being observed in turn by the more privileged appraisal of the painting's viewer. And of course the man behind the canvas sees it all.



Windows Shiao-Ping Wang 40"x 32" acrylic on board 2005



Silk Shirt Christopher Bagg 16"x 20" oil on linen 2000



Woman Reading Brian Chu 14"x 16" oil on panel 2006

SINCE ITS MIMETIC FUNCTION WAS DIMINISHED

by photography in the 19th c. (history painting and portraiture in particular), painting has re-invented itself, wave after new wave. The relentless polemics of 20th c. art forced painters to justify choices ideologically. Abstraction and figuration were polarized, painting often declared dead. But this last fin-de-siecle seems to have marked a postmodern 'glasnost' in art. Painters (like poets) are free to choose among multifarious, de-politicized, equally valid methodologies.

Monet's Impressionist series *Waterliles* foretold painting's present spectrum of spatial and metaphorical readings. Illusionism leads, but the depiction of several layers—flowers on the water's surface, transparent depths below, reflections of the sky above/outside the view, the dazzling abstract pattern of colored marks across the surface—invites multiple viewpoints. Imagery questions space, where things are, and definition: what is really being pictured? The post-Impressionist Cezanne surpassed Monet (and others reacting to the Industrial Revolution) in redefining the perceptual painter as more inventor than re-presenter. In Cezanne's hands the act of painting became foremost investigative, almost fetishizing process, and prefiguring self-conscious Modernism. His thoughtful compositions materialize conjecture, reading part to part like an equation building to its solution. Speculation stalls synthesis, slowing wonder down.

Accordingly, the dynamic, overlapping curves of road and bridge in Chu's *Hilton Park* flow to and from the middle ground, while irregular shapes and broken color decelerate the eye, a compressed dialectical energy pulsating throughout the sculpted surface. Using an eclectic array of tools—brush, palette knife, and chopstick (calling to mind the Freudian relationships Guston implied in *Painting, Smoking, Eating*)—Chu paints from life for interaction "not to look at, but to look against" something. *Woman Reading* likewise renders the observed a means to an end, a poetic aggregation of responses.

Christopher Bagg's *Silk Shirt* more subtly presents the figure as both field and entity. Like Edwin Dickinson's calm, slow looking, the image refuses fluid cohesion; viewers must review the process culminating in that shiny moment. Unsmoothed edges and irregular shapes, left as they were 'found', document each decision, delaying illusion. Recording specific atmospheric conditions that softly describe light and space, *View of Cummington Spring* tentatively spreads out in measured applications of thin paint. Bagg's circumspection seems to view everything as though approaching from a distance and larger context. His *Portrait of Richard Wilbur #1* seats the poet quietly before us, reading glasses in hand, faraway look in his face, emerging as it were from the rows of books behind him. Chances are one of them contains his poem *My Father Paints the Summer*: "A smoky rain riddles the ocean plains...But up in his room by artificial light/My father paints the summer, and his brush/Tricks into sight...a summer never seen..."⁵



Lava Sarah Dueth 24"x 20" oil on canvas 2000

Trent Miller's adventurous interiors, recalling those of Bonnard and Braque, convey the enterprising realm stretching from the painter's mark to the spheres. He says *Maud Moon*, named after a Galway Kinnell poem, "almost painted itself". Mused by the optical delusion of a giant moon, hallucinatory forms were elicited from the painter, like sorcerer and apprentice. One of them, half-human and begotten by its own emotion-driven marks, brandishes a brush. *Three-in-One* likewise summons the creative alchemy of the studio. The Holy Trinity's mystery (humbly repeated in the trio of himself, in his father's shirt, with looming shadow), veiled by the drama of vivid reds, bold shapes and gestures asserting proximity, plays off spaciousness created by scale variation. Seated diminutively below and behind some plants, under the ruling moon above, the artist is a small part of a bigger picture. He looks down and inward as though under a self-cast spell; painting will do that to you.

LIKE POETRY, PAINTING EXERCISES

our slack senses, reinvigorating the range from perception to imagination so diminished by the mass reproduction of photographic close-ups: What was once a remote mental image, the precious glimpse or searching stare, is now the foreground territory of the passive armchair observer (with remote). The experience of panorama, claimed by film and television, means hiking, highrise views, or certain sports or spectator activity only occasionally navigate deep space. The technological infrastructure of postmodern daily life—highways, directions, electric lighting, the Internet demystifies and dislocates the open frontier. Like a zany Futurist fantasy, the speedy conceptual space of web-surfing knows no bounds; everything is everywhere.

Conversely, *Painting and Experience in 15th c. Italy* describes how keenly people once used vision to articulate their world. When cities had individual systems of weights and measures, for example, math had practical, everyday applications. The skills that "...any painter used to analyze forms were the same [ones] any commercial person used for surveying quantities...the literate public had these same geometrical skills to look at pictures with [and to] make discriminations, and the painter knew this."⁶ Painting's analytical, meditative play can still empower sight and mind, and ease disorientation.



Three-In-One Trent Miller 72"x 60" oil on canvas 2003

"It is our sense of time, our sense of ritual, which in the long run creates our sense of place..."7



Hyperbole Shiao-Ping Wang 11"x14" acrylic/collage/panel 2008

1 John White; p. 176, Fillippo Lippi

- 2 http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary /Field.html
- 3 p. 38, Philip Guston by Robert Storr Abstraction
- 4 The Experience of Landscape by Jay Appleton
- 5 Richard Wilbur Collected Poems 1943-2004 6 Michael Baxandall, p. 87 Volume
- 7 A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time J.B. Jackson
- Design Quarterly no. 164
- 8 says John Jacobsmeyer
- 9 John Berger p. 206-7 Painting and Time

Exploring the way to a painting's end, rather than zooming to image or idea, is a quasi-cartographical, empirical process. The surveying eye, searching hand, and responsive impetus inspire assorted compulsions-from Wang's perambulating pursuit of something like the divining function of a geomantic chart, to Baker's or Bagg's contrasting approaches to truth, to Jacobsmeyer's visionary conceits—that oblige the viewer's sensory and imaginative complicity. In Jacobsmeyer's Inside, the eye moves over a cow lying in the foreground, across a desert to the tonal contrast of a swelling sunset. Closer inspection reveals a boy curled inside what is now seen as a carcass for warmth; the air is suddenly cold. The eye looks out, then back, then in-from pleasure to surprise, to a nice mix of horror and charm. In Arrival an explorer's arm and shadow enter the picture and the Martian landscape before he himself does-as the viewer enters and yet cannot enter the space. All are greeted at the vista's end by a mirage of "either Lewis or Clark"⁸. Like the painting odyssey's prospect of finish, may the road rise to meet us on Mars, too.

FOR FINISH-THE FINAL FRONTIER

-is an uncertain thing. The complex, sublimating route there (admonished in Balzac's *The Unknown Masterpiece*) makes arrival difficult to ascertain. As *The Sense of Sight* explains, "When is a painting finished? Not when it finally corresponds to something already existing...but when the foreseen ideal moment of it being looked at is filled as the painter feels or calculates it...Photographs are records of the past...Paintings are prophecies received from the past, prophecies about what the spectator is seeing in front of the painting at that moment."⁹ Upheld by tradition and compelled by the present, painting moves toward an appreciative future for completion. Regardless of cost or time consumed, its puzzling way is rich. *Margaret McCann*



Arrival John Jacobsmeyer 30"x 28" oil on canvas 1997

BIOGRAPHIES



CHRISTOPHER BAGG

(BFA 1981 Amherst College; Yale Norfolk; Queens-Caumsett; NY Studio School 1982-85) lives in Cummington MA. Solo shows include Oxbow Gallery, Northampton MA; Blue Mountain Gallery NYC. Group shows include Bowery Gallery NYC; National Academy of Design NYC; First Street Gallery NYC; Gross-MacLeaf Gallery, Phila.; Northampton Center for the Arts; River Gallery, Damerscotta ME.



BRIAN CHU

(BFA 1991; Caumsett-Queens; MFA 1993 Queens CUNY) is Assoc. Prof. of Art at UNH and lives in Somerworth, NH. Solo shows include Oxbow Gallery, Northampton MA; Three Graces Gallery, Portsmouth NH; Bowery, NYC. Group shows include The National Academy of Design NYC; the Heckscher Museum, Long Island; The Coney Island Museum; Cooper-Jackson Gallery, Portland ME; Nahcotta Gallery, Portsmouth NH. He had a residency at the Vermont Studio Center, and his work has been reviewed in Art New England and The Philadelphia Inquirer.



JOHN JACOBSMEYER

(BFA 1986 UNH, MFA 1989 Yale U.; Tamarind Institute), Faculty Chair and Printmaking Coordinator at the New York Academy of Art, lives in Brooklyn. Solo gallery shows include at Jack the Pelican Presents NYC; Fraser, Wash. DC; Ex-Ministry of Agriculture Florence, Italy. Group shows in NYC include Michael Steinberg; DFN; White Columns; also Fitchburg Museum MA; Boston Center for the Arts; McGowan, Concord NH. Awards include NY Foundation for the Arts, Fulbright (to Italy), Pollack-Krasner, Basil Alkazzi, NH State Council on the Arts. Residencies include MacDowell, Ragdale, and Roswell colonies. His work has been reviewed in Art-News, The Brooklyn Rail, Art New England, The Boston Globe, The Concord Monitor, The Washington Post.



TRENT MILLER

(BA 1999 Anderson U. IN; MFA 2003 Boston U.) teaches at the U. of Wisconsin, Madison. Solo shows include Porter Butts Gallery, WI; Carrie Haddad Gallery, Hudson NY. Group shows include Bowery Gallery NYC; Washington Art Assoc., CT; Harrison Center for the Arts, Indianapolis IN; Galtung-Huser Gallery Oslo, Norway. Awards include NY Foundation for the Arts, Indiana Arts Commission Grant, and residencies at the Vermont Studio Center. His work has been reviewed in the Boston Globe and The Indianapolis Star Weekend.



BRFTT BAKER

(BFA 1995 William and Mary; post-bac Brandeis U.; MFA 1999 Boston U.) taught at U. Mass. Dartmouth and St. Mary's College of Maryland, and lives in Durham, NC. Solo gallery shows include at The Painting Center NYC; Simon Gallery, Morristown NJ; Zhou B Gallery, Chicago. Group shows include DFN Gallery NYC; Bowery Gallery NYC; New Bedford Museum, MA. His awards include a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, and an artist's residency grant for the Vermont Studio Center.



SARAH DUETH

(BFA 1997 Boston U.; Yale at Norfolk) lives in Hoboken NJ. Gallery shows include First Impressions, Boston MA; Mikhail Zakin Gallery, Demarest NJ; and through Kipton Art NYC. Her awards include a Mortimer Hays Brandeis Traveling Fellowship to Australia.

MARGARET McCANN

(BFA 1979 Wash, U. in St. Louis: Yale at Norfolk: NY Studio School: MFA 1985 Yale U.), Asst. Prof. at Stockton, lives in Atlantic City; wrote reviews for Art New England, The Portsmouth Herald. Solo gallery shows include Antonia Jannone Disegni di Architettura, Milan; The Painting Center NYC; Spartanburg County Art Museum. Group shows in NYC include Art in General; Natl. Acad. of Design; Lori Bookstein; Bridgewater/ Lustberg; Denise Bibro; Bowery; also Fraser, Wash. DC; Artemesia, Chicago; Sala Una, Rome; Cleveland Museum; Las Vegas Art Museum; Museo di Francobolli, Ancona. Awards include Fulbright (to Italy), Ingram-Merrill, NH State Council, Blanche Coleman. Residencies include Millay, Ragdale, Cite Internationale des Arts in Paris. Her work has been reviewed in La Repubblica, Il Corriere della Sera, NY Observer, Art New England.

SHIAO-PING WANG

(BA 1976 English Literature, Tung-Hai U., Taiwan; Caumsett-Queens; MFA 1992 Queens CUNY) studied Chinese art history, calligraphy, etymology w/Prof. Chang of St. John's U. NYC; Chinese painting w/artist Ru-Zhou Cui. She teaches at UNH, and lives in Somersworth, NH. Solo shows include Three Graces Gallery in Portsmouth NH. Group shows include Artstream Gallery, Rochester NH; Cooper-Jackson Gallery, Portland ME: Susan Maasch Fine Art, Portland ME. Awards include an artist's residency grant for the Vermont Studio Center. Her work has been reviewed in Art New England.







Maud Moon Trent Miller 72"x 60" oil on canvas 2003

LIST OF WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION:

Christopher Bagg

- Portrait of Richard Wilbur #1 20"x18" oil/linen 2007
 Portrait of Richard Wilbur #2 24"x20" oil/linen 2007
 Carla with Folded Arms 16"x12" oil/linen 2009
 View of Cummington Spring 24"x38" oil/linen 2002
 Truck and Tractor 18"x24" oil/linen 2005
 Swift River 20"x15" oil/linen 2008

Brett Baker

- 1. Hand 10"x8" oil/canvas 2002-06 2. Painter's Table 14"x16" oil/canvas 2004-07 3. Double 17"x18" oil/canvas 2005-08 4. Axel's Castle 16"x14" oil/canvas 2006-08 5. Axel's Forest 16"x14" oil/canvas 2005-08

- Figure in Striped Chair 16 x12 olirpanel 2007
 Awning 18"x12" oil/panel 2005
 Two Bridges 34"x34" oil/canvas 2004
 Train Tracks and Bridge 44"x34" oil/canvas 2004
 Garlic 7"x7" oil/panel 2004
 Reading 14.5"x16" oil/panel 2006
 Converter 17"x12" oil/wood 2005
 Hilton Park 30"x28" oil/canvas 2009

- 1. Ayers Rock 22"x22" oil/canvas 1999

- Ayers Rock 22 x22 oli/carivas 1999
 Lava 24"x20" oil/linen 2000
 Red Shell 10"x12" oil/carvas 2000
 Rain 14"x16" oil/carvas 2001
 Mirror Image 24"x29" oil/carvas 2007
 Cave 1 10"x 12" oil/carvas 2007

Trent Miller

- Windows 40"x32" acrylic/board 2005
 Mapping 24"x48" acrylic/canvas 2006
 Seasons 54"x18" colored pencil,acrylic/linen 2009
 Tangled 24"X24" acrylic/canvas 2009
 City by the Sea 9"x12" collage,acrylic/panel 2005
 Hyperbole 11"X14" collage,acrylic/panel 2009
 Diversion 8"X6" mixed media/panel 2009
 Sleep 16"X24" oil/panel 2004
 Journey 11"x14" acrylic/panel 2008
 A Little Gardener 12" dm. coll.,acrylic/canvas 2007

1. Aqua 30"x28" oil/canvas 1997 2. Arrival 30"x28" oil/canvas 1997 3. Circling 36"x48" oil/canvas 1993 4. Clubhouse 22"x24" oil/canvas 2008 5. Food 30"x28" oil/canvas 1997 6. Injection 25"x14" oil/canvas 1992 7. TV Room II 22"x24" oil/canvas 2009

1. Maud Moon 72"x60" oil/canvas 2003 2. Three-in-One 72"x60" oil/canvas 2003 3. The Meeting House 45"x36" oil/canvas 2003 4. Pink Sky at Night 45"x36" oil/canvas 2003 5. Pink Moon 16"x12" oil/canvas 2006 6. Bad 10"y6" oil/canvas 2000

