

## Sarah Crowner NICELLE BEAUCHENE GALLERY

For her first exhibition at Nicelle Beauchene, held in 2009, Sarah Crowner juxtaposed two bodies of work: a series of unglazed ceramic vessels and a group of "paintings" sewn together from remnants of discarded fabric. Both revealed a distinctive handmade quality. The former featured mottled surfaces, gently misshapen necks, and generally uneven forms, while the latter betray imperfections of alignment that open up pockets of space, holes amid the just-mismatched seams. Those paintings, with their insistent tactility and crisp, high-keyed geometric designs—they broadly referenced the fabric works of Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Blinky Palermo, among others, and were sometimes directly appropriated from specific compositions—presaged the artist's subsequent production. So, too, did the pots set the tone for more recent developments: the ceramics lacked bottoms, and were therefore nonfunctional. There is use and then there is use under the sign of the exhibition, and underscoring this distinction seems to be very much the thrust of Crowner's project.



View of "Sarah Crowner," 2014. Wall: *The Wave* (Flame), 2014. Floor: *Platform, Hot Blue Terracotta*, 2014.

of purposeful abstraction, along the lines of Wade Guyton's 2007 intervention at Petzel Gallery, was built around a shimmering turquoise parquer, a mosaic of glazed terra-cotta tiles set into a pattern by Josef Hoffmann. Elevated as a false floor, it became at once a stage and a kind her third at this gallery, was built around a shimmering turquoise parquer, a mosaic of glazed terra-cotta tiles set into a pattern by Josef Hoffmann. Elevated as a false floor, it became at once a stage and a kind of purposeful abstraction, along the lines of Wade Guyton's 2007 intervention at Petzel Gallery, where he laid down a black plywood floor, or Jorge Pardo's long-term project at Dia's old space in Chelsea, installed in 2000, for which he paved the lobby and bookstore in sunny ceramic blocks. (In fact, Crowner had the tiles fabricated at the same studio in Guadalajara, Mexico, where Pardo had his turned out for Dia.) A group of paintings lined the perimeter of Crowner's tiled surface—five panels hung on the adjacent walls and two were supported by freestanding structures—and to see them, viewers had to step up onto the raised area. Together, the paintings and the floor effectively constituted a room within the larger container of space, yet while Crowner evidently conceived of the installation as a cohesive entity, she refused the illusionism (as much as the illusion of totality) that is the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Viewers could step off the platform at the far side of the entrance, only to turn around and see the backs of the two unattached paintings, strings hanging, easel armatures foregrounded, looming like unseemly, naked totems.

Like the material distinctions—of color, sheen, and edge—between the various tiles, the paintings, too, contain leftovers from the process of construction. And, like the platform, they were produced part by part, from different elements put together to create a quilt-like whole. Most involve large sheets of hot-red and orange fabric cut into squiggles and stitched to raw canvas fields, while a painted pair features a fragment of a 1970s textile design by interior designer Alexander Girard—the motif of a silhouetted hand holding a spray of leaves and flowers—which Crowner has mirrored and cropped. Here, the body—suggested in the anthropomorphism of the standing paintings—*cum* sculptures—is pictured rather than implied, which has the effect of making its absence more profound.

Our presence moving across the artist's tiled ground registers as compensatory, perhaps even urgent. Not surprisingly, at the end of 2010, Crowner asserted that she felt her paintings, if enlarged, might serve as the backdrop for a performance. This was an interesting idea, one that Crowner in fact executed when she created the set for a Robert Ashley opera put on at the Serpentine Gallery in 2012. There will, no doubt, be many similar projects to come. Still, I find myself rooting for Crowner to continue to work in the manner demonstrated in this recent show. It remains powerfully in the present tense, and, rather than holding out for actions in the future, relishes the uncertainty and complexity of interactions generated by its own design.

—Suzanne Hudson

## Simon Evans JAMES COHAN GALLERY

THE AIM OF DRINKING IS PHILIP GUSTON, reads a tiny handwritten line in Simon Evans's *The Hell of Addiction*, 2013, BUT THE RESULT IS DENNIS QU Aid. This strange, regret-filled assertion is but one among hundreds in a work that is at once a drawing, a collage, and a map, crowded with text imparting self-help advice (THE CENTER OF ADDICTION IS SELF-DECEPTION), messages of despair (OBSESSIVE NEUROTIC ACTIVITY KEEPS TRAUMA AT BAY. THIS IS NOT TRUE), and what occasionally feels like absolute truth (I FUCKING LOVE DRUGS, GIVE ME DRUGS). These wry statements flood the imaginary neighborhood that Evans calls the "jazz district," in a crowded, palimpsest-like diagram heavily worked and reworked using tape and correction fluid, where the streets are inhabited by ghostly outlines of buildings, furniture, and people. Though the work flirts with incoherence, its anti-logic begins to double back on itself in a way that suggests a kind of sense.

Words and more words and occasionally the absence of words are the hinges of Evans's psychogeography, which the Brooklyn-based British artist produces in collaboration with his wife, Sarah Lannan. This exhibition was paced by four large works (made variously in 2013 and 2014) created from paper and found objects patched together in grids that are frequently and rather cheerfully violated by all manner of the crushed, dirty, randomly folded, and torn. One of the four is dominated by white paper and items such as a set list, a passive-aggressive note, play money, receipts, and paper plates, with a none-too-clean piece of gauze pasted over a section of it. Another, mostly blank, contains gridded, ruled, and ledger paper, as well as the patterned insides of envelopes; still another



Simon Evans, *Notes*, 2014, mixed media on paper, 88 1/2 x 64".

is the yellow of legal paper and Post-it notes; and the last one, whatever it is made up of, is almost entirely obscured by different black materials—something waxy, something plasticky, something shiny—so that very little can be read. These works contain annotations upon annotations, corrections upon corrections, more self-help bromides, more philosophical musings, and the results swerve from catholic chattiness to a kind of wholesale devouring of the world and then, in the expanses of blank paper and in the black work, to a silence as deep as death. But they are not only about words: A poster hung high above the gallery reception desk trumpeted *THE PURE UNWRITTEN MOMENT*. In other works we could focus on the individual found materials; from farther back there was a soothing or numbing visual white noise, an aesthetic of hoarding, or of marginalia gone berserk.

These written and typed fragments may be physically fragile, but in Evans's constructions they become tense and powerful. *R.I.P.s*, 2012, which enumerates the names of the dead—Etta James, Mike Kelley, cargo pants—in tiny, spidery letters, is a work of compressed feeling and helplessness, a terrible and devotional litany of loss, despite the jokes. By flooding so much stuff with even more stuff, Evans paradoxically creates a void. In part from horror vacui, in part from amused acknowledgment of this emptiness, he writes, corrects, fills in, corrects again, like Thomas Bernhard's Roithamer, until what remains both celebrates the fullness of existence and leaves one in despair at all the noise. One thinks of outsider artist Howard Finster and the way he swung back and forth between saying everything and saying nothing. With his questionable maxims, with the philosophy that lands just to the left of sense, with grids composed of ephemera given second life, Evans, too, goes to the brink of meaning and then backs away, as though meaning were too important to be divulged in the first place.

—Emily Hall

## Josephine Halvorson

SIKKEMA JENKINS & CO.

In this show—her second solo exhibition at the gallery—Josephine Halvorson presented ten formidable paintings portraying artful decay. All created freehand and most in plein air, the canvases depict flattish or relief-like surfaces found in the vicinity of her studio and

Josephine Halvorson, *Woodshed Vine*, 2013, oil on linen, 36 x 28".



home in rural western Massachusetts: a boarded-up window frame, a panel used as a mold to pour a cement foundation, a shallow fireplace, a woodshed door. As in Halvorson's earlier work, the application of paint reveals keen powers of observation married to an impressive facility with her medium. A person could spend quite some time marveling at how simply and forcefully the horizontal white bands of *Woodshed Vine*, 2013, convey the texture of chipping house paint, or at the economy with which brushstrokes of ochre in the seven-panel work *Foundation*, 2013, conjure a deep, tactile sensation of caked, dried mud. Yet for all the seemingly effortless rigor with which the works were produced, the painterly illusion is always incomplete; these aren't titanium-cold simulations—rather, they are boldly, imperfectly homespun.

The works embody a convincing sense of objecthood—the things they depict seem to occupy real space. Part of the feeling of presence comes about because of the cropping: The picture plane and the surface of the relief-like subject are nearly coterminous, and the mainly rectilinear subjects are simultaneously contained by and seem to define the edges of the canvas. But it also results from Halvorson's approach to color. In a recent interview with the *Brooklyn Rail*'s Phong Bui, the artist said, "[W]e're told . . . that color is this elusive, slippery, scientific kind of substance, a coating on the real. But for me it's actually the opposite: Color is what gives identity to form." This alchemical invocation of essence via hue—a quasi-medieval collapse of signifier and signified—is evident, for example, in *64*, 2013, for which Halvorson portrays rough timbers slathered with red paint by incising crimson pigment into a thick impasto.

In an essay written by the artist and published in the winter 2012 edition of *Art Journal*, Halvorson characterizes her practice as a kind of "interpretive labor." She cites Thoreau's description of his bean field, which, when he tilled it, "disturbed the ashes of unchronicled nations who in primeval years lived under these heavens, and their small implements of war and hunting were brought to the light of this modern day." Like farming, plein air painting enables a direct, embodied encounter with one's material surroundings, and its various activities—finding and selecting things to paint, mixing pigment and brushing it onto a canvas, and looking at things very, very closely—lead to a deeper, more nuanced understanding of those surroundings and their history. The act is not only observational—it is hermeneutical. But what does this mean for the viewer? Halvorson, working in extreme close-up, evokes this attractive, deteriorating New England world powerfully and persuasively. The paintings seem to want to tell us something. Yet the insights Halvorson has gained from the experience of making them—whether social, historical, or even atmospheric—remain beyond the margins. In focusing on surfaces, Halvorson presents ciphers. When communicating an interpretation of the world, sometimes it's important to zoom out.

—Lloyd Wise

## Kazuko Miyamoto

INVISIBLE-EXPORTS

In 1969, Kazuko Miyamoto was working in her live-in studio at 117 Hester Street when the fire alarm went off. Congregating on the street below with other artists from the building, she met her neighbor Sol LeWitt, and soon after became his assistant. For several decades, she executed his wall drawings and oversaw the production of his modular cube sculptures. Today, the Japanese-American artist is best known for her signature post-Minimalist work, as well as for establishing Gallery Onetwentyeight, a Lower East Side storefront space, in 1986. Fourteen years earlier she had cofounded the feminist cooperative A.I.R. Gallery, where she had solo shows in 1975, 1977, 1979, and 1980.

Miyamoto's recent exhibition in New York—her first solo show in the city in eleven years—examined the beginnings of her work and featured a judicious selection from the 1970s: geometric, abstract drawings and an undated, kaleidoscopic installation called *Untitled String Construction*. Though the show invoked LeWitt's self-imposed restrictions and Agnes Martin's hand-drawn grids, it also brought to mind drawings by other artists—namely Hanne Darboven, Mirtha Dermisache, Irma Blank, and Nasreen Mohamedi—that are task-based, repetitive, and develop according to their own internal logic. For an untitled graphite and color pencil drawing from 1971, Miyamoto plotted small crosses on graph paper, embedding successively smaller crosses in the resultant white space to generate a fractal-like cosmos of