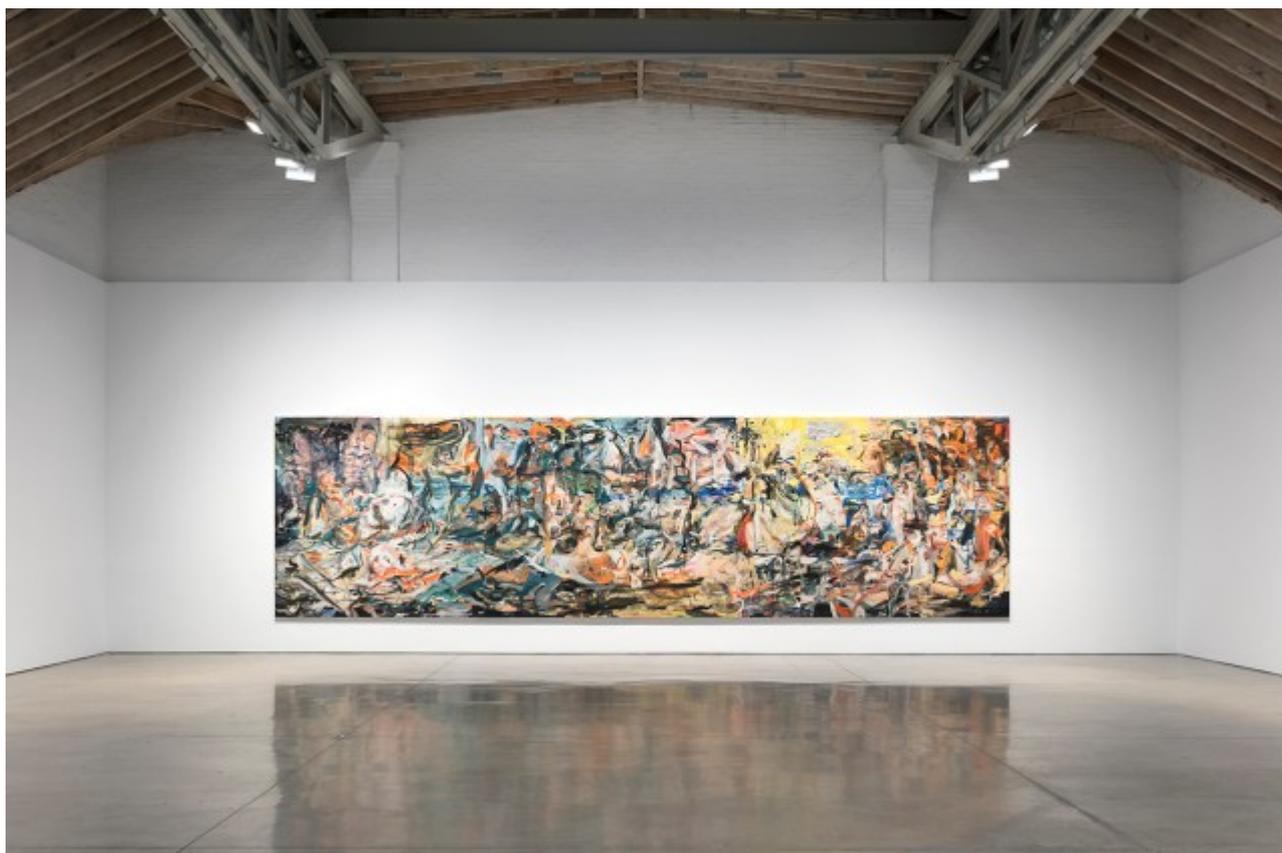


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A New Age in Painting (at Last)?

Witnessing a Reinvigoration



Installation view of "Cecily Brown, A Day! Help! Help! Another Day!" at Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, (October 27-December 2, 2017) © Cecily Brown. Photo credit: Steven Probert

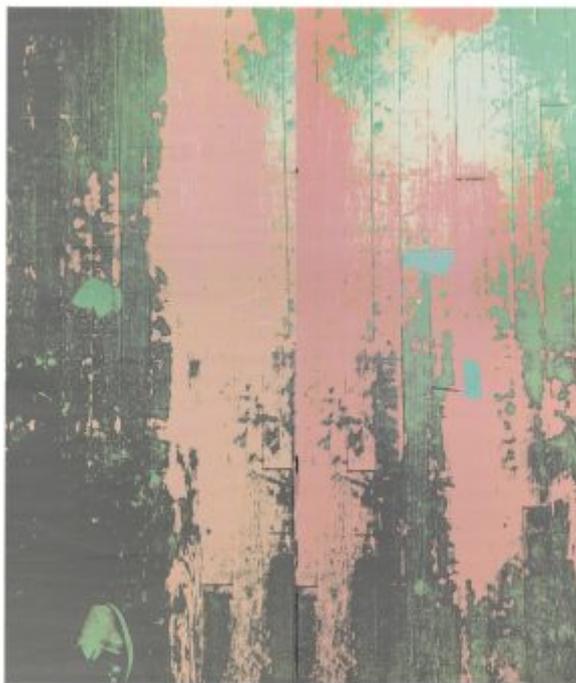
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1950s

Ad Reinhardt makes "the" last painting—and then continues to make "last" [paintings](#) until he dies in 1967. Therein he delineates the conundrum of the death of originality in painting and the perpetual urge for the medium's mysteries, no matter how reduced, remote or seemingly pointless.



Wade Guyton, *Untitled* (2016) on view in “Wade Guyton: Das New York Atelier, Abridged” at Serpentine, London (until 8 February 2018) © Wade Guyton. Courtesy the artist. Photo credit: Ron Amstutz

1960s

Around the same time, Conceptual art renders the object superfluous. If painting isn't really dead, it has been backed into a corner. Checkmate.

Late 1970s/early 1980s

Painting is back with a vengeance. It is big, bold, colorful and flamboyant—whether intentionally decorative, macho-expressionistic, imitative, derivative, or a re-enactment of that which has already been seen—it embraces, scrutinizes and repositions known processes and imagery. A new voracious art market develops at the same time.

By the end of the 1980s

Many of the next generation of artists are dead or dying from AIDS. The artistic virility of youth—typically the province of invention and reinvigoration in art—becomes diminished by death. Big, bold, exuberant painting doesn't seem so appropriate anymore. Instead, intimately scaled, psychological sculptures define these newly challenged times. Painting fades in importance.

Early 1990s

There is a severe art market crash, after which painting re-emerges. It is now figuratively and psychologically tentative, intentionally introspective and its meanings are often not fully knowable.



Jacqueline Humphries, *:)green* (2017). Courtesy the artist and Greene Naftali, New York

The previous decade or so

A new generation of professional artists comes of age making lots of painting, much of it abstract, mostly vertical in format (very iPhone communicable). Much of it is attractive and likable: maybe too easily likable.

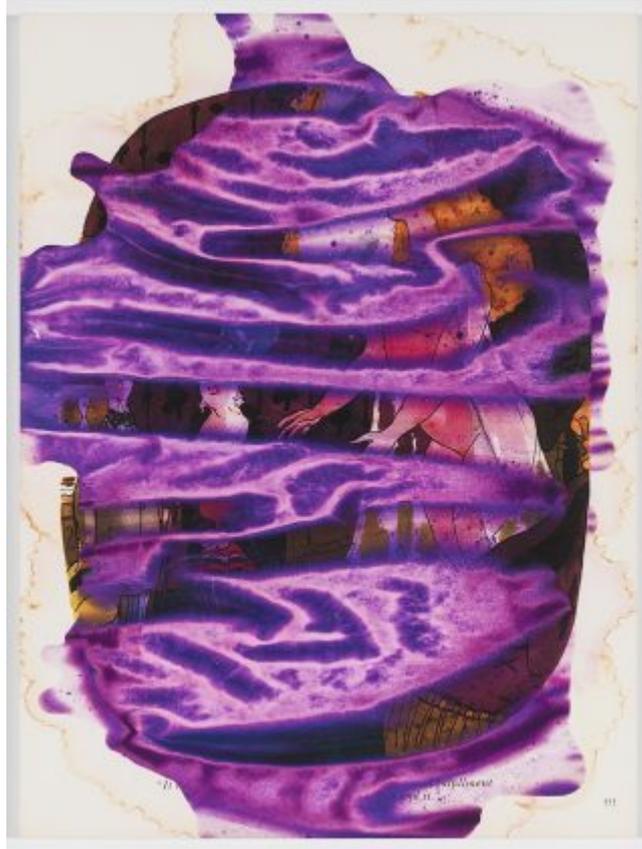
Ravenous for new product and new greats, the market embraces quite a number of these artists. Many receive oodles of fame and are subject to much speculation. A very small number of them show long-term promise; most crash and burn within a season or two. Painting enters a crisis blandly masquerading as a period of plenty.

Today

Many of us have been lamenting this for years. But right now, in numerous exhibitions in New York, we are witnessing a reinvigoration in painting. This is less fully evident in the work of emerging artists but is completely visible in the work of maturing and mature artists. The decade-long deprivation of greatness in contemporary painting is finally being rectified.

Maybe the reinvigoration comes as a reaction to a current critical mass of worldwide crises, an increasing sense of mortality and, after an avalanche of affluence, the inevitable urgency to go for proverbial broke.

In our most recent issue I wrote about some great recent exhibitions of painting, including several that had just opened. Now, just a couple of weeks later, it has become clear that we are in the middle of an exhilarating moment for painting.



Richard Prince, *Untitled (#211)* (2016) on view at Gladstone Gallery, New York (3 November-22 December 2017) © Richard Prince. Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

New York and London right now

Richard Prince is showing his best paintings since he began painting the monochrome jokes in the late 1980s ("[Richard Prince: Ripple Paintings](#)", until 22 December at Gladstone Gallery). Cecily Brown ("[A Day! Help! Help! Another Day!](#)" until 2 December at Paula Cooper) has ramped up the intensity and vigor of her work with paintings that have the presence and essentiality of grand 19th-century French Neoclassical painting. Jacqueline Humphries is making the best work of her life ("[Jacqueline Humphries](#)", until 16 December at Greene Naftali), with exhilarating paintings in which she constructs gesture with relief, utilizing the marks of the keyboard, each "drip" a letter, punctuation point or emoji.

Wade Guyton's current exhibition at the Serpentine in London is, quite simply, one of the most breathtaking exhibitions of new painting I have seen in years ("[Wade Guyton: Das New Yorker Atelier, Abridged](#)" until 8 February). Cheyney Thompson's recent show at Andrew Kreps Gallery found fresh life for the monochrome ("[Somewhere Some Pictures Sometimes](#)"). And Alex Katz's new work ("[Alex Katz](#)" until 22 December at Gavin Brown) is some of the most powerful and unforgettably "present" art produced during his six decades as one of the most consistent artists in the history of postwar painting.

Speaking of sculpture (!) let's not overlook the amazing new works by Katharina Fritsch ("[Katharina Fritsch](#)" until 22 December at Matthew Marks).