

Jef Geys

Essex Street / New York



From top:

Jef Geys

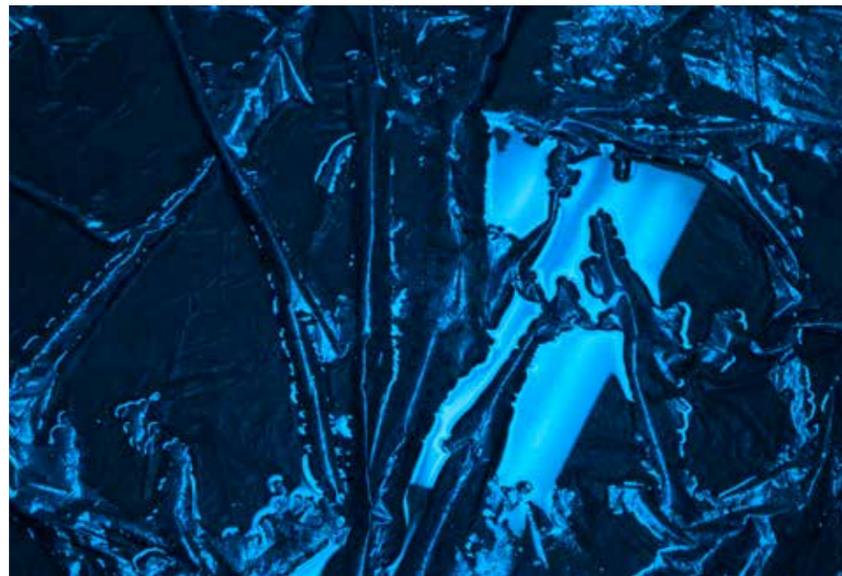
Maquette Muhka (2017)
Courtesy of the Artist and
Essex Street, New York

Céline Condorelli

"Epilogue," Installation view
at P!, New York (2017)
Courtesy of the Artist
and P!, New York
Photography by
Sebastian Bach

Lindsay Lawson

"Agency," Installation view
at 8-11, Toronto (2017)
Courtesy of the Artist
and 8-11, Toronto
Photography by
Yuula Benivolsk



In spite of the fourteen paintings on view at Essex Street Gallery, Jef Geys isn't interested in making abstract paintings, per se. Having served as the editor and publisher of his local newspaper in provincial northeastern Belgium, *Kempen Informatieblad*, he's a self-appointed newspaper man, and his exhibition "Bubble Paintings" — which essentially seems to collect paintings from his storage unit and exhibit each work in its bubble wrapping — demonstrates a plainspoken and unceremonious approach at odds with the art world's often self-fulfilling specialization. In fact, it's Geys's straightforwardness that makes him so enigmatic, because it requires us to grapple for *who, what, where, when* and *why*.

The only gestures that are recognizably "painterly" or "artistic" in the entire exhibition are the daubs of red, blue and yellow paint that mark the packaging, as one might seal an envelope with wax. Were we to begin looking for further clues about these works, the press release *assiduously* explains that Geys updates the dates of each to 2017; that prices correlate directly to scale; and that the artist designed the entirely nondescript shelves that support each piece. By emphasizing these details, Geys prioritizes the bureaucracy surrounding an artwork, and though it is possible to have a pleasant visual experience — the purples and yellows in *Violet* (2017) pierce the muddying effects of the plastic wrapper — the show poses the visual as incidental, or merely a matter of taking note.

All this suggests that Geys sees artmaking and viewing as redundant enterprises. The show itself intimates that there's an overabundance of art packed up and stowed away. A banner hanging high on the gallery's back wall reads "Marie Gouze" (*MARIE GOUZE*, apparently undated), which the press release leads us to believe refers to an eighteenth-century French abolitionist playwright and pioneering feminist figure. Attempting to reconcile the reference against the show's systematic redundancies, however, instills a sense of doubt. "Marie Gouze" merely sounds like a typical French name.

by Sam Korman

Céline Condorelli

P! / New York

P! is closing, and Céline Condorelli's exhibition "Epilogue" is the gallery's last. The show takes careful inventory of P!'s social, architectural and ideological stock, presenting a series of interventions that amount to a critical biography.

Traces of the last several exhibitions were left in anticipation of the closing. It anticipates works like *Epilogue* (2017), a freestanding room divider composed of custom brackets and cheaply sourced corrugated plastic — something always edges into our vision here. The framed print *It's All True* (2017) depicts a palimpsest of the gallery's exhibitions over the course of its five-year run. A beautiful eulogy in itself, the work also recalls the gonzo experiment when P! thought it could completely rebranded itself as "K-period," and sell a suite of short-run shows as one large project.

P! put art in dialog with design. Or, more accurately, design helped P! interrogate the apparatus of art in a way that traditional gallery models couldn't or won't. It converted the white cube into a tool. Condorelli's show similarly emphasizes the particulars of display to elucidate the gallery's social and ideological entanglements. The artist cut a large rectangular hole in the gallery's east wall for *Alteration to Existing Conditions (II)* (2017). The leftover sheetrock was converted into a bench, which forced occupants to face one another. Over the hole hangs *Extended Field of Vision* (1930), a surreal drawing by Herbert Bayer, an artist and pioneering exhibition designer with questionable ties to Nazism. A tiny figure with an eyeball for a head is immersed in a disorienting, merzbau-like exercise in spatial design — in Condorelli's incisive re-presentation, it's subordinate to a larger story about legacy.

Welcoming and bookish, P! capably contained some problematic ideas along the way — this same attitude preserved a space for mystery in art. It would be sadder to see P! go if it hadn't already taught us that a gallery is actually a set of ideas that prod us to endlessly renegotiate art.

by Sam Korman

Lindsay Lawson

8-11 / Toronto

In Toronto's Chinatown, Lindsay Lawson covered the exterior windows of 8-11 with one-way tinted window film to create the self-contained interior of "Agency," the artist's latest solo exhibition. Only at night did the full effects of the site-specific installation come into view. Floor-to-ceiling vinyl printed with a net-art pastiche of cellos, masks, water drops, soccer nets, windows and toothbrushes enclosed the room. Puddles of water pooled on an undulating expanse of black plastic covering the floor. The odd arrangement of objects seemed to hang weightlessly in space in a hazy blue-black neon light that resembled the wince-worthy glare of a night-light laptop screen illuminating the dark.

Lawson's previous takes on the propositions of object-oriented ontology have been unusual. OOO is a philosophy that claims a kind of leveling universalism that decenters the human and considers all objects to be on the same plane: we all relate equally to a tree, a cello, a toaster, an oyster and a rock. Fascinated by the intimacy in human-object relations, Lawson scripted her upcoming feature film about a woman who falls in love with a rock. During last year's Berlin Biennale, Lawson collaborated with renowned objectum sexuals advocate Erika Eiffel in a tender choreography for cranes.

The uncanny, speculative atmosphere of "Agency" is Lawson's attempt to imagine the inner life of objects. Though the enclosed environment seems to put into question what can be seen, it is actually more about what can be known. Spectators are invited into an uncomfortably close space where familiar rules have been rendered nonsensical. "Without physical information," suggests the exhibition text, we must "rely on rendering meaning through methods of humanistic interpretation." This leaves us at a loss. As close as Lawson may have come with this imagined interior, ultimately, any sense of the agency of objects remains undetermined.

by Yaniya Lee