

Art and Cake April 14, 2017

Kevin Appel
slip collapse then and
Christopher Grimes Gallery
March 18 - April 29, 2017

By Jody Zellen



At first glance the paintings in Kevin Appel's exhibition, *slip collapse then and* are formal abstractions dotted with geometric shapes and photographic fragments referencing architecture and nature. In Appel's early paintings the architecture was foregrounded. Appel became well known for his renditions of interior spaces and exterior facades of case-study style houses painted as flat geometric shapes in a 1950s palette of colors. In the ensuing years Appel's work has become both denser and more abstract. Although architectural references are still contained within the works, Appel now includes photographic fragments of the natural world — including animals as well as the landscape— often overlaid and partially obscured by bold colorful rectangles and other geometric shapes.

Appel's work is concerned with surfaces and layers and while he often mines his own history, his recent works on paper and paintings can be approached as if they were maps depicting the layers of an archeological site. The key referents in

this series of work are the portholes that were constructed on the facade of modernist architect Jean Prouvé's La Maison Tropicale, a prototype for modular housing. Appel uses the circular form as a viewer or lens through which the layers below can be seen. Each work takes as its point of departure a collage of printed materials loosely hanging on the artist's studio wall. These collages — containing fragments of photographs of Appel's earlier works, landscapes as well as images of Paolo Soleri's Arcosanti— are photographed and then digitally printed onto Appel's panel becoming the base layer of the artwork.

Next, Appel screens and paints gestural marks and geometric shapes on top of the image, often obscuring most of the surface below. The predominant top layer in these works is a translucent white that varies from hard edged to textured and soft washes. Fragments of the photographic back layer are visible in the interior of many of the screened circles, yet Appel never leaves enough details for them to be identified. They do not coalesce as a coherent whole but rather allude to spaces and places that exist beyond the painted frames.

In the past Appel could be defined as a representational painter and deliberate colorist, yet these pieces gravitate more toward monochrome abstractions. Composite 18 (ragged glory) and Composite 24 (terse rejoinder) (all works 2017) are the most colorful paintings on display. Here, the repeated form around the void of the circle is screened over ambiguous black, green and red shapes and as the titles suggest, they are composites that indulge in their ragged glory and are terse rejoinders of disparate source materials. As directed by the similarly obtuse title, slip collapse then and, these paintings and works on paper celebrate what can happen when the known slips or collapses and then, serendipitously becomes something else, something more complex and engaging than the disparate parts.

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