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Liminal Spaces: Yvette Gellis and Ty Pownall at Jason Vass
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By Jody Zellen



What is a liminal space? Liminal refers to something transitional, as if at a boundary or threshold. In their exhibition, aptly titled *Liminal Spaces*, Yvette Gellis and Ty Pownall have filled both the walls and floor of the gallery. Works by these seemingly unrelated artists are interspersed in the space to create a conversation about crossing over— be it because they push at the boundaries of abstraction or because of their use of hybrid materials. While Pownall's works appear more minimal, Gellis' are complexly packed.

Pownall is interested in materials and materiality. His floor pieces are geometric constructions made from loose sand, steel and dry pigment. In *Relative Density of Moments*, (2018), two triangular wedges join at their vertexes. The larger shape has a rounded concavity covered in cyan pigment with a smaller yellow circular opening. At the opposite end of the sculpture there is a smaller black circle surrounded by a similar concave ring of yellow pigment. The two parts have a kind of symbiotic attraction. Pownall's wall works are made with spackle, a material used in construction but not often thought of as a drawing or painting medium. In works like *Shared Terrain* and *Dense Time* (both 2018), Pownall draws on panel with the spackle, creating

diagrammatic marks that rise from the its surface. These pieces reference the scientific, yet depict imaginary forms and relationships. Pownall's works are purposely ambiguous and allude to that which might exist in another world.

In her paintings and floor sculptures Gellis juxtaposes wide swaths of thick paint with realistic representations, often collaged to the canvas. While her layered works are infused with quasi-recognizable elements, they are covered by flowing gestures. Gellis depicts invented spaces in her paintings and like Pownall, imagines what might exist in another world. Many of her works include realistically black and white checkerboard floors —some rendered, others collaged— that recede into the deep space of the paintings and lead to distant and unrecognizable places.

Gellis creates hybrids— her assemblages often physically extend elements within paintings onto the gallery floor. In *Liminal Space Dark*, (2018), Gellis has constructed a ramp that juts out horizontally along the floor from the bottom of the painting, mirroring the scene depicted. Squares of tile surround the floor-based work, suggesting a real rather than invented space. Gellis is not afraid to disrupt her surfaces and is bold in her choices of materials. She weaves different styles —gestural, representational and collage— into a single work. Many of the paintings are hung low on the wall as if inviting the viewer to step into the painted world.

Once inside Gellis' dense compositions, the viewer is confronted by skewed and often conflicting perspectives; thick areas of built up paint applied atop more carefully rendered sections that reference domestic space. In *Liminal Embrace #1*, (2018) Gellis inter-mixes oils, acrylics and resin to create a dizzying and chaotic composition that alludes to a mysterious event or presence in the painted space. Is it a gateway to danger or the sublime? The works are at once structural and architectural. In many ways, they represent fantastical places that are only accessible via a leap of faith akin to Alice's adventures in wonderland.

Both Gellis and Pownall are dedicated to their craft and committed to expanding the boundaries of both painting and sculpture. While Pownall's works speak to precision and have a certain quiet delicateness, Gellis' works are loud and bombastic. Both artists investigate liminality and push their use of materials beyond convention in order to create a portal to new and different worlds.

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