

CRAIG TAYLOR: ENFACE

CB1 Gallery – Los Angeles

By Megan Abrahams



Craig Taylor, *Internal Friction Stacked*, 2014, oil on canvas, 72" x 54." Courtesy of CB1 Gallery.

Derivative of portraits or sculptural busts, Craig Taylor's recent complex abstract paintings achieve striking visual tension through the contrast of scraped-out layered backgrounds and the built-up application of paint on the dominant shape—or subject—configured in the foreground.

The theme of the exhibit is a revealing double entendre—*En-face*, meaning to write on the face of something, usually paper. In this series, the artist embellishes the suggested portraits or busts—in effect, faces—through systematic marks made with thick marks of paint in a stringently limited palette. There is a sort of start-stop to the marks, surfacing above an historical record of various versions of different backgrounds.

The forms in the foreground—subjects, or perhaps faces—appear in subtle relief from backgrounds comprised of layers of paint that have been applied in succession and then removed, leaving the echoes of assorted pigments visible in ghost-like shadow through a film of muted green-gray blue. The end result of the scraped-out backgrounds is a smooth burnished patina of exposed under-painting, revealing an intriguing glimpse into the artist's process, a deliberate and intricate method that requires hours of working, undoing and reworking to achieve its profound nuanced effect.

If it weren't for the pedestal shapes at the base of each abstracted bust, the portrait connotation might be less apparent. The shapes dominating these canvases could be construed as maps, satellite im-

ages or organic forms, like islands or rocks in the desert. In *The Absolute Fragrance* (2015), Taylor mostly confined his palette to muted grays, greens and blues, reminiscent of the colors found on camouflage fatigues. The gold background magically glows with light. Little vertical raised relief marks in the background coexist like a negative or reverse image of marks in the dominant foreground shape.

Internal Friction Stacked (2014), features a still subdued, but more varied palette—pale lavender, a hint of rose, umber, green, blue—each muted with white to create subtle tints. Spaces in the large mass, which loom from the canvas, provide a window into the background. There is architecture, solidity, in the prevailing shape. Demarcated by the built-up application of paint, it becomes a mesmerizing though inconclusive entity, enveloped in a mysterious aura, anchored with a sense of gravitas.

Lines confer dimension to the central form, or subject, most notably in *Without the Transistor of Reason* (2015), which features an abstract extrapolation of the head of a cartoon rabbit. Here, the artist has described the pedestal at the bottom of the frame in a horizontal plateau that almost appears to jut out from the plane of the canvas. Not sculpture, or even bas-relief, these paintings defy the flatness of the surface, capturing the essence of abstract sculptural shapes and compelling the eye to linger.

(March 7 - April 11, 2015)

CB1GALLERY

1923 S. Santa Fe Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90021
Tel. 1-213-806-7889 • www.cb1gallery.com