



Painting Forward

Joan Brown, Charles Garabedian, Jackie Gendel, Haley Josephs, Kyle Staver

February 18 – April 2, 2016

Opening reception: Thursday, February 18 from 6 – 8:30pm

Thomas Erben Gallery is pleased to present *Painting Forward*, an exhibition of works by Joan Brown, Charles Garabedian, Jackie Gendel, Haley Josephs, and Kyle Staver. Recently, figurative painting has undergone a revival. Artists have taken up the genre in ways that break from its earlier resurgence in the 1990s, when figurative painting was still coping with photography's dominant influence in the decade prior. Painting had been burdened with the need to justify itself in relation to other media, to contemporary culture, and to society at large. Now, the medium has moved beyond this moment, and works by artists of multiple generations are being appreciated under the revival of its earlier history. In the work of these five painters, newly relevant positions are found by abandoning artifice and irony, and depicting subjects in unadorned and direct ways.

Emblematic for this renewal are the paintings of **Joan Brown**. In *Mary Julia y Manuel* (1976), a woman poses in front of San Francisco Bay, with Alcatraz island floating above the red-carpet scene. Awkwardly positioned within a shallow ground, her figure appears as an unpredictable agent, with her inner psychological life evident but inscrutable. With their bright colors and flat planes, Brown's paintings recall the sheen of both pop art and graphic design, while personalizing this formal language with slightly off-handed brushwork.

Haley Josephs' works are similarly inward-oriented and eloquent. The subjects are painted with a saturated palette and softly rendered features, and in spite of their reserved expressions, the figures exude an intimate depth. In *Night Painting – Emergence of Clouds* (2016), ornamental motifs reappear as echoes: the curved tendril of a cloud reappears in the dirt road, the page of the notebook, and the woman's back. Pictorial elements reverberate within the work, yet they remain enigmatic.

This interest in line is shared with **Jackie Gendel's** complex composition *Sidewalk* (2015), in which layers of figures are distinguished by insistent and articulate mark making. The twenty-six gridded portraits of women appear as types, only slightly individualized by the scratchy line-work and purple strokes. Beneath the figures, an under-painted background of bright blocks of color has been washed over. The painting gives the impression of narrative without revealing it: the content is a blend of image and gesture that remains unresolved.

Kyle Staver adopts mythological figures as her subjects. She imbues these iconic individuals with new life, in an almost fairytale reinterpretation. Staver's technique mirrors its content, as she turns the great tradition of French painting contemporary, with cartoonish rendering, contorted perspectives, and cinematic lighting. As a triptych, *Diana & Actaeon* (2012) adopts an iconic art historical format, but one that also recalls the cells of graphic novels and comics.

Whereas Staver imbues these archetypes with affection, **Charles Garabedian** employs myth in a more jarring fashion. The symbolic and mythological references that populate his work are assembled in a disjointed manner, with figures theatrically staged within the picture plane. In the sparsely-set seaside painting *Stigmata* (2014), Christ appears within a pale sky. A female figure pulls on her own hair as she stares at the cross floating above her. In the pattern of her shirt, the cruciform is replicated as a lamppost, while her position on the shore is mirrored in the seascape of her skirt. These conjoined worlds are idiosyncratic, with deep attention given to figures whose tone and purpose are unknowable.

Joan Brown (1938 - 1990) was born and raised in San Francisco, where she studied at the California School of Fine Arts (now San Francisco Art Institute). She exhibited frequently throughout her career and was an influential teacher at the University of California, Berkeley. Recently, solo exhibitions have been held at George Adams Gallery in New York and the San Jose Museum of Art in California. Her works are represented in many public collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Whitney Museum, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Charles Garabedian (1923 - 2016) has shown regularly in New York and Los Angeles since the early 1970's and is the recipient of numerous awards and grants, including the National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, and a prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His work can be seen in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. In 2011, Julie Joyce curated a comprehensive retrospective of Garabedian's work at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art in Santa Barbara, CA.

Jackie Gendel's exhibitions have garnered reviews in *Modern Painters*, *Artforum*, *New York Times* and *Art in America*, to name a few. The American Academy of Arts and Letters awarded her an Academy Award in Art in 2007. She participated in the Marie Walsh Sharpe Space Program in 2010 and was an artist-in-residence at The MacDowell Colony in 2005. She received her MFA from Yale University in 1998. Recent solo exhibitions include Jeff Bailey Gallery, New York, and Loyal Gallery, Sweden. Gendel (b. 1973) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Haley Josephs (b. 1987) earned her BFA from Tyler School of Art in 2011 and her MFA from Yale in 2014. She has been the recipient of many awards including the AI Held/American Academy in Rome Prize in 2013. Recent exhibitions include *Strike Up the Band* at Waterfront Art/Life Institute in Kingston, New York and *Wind Chimes* at Bannerette in Brooklyn. Josephs lives and works in Hudson, New York.

Kyle Staver is from Minnesota and received her MFA from Yale School of Art in 1987. In 2015, Staver was granted a Guggenheim Fellowship and was inducted into the National Academy. She is the recipient of several awards including an American Academy of Arts and Letters Purchase Prize in 2015, an ArtPrize award in 2013, the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award in 2003 and the Benjamin Altman Figure Prize from the National Academy Museum in 1996 and again in 1998. Recent solo exhibitions have been held in NYC at Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects (2015) and Tibor de Nagy Gallery (2013).