

Related Events:

All events are free and open to the public.

Exhibition Reception

Sunday, May 23, 3 - 5 pm

Salon

Sunday, February 28, 2010, 4 pm

Join curators Shannon Stratton and Jeff M. Ward as they talk informally about the artist's work.

About the Artists

Artists Todd Chilton (Chicago), Pete Fagundo (Evanston), Carrie Gundersdorf (Chicago), Katy Heinlein (Houston), Jessica Labatte (Chicago), Andrea Myers (Chicago) and Tessa Windt (Phoenix) all work formally, producing work that is notable for its materiality. Conjuring a firm, optimistic agency in their application of both their materials (fabric, foam, discarded furniture, pencil and paint) as well as an evident hand (draping, dripping, stitching), they work in the service of an up front and open formalism, confidently considering the possibility of a truthful object.

About the Curators

Shannon Stratton serves as Executive and Creative Director at threewalls, a residency and exhibition space she co-founded in part with Jeff M. Ward in 2003. Since then, they have collaborated on a number of projects including *The Happiness I Seek* (Chicago, 2006) and *Without Which Nothing* (Chicago/Sarasota, 2005) and an earlier version of *Ps and Qs* in Houston. Both Stratton and Ward reside in Chicago.

Hyde Park **ARTCENTER**

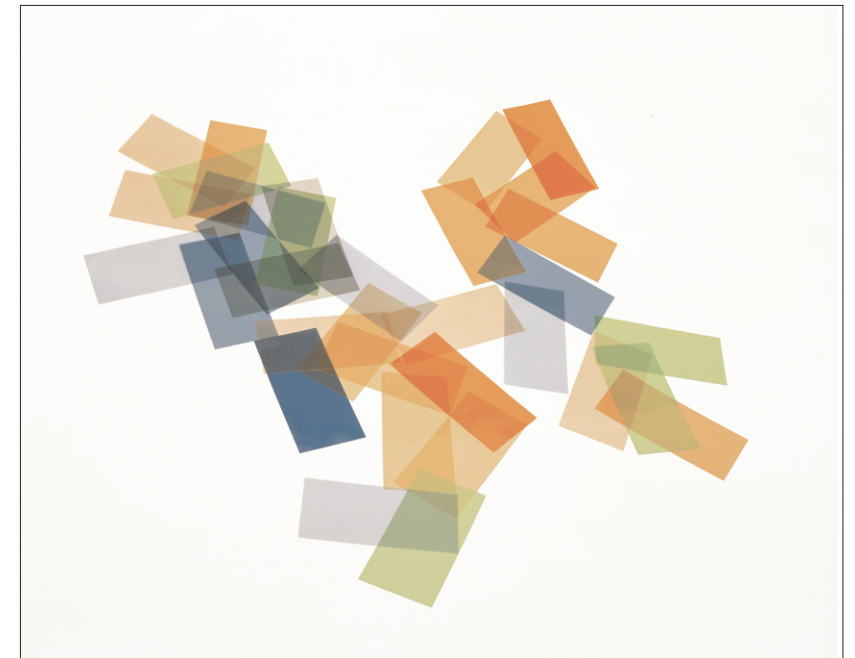
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The Hyde Park Art Center is a not-for-profit organization that presents innovative exhibitions, primarily work by Chicago-area artists, and educational programs in the visual arts for children and adults of diverse backgrounds. The Center is funded in part by 3Arts, Alphawood Foundation; Boeing; a City Arts III grant from the City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and the Illinois Arts Council; Creative New Zealand; Harper Court Arts Council; The Lloyd A. Fry Foundation; The Leo S. Guthman Fund; The Irving Harris Foundation; Illinois Arts Council, a state agency; JPMorgan Chase Foundation; The Mayer & Morris Kaplan Family Foundation; The MacArthur Foundation; The MacArthur Fund for Arts and Culture at Prince; The Orbit Fund; Polk Bros. Foundation; The Clinton Family Fund; The Wallace Foundation; and the generosity of its members and friends.

February 28-June 6, 2010

Ps & Qs

Curated by Shannon Stratton and Jeff M. Ward



Jessica Labatte, *Untitled*, 2010, archival inkjet print, 18 x 22 inches

Artwork by:

Todd Chilton
Carrie Gundersdorf
Jessica Labatte
Tessa Windt

Pete Fagundo
Katy Heinlein
Andrea Myers

Surprisingly Friendly Formalism

The pleasure of re-mounting *Ps & Qs*, an exhibition we had originally organized in 2006, is the opportunity to adjust the emphasis of our original premise based on an experience of how these artists' works behave together. We have also been informed by the ongoing practices of these artists, writings we have done about the show, and the absorption of the original exhibition's critical reception, both anecdotally and in print. Now, through a process of editing and reconsidering marked more by intuition than the conceptually focused initial approach, we re-present a *Ps & Qs* which highlights a vital, friendly formalism.

When we first organized *Ps & Qs* for the Glassell School of Art at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, we had been inspired by a studio visit with a young artist whose work mobilized a sly, sneaky formalism. Then still a dutiful art student, she was engrossed with making formal abstractions that were modern in style but influenced by the de-monumentalizing history of post-minimal sculpture. The objects were strictly themselves—i.e. they did not look analogous to any particular non-art object—but, significantly, no particular narrative was positioned to take up residency in their vacancy of referent. It was an attempt at a contemporary, un-entangled formalism: modest, truthful, and present.

This was a galvanizing experience for us, and we quickly assembled our initial exhibition. The original *Ps & Qs* brought together work that eschewed metaphor in order to foreground a material presence through both traditional modernist materials (oil paint and welded steel) and those ushered in course-correctively by more recent artistic practice (fabric and other "craft" materials). The work was generally forthright about its materiality, with an evident hand in the treatment of otherwise taciturn materials, conceptual emphasis was placed on truth and the adoption of a formal language.

By truth, we had meant the profoundly simple kind that recognizes the actualities of the passage of time and the immutable—yet mortal—presence of things and peoples amidst the contingencies of context. We had titled the show *Ps & Qs* in a move to identify the grounds for these artists "minding" a formal lexicon. In their case, a provisional, non-grandiose, "I am here" brand of self-aware truth that appears compatible with existing, contemporary reconsiderations that emphasize mutability and relativity in critical thinking.. The aspect of the show that we didn't anticipate until its installation, however, was how amicable and beautiful the show was. The work existed on a human scale, as opposed to an



Todd Chilton, *Purple Diamonds*, 2009, Oil on linen



Katy Heinlein, *Bellows*, 2008, Wood and fabric

architectural one, and many viewers of the exhibition felt greeted and embraced by the work. Among the objects' largely formal moves, a harmonic interrelation predominated. Consequently, this current incarnation of *Ps & Qs* at the Hyde Park Art Center underscores a tangibility that emphasizes the art object's participation in the process of viewing art—the object as subject, as a thing that makes relationships.

An emphasis on the desirability and romance in the exchange among objects and between object and viewer is, in retrospect, an undercurrent we recognize in all of our curatorial projects. In this translation of *Ps & Qs*, the relationships have become more exaggerated, driven by a conversational, descriptive use of formal languages. Each piece begins to sound more personified, sensual, and loaded. Our layout of the artworks, which alternate artworks and architectural elements in a peek-a-boo fashion, encourages overlapping, intimate experiences of a few pieces at a time.

In this installation, a truth to materials remains, an unavoidable circumstance given the impossibility of diluting something as synthetic as spandex cloth, as in the work of Heinlein and Windt. Despite the stubbornness or specificity of some of these materials, a desire to unfix the immovable endures and is evident in the subtle manipulations: Labatte's push/pull between depth and flatness, Chilton's vertiginous compositions, and Fagundo's aesthetic groupings of humble materials. The subtlety of the manipulations along with the "looking after" of materials—in terms of judiciousness and tenderness—plays with the idea of being "mindful," in the manner of a caretaker as well as the acolyte who is heedful. Gundersdorf's rendering suggests both acumen and sensitivity with her attentiveness to executing fields of light and color with the minute strokes of colored pencil. Similarly, Myers loops a potentially endless supply of colored cloth strips, which are joined by some handwork whose manifest appearance speaks more to a shrewd sense of line than craft.

Perhaps this playful tension—a tension inherent to desire and pleasure—challenges the idea of "minding" one's *Ps & Qs*. The play demonstrated here toys with the idea of formality—a coquettish wink from across the white cube. These objects make an attempt—perhaps even struggle—at being well behaved, but they are only so successful. Rather than being precious, they are even a bit flippant, maybe somewhat misbehaved. If the idea behind the first exhibition was to ask, "what might it be to mind one's formalist *Ps* and *Qs*," this current iteration emphasizes the vitality—the nature—of these objects over discipline, wondering instead, "what it might be to flirt with one's *Ps & Qs*."

Shannon Stratton and Jeff M. Ward
curators of *Ps & Qs*