

## Howard Sherman's Frenetic Abstraction

There is a show at 4411 Montrose by Howard Sherman, who has currently rented the unoccupied space on the second floor, across from Anya Tish gallery.

I first saw Howard's work years ago at a space in Montrose. I had a strong reaction to it; they seemed antagonistic for abstract painting. There was one particularly large painting about 8 ft high, covered in mostly black paint, with choppy strips of canvas and layers of paper adhered to the surface. The painting had explosive movement everywhere. There were shards of yellow and orange color and barely articulated cartoon penguins peeking out from the surfaces. I was a bit put off in that moment, but decided to go through the rooms and look again. I eventually found an image I connected with, which led to other paintings seeming less confrontational, allowing for an understanding of what he was up to. Upon revisiting the large painting for the third time, it became my favorite piece in the show.

Fast forward to now, Sherman is still making challenging work. He uses an assemblage approach of slapped-on acrylic, spray-paint, and roughly cut paper, sometimes moored to a standing canvas, at other times layers of furled paper are tacked to the wall. His pictures sway and provoke. The planes of color operate in polarities; they are open and then dense, swing between desolate and explosive, push at you, and then release in the long tradition of figure/ground painting. His color palette skews toward high contrast, effectively using black, off-white, various grays and tans with splashy areas of hot pink, mustard yellow, and the occasional warm green. The slices of paper and canvas he incorporates often read as 3D gestural marks, exerting forward, sometimes looping and hanging, creating additional marks via their own cast shadows. There are nods to Rauschenberg, Basquiat, and NY action painting; however, Sherman has a quirkiness and humor that is all his own. The seriousness of modern abstract painting that Sherman draws from is entangled with pieces of cartoon characters and the occasional graffiti marking. As such, figuration continues to appear in his paintings. There are floating teeth, suggestions of a head, eyes lurking in his work. A friend of mine once remarked about Mr. Sherman as having "frenetic energy"; the man is a bit wired, and that energy is felt in this show.

In contrast, the small pictures are more subdued. Each image is about 9" x 7", contained in a frame and behind glass. These images feel more like color drawings, executed quickly in a few moves. Many read like masks as a placeholder for an unseen person. I relate some images to the cartoon heads of someone wearing an extra-long cap or hood, covering not just the head but the entire face for a gag. Or maybe these

figurative abstractions are comic ghosts? Sherman won't say, but will quickly acknowledge his background in cartooning before becoming a full-time painter.

If you get to the gallery on Tuesday or Saturday, you can meet Howard Sherman as he will be on location. He also has a new book out worth looking at. And if you choose to purchase one at the gallery, you can get it autographed on-site.