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What State Abstraction: Jason Fox And Eva Lundsager

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In early 2009 I posed a question to 12 admired painters: "What is the current state of abstraction?"



Jason Fox, *DISILLUSIONISM*, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 32 x 32 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Jason Fox

"Certainly I think it is incumbent upon us to complicate and/or dismantle the reductive formulae and the abstract but potent kind of thought that leads the mind away from concrete human history and experience and into the realms of ideological fiction, metaphysical confrontation, and collective passion. This is not to say that we cannot speak about issues of injustice and suffering, but that we need to do so always within a context that is amply situated in history, culture, and socioeconomic reality."

—"(external)Edward Said":<http://bombsite.com/issues/69/articles/2269>, Orientalism, Preface to the 25th anniversary edition, 2003.

"The music that formed my idea about life and how to live is "free" music. Punk is total in its freedom because of the D.I.Y. thing. You want to make music, films, books, whatever: Do It Yourself. Everything is cool as long as it's honest. Hardcore, No Wave, Old School, New School, Garage, Electronic, Noise; however you choose to express yourself, just do it and fuck the system, fuck the industry. Be beyond politics, beyond society. Freedom at all cost."

—Steven Parrino, *The No Texts* 1979-2003.

For me, the fact that abstraction can relate to both of the two quotes above exhibits the amazing elasticity of the practice. Said's argument for cleansing your head of cultural propaganda and trying to attain some level of clarity based on reality speaks directly to the process of making art, where the ability to avoid self-induced propaganda ("Wow, that looks great. I'm a genius!") and cultural dogma is essential. It makes me nostalgic for the old-school humanism and utopianism

of Mondrian or Malevich. I find the Frank Stella line of thinking, “What you see is what you get,” and “Who needs European composition” extremely dated and out of sync with present realities, but at the same time, his early paintings are not dated. And I enjoy the way Parrino approached that work with a punk sensibility. That still seems like a useful way to keep its heart beating ... to be free to take politics, history, the Ramones, Beuys, Jerry Garcia, Roland Barthes, Richard Prince, Susan Sontag, Balzac, Return of the Living Dead and melt them down to one—maybe two—colors and make a painting. To paraphrase Kris Kristofferson, “To be free to have nothing to lose.” Freedom from taste, rules, grammar, and linear thinking.



Eva Lundsager, *ADORATION ANGEL MONSTER*, oil on linen, 50 x 46 inches.

Eva Lundsager

When someone I've just met learns that I'm an artist they usually ask what kind of art I make. I say I'm a painter, and when they ask what kind of painting, I say abstract. But it's just an automatic response that always feels not quite right. The terminology seems inadequate, but what would be better? It's a label, not a limit. Sometimes images are like words; it's hard to choose the right ones, and so they are just abandoned. I make paintings.

Painting as a window into another realm is simply intoxicating. It is escape and teleportation and freedom from our physical beings. The experience can be so very real. It's a rush! Abstraction is a means to paint thought processes as a response to visual and physical experience. Movement through space. Trying to imagine another means of perception. Wanting to see something.

There is a sense of possibility in abstract painting—in all painting—possibility and freedom. The distinction between what's abstract and what isn't doesn't seem like such a big deal. Taking a language that had its gift of representation removed and then using it to make a picture, using the language of abstraction to make a picture: there is a sense of limitless space in those two dimensions. Attempting invention.

I feel like there's something great right around the corner, and I can't wait to see it. I feel like something magical is going to happen, and it will be so different and so obvious, and we'll all say “Of course!” I am trying so very hard to recognize it. Imagination is thrilling.