

ARTFORUM

"Painter's Painters: Gifts from Alex Katz"

HIGH MUSEUM OF ART
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"Painter's painter" is a term of praise for artists who forcefully push the medium to generate new expressive possibilities. This exhibition, assembled over the span of three years, thanks to a gift from the Alex Katz Foundation, gathers works by thirteen contemporary painters plus several by Katz himself. These include skillful imitations of surfaces and materials (Jan de Vliegher, *Man with Gigantic Bee*, 2012), reimaginings of pop-culture images (Joyce Pensato, *Daisy*, 2007), and private visions bordering on psychological puzzles (Wilhelm Sasnal, *Untitled*, 2012). Also noteworthy is one of Ronald Bladen's rarely seen impastoed paintings, the gritty and chthonic *Space Landscape*, 1955.

Among the strongest works is Laura Owens's *Untitled*, 2013, which illustrates the possibilities of a simple black-and-white palette. Two large-scale grids overlap like Photoshop layers, scribbled across with thick lines rendered perfectly three-dimensional by drop shadows. Her precise control of line and shading makes the occasional blob of raised paint look like material intrusions into a realm of digital brushstrokes. Charline von Heyl's symbolically charged *Idolores*, 2011, is dominated by an enigmatic figure that wavers between a stone totem and a blinded skull topped with a black spiky crown. The figure seems trapped between the woven grating that covers it and the background of pale bars, but at times it reverses itself, becoming part of a larger underpainted pattern that is only partially revealed. Spencer Sweeney's *Untitled*, 2011, draws on Grace Jones's iconic *Island Life* cover, portraying her as the ghostly shadow of a painter's model, a barely outlined form seemingly dissolving under the lascivious red-eared artist's gaze. The work's multiple lines of sight depict the painted subject as not quite a person, but rather something between an object and an idea.



Spencer Sweeney, *Untitled*, 2011, oil on linen, 66 x 66".

— Daniel A. Weiskopf

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