

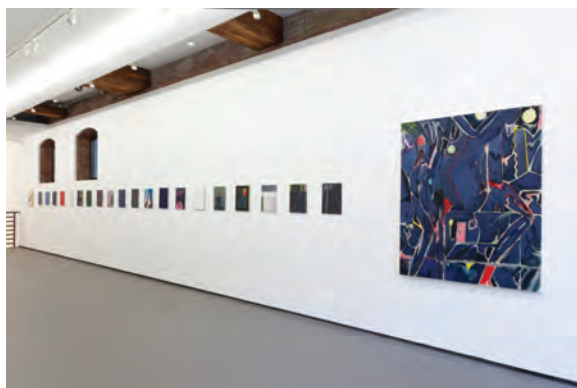


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UP ALL NIGHT: Q&A WITH TED GAHL

by Alex Ebstein

Ted Gahl's new exhibition (and first solo exhibition in New York City) *Night Painter*, on view at Dodge Gallery through November 13th, includes an honest and uninhibited array of works that suspend memories and personal symbology in the thin stratum of Gahl's painted surfaces. Dense but not overcrowded, minimal paintings serve as visual respites between larger, tangled compositions where the referential and abstract overlap. Within the dark and specific palette, each painting begins to read as a different element of memory, meditation, dream, insomnia and delirium. - Read the interview between Alex Ebstein, Baltimore contributor, and Ted Gahl after the jump.



Alex Ebstein: Can you tell us a little about *Night Painter* and your painting practice?

Ted Gahl: I've always been someone who works better at night. When I work during the day, it's usually prep work or making various small paintings that will be used like sketches for larger work. I also do a lot of drawings on napkins when I go to bars or restaurants, which usually filter into the finished work.

In the last year, I started getting really obsessed with mixing different blacks and blues, and the paintings kind of took on this night palette. I liked how the series of work was coming together, so I decided to continue making work in that vein. Painting at night just feels right, when the world has settled down, and it is just you, some good music, and materials to work with.



AE: Your work has changed quite a bit in the past two years, without ever losing your distinct hand, what motivated the change, and the limitation of palette for this body of work?

TG: I've always been a fan of minimal and monochrome painting, but at the same time love elements of figuration and drawing in work. My goal was to create paintings that from afar read as relatively flat, but when you get closer, include elements of subtle color and form. I like the push/pull that some of the paintings I have created seem to have, and wanted to continue investigating working in that mode. I've also kept up on making paintings with stretcher keys. They kind of function as three-dimensional paintings, and can either look flat or colorful depending on the viewer's angle. People seem to read them as a lot of different things, which interests me. I just always look at them as small sailboats.

AE: There is a lot of Diebenkorn in your work, who are your other influences?

TG: Norbert Schwontkowski is a painter I always like to look at, he has a show up right now at CFA in Berlin that looks interesting. I think Volker Hueller does a great job in blurring the line between abstraction and figuration. Dorothy Iannone's paintings from the early 1970's are amazing. I'd like a Thomas Houseago sculpture if I had a yard and the money. The list gets longer each day.



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AE: How do memories play into your imagery? Your imagery is so unrestrained, veering into the realm of the crude or embarrassing and melting into something new and different as part of the larger composition.

TG: Memory plays a big role. A lot of my paintings in Night Painter are based off of drawings that I have been doing since I was young. Certain characters or motifs have a tendency to reappear in my work. There are a lot of nods to sailing and nautical themes, kind of homages to my father and uncle who would take me out on the water in their little Sunfish boats when I was growing up. Another character that consistently comes up is this bent over man image. It's derived from a kind of dirty "trick" drawing you used to see in middle school notebooks, where this innocent house with snow on the roof slowly becomes this naked man as you add more lines together. I saw this character as not only a way to get a laugh, but also as a way to convey vulnerability and embarrassment, which to me are issues that come up in making as well as exhibiting paintings.



AE: How long have you been in New York? Pros? Cons?

TG: I lived in New York from 2002 to 2006. Then I was in Rhode Island for two years for graduate school. I returned to New York last fall and have been here since then. The pros are that there is so much art here that the city is nearly bursting at the seams. Great shows are only minutes away on any given afternoon.

The cons? Most expensive place I've ever lived. I think that might be the biggest Con for most artists living here.

AE: What advice can you give to others looking to get their work out there?

TG: If you like someone's work, send them an email and tell them so, in my experience it has always been appreciated. The art world can be very competitive and difficult to navigate, but at the end of the day, if you consistently make work, you can't lose.