

technology widely expected to eliminate swathes of manufacturing jobs. The conflict crops up even in the exhibition's checklist, which conscientiously identifies everyone involved in each work's production, from studio assistants to location scouts. The convention is borrowed from the film-and-television industry, yet, in a gallery context, this recognition of collective labor quietly punctures the myth of artistic autonomy and promotes a model of mutual interdependence. There might come a time when capitalism no longer needs us, but we'll still need each other.

—Colby Chamberlain

## Amie Siegel

SIMON PRESTON

"A house is a machine for living in." So declared Le Corbusier in his revolutionary 1923 book *Towards a New Architecture*, thereby providing the burgeoning modern movement with one of its most famous maxims. Yet this pronouncement was as enigmatic as it was aphoristic, ripe for misinterpretation. Corbusier's text was lavishly illustrated with images of automobiles, airplanes, and ocean liners, and in this context it was easy to understand his statement as a call for buildings to share the same sleek look that made such industrial technology so visually arresting. Indeed, the house to which Corbusier most directly applied this principle, the Villa Savoye (1931), eventually became one of the most iconic works of twentieth-century architecture and played a significant role in defining the visual language of modernism, figuring prominently, for example, in the definition of both Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson's International Style and Reyner Banham's "machine aesthetic." Ironically, however, Corbusier's ambition was far greater than simply changing the way architecture looked—his statement in fact proposed a fundamental shift from aesthetics to performance. His obsession with an activated architecture even led him, in the same volume, to move beyond the mechanical into the biological, arguing that an architect should not be a mere maker of things but a giver of life: a "creator of organisms."

This fundamental contrast is the crux of Amie Siegel's *Double Negative*, 2015, recently on view at Simon Preston Gallery (where it appeared alongside the video *Fetish*, 2016). The work compares Corbusier's villa with a copy built by the Australian architect Howard Raggatt to house the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra in 2001. Raggatt has devoted his career to extending the linguistic plays and historical references pioneered by postmodern architecture into rhetorical gestures aimed at undercutting the dominance of the Euro-American canon; here he

inverted Corbusier's icon by rendering the white exterior walls of the original building in black. In the gallery, Siegel redoubled this inversion with a pair of black-and-white 16-mm films, one of each building. Both are printed in negative, producing an unsettling confusion that underscores the subversive implications of Raggatt's translation. If we can't tell the difference between a house in France and a cultural institution in the South Pacific, surely the form they share is arbitrary, with no inherent connection to their function, and whatever meaning we think they have must be primarily a matter of context and interpretation.

But in the merciless precision of HD, this seeming equivalence vanishes. In the work's video component, which is in color, carefully framed shots of the Villa Savoye catalogue the elements that make it such a faithful expression of Corbusier's vision, for example the slender reinforced concrete columns that allowed the architect to lay out floor plans based solely on the contingencies of inhabitation rather than in the demands of engineering, or the massive ramp and exuberantly spiraling staircase that catalyze fluid movement between floors. The following sequence of views of Raggatt's building offers a total contrast: The walls are flimsy corrugated metal rather than cast concrete, and there is no correspondence between the building's appearance on the exterior and its functions on the interior. In fact, Raggatt has housed the institute in utterly generic office space, right down to the ugly drop ceilings and cheap fluorescent lights.

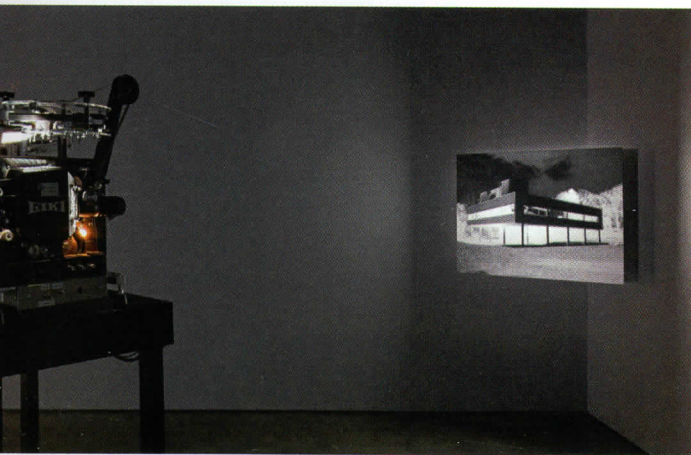
Yet Siegel's camera seems more comfortable inside Raggatt's space, lingering on the technical equipment that the institute's staff use to document and digitize their collection. Siegel has long been fascinated by the various apparatuses, both technical and cultural, that constitute any medium, and her previous works have included incisive examinations of both architecture and film. But in Corbusier's Villa Savoye, her lens seems to have encountered some resistance—her signature slow tracking shots are conspicuously absent here, presumably at least in part because the rigid linearity of the technique is foreign to the freewheeling energy of Corbusier's ramps, stairs, and open plans. Not only by revealing the limitations of Raggatt's translation, then, but through the mechanics of its own production, *Double Negative* suggests that architecture may not quite be reducible to image or technique. At its best, architecture is not just one more vehicle for meaning but another living thing.

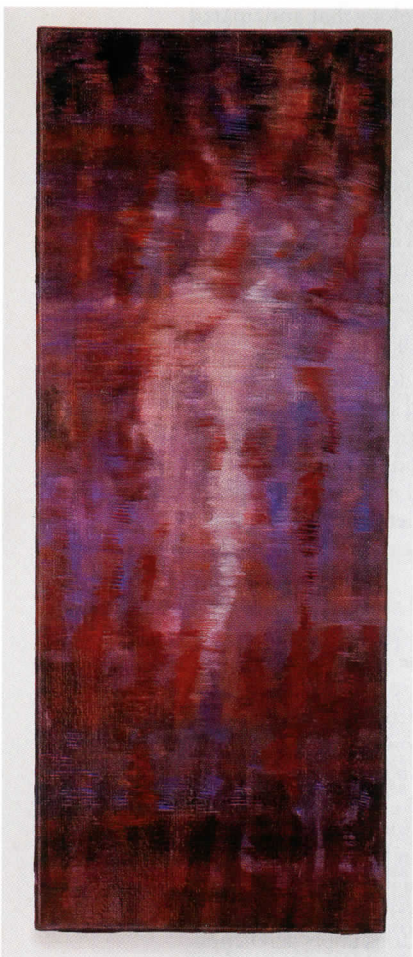
—Julian Rose

## Bracha L. Ettinger

CALLICOON FINE ARTS

"Painting is not about representation," according to Bracha L. Ettinger, but that doesn't mean it's about abstraction either. Her work registers the ambivalence of the image, photographic in origin—its way of insisting on its own presence while seemingly putting itself under erasure through a destabilizing instability of focus or refusal of clarity. The resulting sense of vagueness or veiling might recall Gerhard Richter's famous blur, though Ettinger's defocusing produces an effect that's different than the one conjured by the German master, who once said, "I blur things so that they do not look artistic or craftsmanlike but technological, smooth and perfect. I blur things to make all the parts a closer fit. Perhaps I also blur out the excess of unimportant information." Ettinger's blur, on the other hand, seems to result from a determined, if not obsessive, desire to return, again and again, to the charged image, to rehearse it endlessly, to assuage something by going over it repeatedly until it dissolves. The images Ettinger works from are of women and children about to be slaughtered in the Nazi death camps. Her blurring of them is neither tactically banalizing, à la Richter, nor seductively sensational, as with the work of Francis Bacon; nor does





Bracha L. Ettinger, *Ophelia and Eurydice no. 1*, 2001–2009, oil on canvas, 20¼ x 8”.

it represent a determination not to see, as does László Nemes’s 2015 film *Son of Saul*, in which the protagonist’s face dominates the screen while everything around him is usually out of focus, as if his refusal to look at the horror around him is his only hope for surviving it. In Ettinger’s case, rather, it’s as if her effort was constantly to get closer to the image, so close that it finally reveals itself at some cellular or molecular level rather than as a tangible surface.

In any case, as Griselda Pollock has said, Ettinger’s work “involves de-archiving, de-documenting and de-photographing,” and so by the same token (despite Pollock’s description of the results as emphatically “abstract paintings”) it would be more plausible to refer to them as “de-representing”—the present participate in all these cases implying that the action has not been completed but is ongoing. Ettinger’s recent paintings begin with images printed onto canvas, even though the viewer can no longer make out the traces of the underlying imprint and experiences only the austere radiance of the light refracted through layer upon layer of translucent oil paint applied in delicate interweavings that take years to realize. (The earliest of the six canvases in this show, *Ophelia and Eurydice no. 1*, was dated 2001–2009, while the most recent, *No title yet*, was completed relatively speedily in 2013–15.) A psychoanalyst as well as an artist, Ettinger knows that it takes a long time to dig back into the past.

Along with the paintings, the exhibition included a multitude of drawings, insistently organic and mostly from the past few years, and notebooks dated from 2000 through the present. The latter are dense not only with pictorial marks and material traces but also with writing in English, French, and Hebrew. The English inscriptions, at least, are full of curious wordplay, featuring resonant neologisms such as *WITNESSING*, perhaps the best description of the artist’s own effort. We are often enjoined against “aestheticizing” atrocity, as if beauty constituted a refusal to recognize reality. Ettinger finds beauty in the attempt to allay the horror she never stops approaching. There’s something to be learned from that.

—Barry Schwabsky

## Charles Koegel

WATERHOUSE & DODD

The dozen abstract paintings by in this show tracked the development of the Brooklyn-based artist Charles Koegel’s work over the past eight years. Titled “Color Maps,” the exhibition began with thoroughly geometric pieces such as *Best Kept Secret*, 2008, and *White Lotus*, 2010, and concluded with the more visually complex *Echoes*, 2015, and *Emulsion*, 2016. These final works read as an extended homage to the history of abstraction: Josef Albers paid homage to the square, but, with *Echoes*, Koegel honors to a gestural matrix at a square’s center. *Emulsion* displays a variety of marks, each a different abstract “text” of sorts. If they are read from left to right, they provide an abbreviated

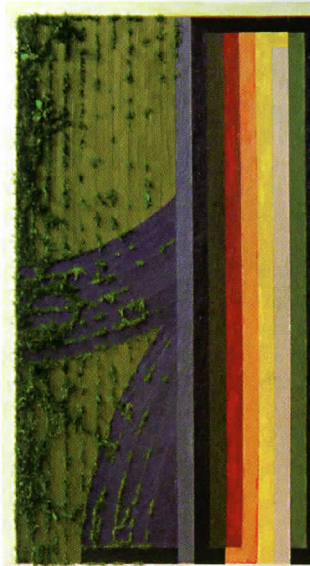
history of abstract art, a shorthand summary of its visual ideas. Though some of Koegel’s paintings deploy a vocabulary of marks that today may feel cliché, his most intriguing works have enough idiosyncrasy—and absurdity—to offer something new.

As do many of Koegel’s paintings, *In Bloom*, 2010, features dead, dried grass, here festering amid vertical stripes of pale paint. The grass—spray-painted green by Koegel—seems to creep from left to right, as if on its way to overtaking the geometric construction, burying the neat geometry in a forgotten grave. *Who Knows*, 2010, similarly features grass growing from a scaffold of vertical stripes. The geometry here is vibrantly colored: a modish collection of blue and orange and green and yellow. (The repeated use of grass in Koegel’s work brings to mind Robert Rauschenberg’s famous panel of live grass mounted on chicken wire from 1953.)

The grass and the stripes—nature and culture—are in uneasy balance. Koegel seems stuck on the horns of a dilemma: Does he prefer living nature to lifeless art—organic form to inorganic geometry—or is it the other way round? Nature and art are in unresolved conflict, uncannily together however radically different. This divided sense is heightened in *Here’s What’s Left*, 2011: The quantity of green grass is reduced to a sliver, and the canvas is flooded with a blinding white, as though from an explosion in the sky. Little more than a sturdy geometrical construction remains, suggestive of the skeletal remains of a skyscraper. If *Here’s What’s Left* does indeed portray doomsday, *Poppies and TV Antenna*, 2012, by contrast, pictures the elysian pre-apocalyptic world: idealized golden blooms and a Victorian home—nature and culture in radiant harmony.

Perhaps the most aesthetically intriguing aspect of Koegel’s paintings is their crackled surfaces, which deceptively suggest they’re age-old—they’ve weathered the times. He produces the craquelure by layering enamel paint, a modern industrial material, over oil paint, a traditional natural medium. This collision of the natural and the industrial suggests yet another conflict between nature and culture, this time embedded in the work itself. The craquelure, moreover, implies that abstraction has seen better days.

—Donald Kuspis



## Ben Vida

LISA COOLEY

Midway through Beckett’s *Endgame*, the blind Hamm, agitated, asks his son/servant Clov, “What’s happening? What’s happening?” Clov responds, cagily, “Something is taking its course.” Later, Hamm attempts to identify this unspecified something, but his efforts—“We’re not beginning to . . . to . . . mean something?”—are unsuccessful, dismissed by Clov with a laugh.

The spirit of *Endgame* is alive and well in composer Ben Vida’s “Speech Acts,” 2016–, a series of works that chart the ways in which sound and meaning work together or permeate each other, and the ways that they approach each other and then swerve. In large, neatly