



Leah Durner
NAKED COLOR
new works on paper



Aquamarine 1, 2011 gouache on aquamarine Fabriano Tiziano paper 39 x 27½ inches

is titled after the color of the Italian paper the artist painted on. *Orange*, *Seabright*, *Cream* and *Iris* – all the works in the exhibition are titled in this manner. The color of the paper comes first – it gives Durner something visceral and visual to work with and against. The medium is gouache, which is pure dense pigment in water (just barely held together by binder).

Specific to each work, the palette ranges from hothouse to verdant, as well as embraces both the mineral and the underwater realm of plants and fish. The process of application is additive and layered. She can cover one color with another, but she cannot scrape anything away. Every act is decisive and must be considered in terms of viscosity and wetness (or dryness). At their core, the works are about both covering and uncovering, with all that these acts might imply.

Color/Sensation

John Yau

As the myth of Psyche and Eros makes clear, we are curious. Our curiosity bids us engage in the essential human behavior of sorting. In childhood, we start sorting by similarity and difference, and, as we get older, we further define and refine the act of distinguishing one from another.

When we look at Leah Durner's sumptuously colored gouaches on colored paper, something as basic and pleasurable – remember the child of Psyche and Eros – happens. We begin making distinctions, only to recognize that her works invite us to make other, more precise distinctions, as well as to – and here is the first of many paradoxes that I noticed – begin losing ourselves in the realm of color sensation, where names drift away.

The first work of Durner's I saw was *Aquamarine*, which I learned

Durner never completely covers the paper with gouache. At least one of the colors she applies will be so close to the paper's color that one must distinguish which is which. In *Aquamarine*, aquamarine brushstrokes slide over darker brushstrokes. In this simple and direct way the artist gets us to make distinctions, to pay more attention to the differences, say, between paper and medium, as well as to register color's immediacy, from slight tonal shifts to sudden jumps. The color can be as disembodied as light and yet as palpable as chalky dust. In the pleasurable realm of matter and color, and the physical (Eros) and disembodied (Psyche), we find ourselves considering a relationship that has haunted philosophers for centuries.



Cream 2, 2011 gouache on cream Fabriano Tiziano paper 39 x 27½ inches

I have not adorned Durner's works on paper with adjectives, because they do not need them; there is a sensual directness as

well as an evident degree of control to the work. Here another paradox emerges. The matte brushstrokes evoke a light-filled world of both liquidity and dust, as well as evoke the marks a housepainter might have left on a wall. Willem de Kooning thought of himself as a housepainter as opposed to a sign painter, which is how he referred to Jasper Johns. Durner's brushwork extends out of Abstract Expressionism, but without any of the angst or agitation. The works aren't theatrical, but they are active and even tense. This is what I mean by sorting—one begins making finer and distinctions, begins seeing how order and disorder are made inseparable in these works.

Traces of joy and sorrow, and celebration and restraint, mingle in Durner's gouaches, but in the final analysis the very different, contradictory feelings their color combinations stir up in us cannot be named with any certainty, which is why we remain in their thrall. The colors are not found on a computer or made with plastic (acrylic). Once again we learn that light come can from the earth's interior (our first source of pigments), which doesn't mean transcendence is obtainable. Stripped down to basics, these gouaches are made of the melding of pigment, water, and paper, which speaks of materiality, fragility, and, finally, time, its waywardness and interventions.



Iris 2, 2011 gouache on iris Fabriano Tiziano paper 39 x 27½ inches



Seabright 2, 2011 gouache on seabright Fabriano Tiziano paper 39 x 27½ inches

LEAH DURNER is an artist who lives and works in New York. Her New York solo debut exhibition, was held at Wooster Arts Space in September 2006, and curated by art critic David Cohen, who also wrote the brochure essay for the exhibition. Durner has also had solo exhibitions of her work at Nye Basham Studio (2009) Berry College (2005), and Limbo (1999). Her work has been included in curated group shows at Art Gotham, Cazenovia College, Barbara Ann Levy Gallery, Markham Murray Gallery, Steinbaum Kraus Gallery, CBs 313 Gallery, Coup de Grace Gallery, SoHo Center for Visual Arts, and Wake Forest University.

In addition to David Cohen, Jorella Andrews, Head of the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths College, University of London; Michael Sanders, Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Cazenovia College; and Joe Valentini, independent artist and writer; have written on Durner's work. Durner was an artist-in-residence at the Leighton Studios for Independent Residencies at the Banff Centre for the Arts. Durner has also curated exhibitions, published art theory, and lectured on a number of topics, including the American landscape, gestural abstraction and phenomenology, conceptualism and its sources, the work of the artist Dan Graham, and the composers Maryanne Amacher and John Cage. Durner's most recent work occupies the critical space between postwar modernist abstraction and post-Warholian pop and conceptual sensibilities—using both modernist painterliness and "facture" and postmodern color references taken from sources in fashion, surfer and skateboard art, mass design, etc. Durner's current theoretical interests include beauty, joy, largesse, and incarnated consciousness.

Durner received her B.A. from Wake Forest University and her M.F.A. from Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University where she studied art theory with Martha Rosler, performance with Geoff Hendricks, and painting with Leon Golub.

JOHN YAU is a poet and art critic. His next book of poems will be published by Copper Canyon in 2012. He is an Arts Editor for the *Brooklyn Rail*.

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5-28 May 2011

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Leah Durner: NAKED COLOR new works on paper is a fiscally sponsored artist project of the New York Foundation for the Arts. We gratefully acknowledge our donors: Kenneth Aidekman, Anonymous, Timothy Baum, Teddy and Scott Deakin, Hugh Dorsey, Dan Foley, Marjorie Greenberg, Joshua Greene, Robert Owens, Mark A. Pollaci, Mitchel Sobel, George Spera, Eva J. Williams, and others.



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Leah Durner: NAKED COLOR new works on paper

cover image: orange 1, 2011 gouache on orange Fabriano Tiziano paper, 39 x 27.5 inches

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