



Leah Durner: Paintings 2002 - 2006



*Prada Spring 1996*, 2006, acrylic and oil on canvas, 60 x 66 in

a full palette: beautiful, ugly, sick, joyful, fake, real, sweet, tart, pale and dark. In *Prada Spring 1996* (2006), Durner takes the colors right off the runway—from Miuccia Prada’s breakthrough Spring 1996 collection—where “ugly” color and “geek” style became a celebrated part of the high-fashion aesthetic—and builds the painting with thick chunks of paint. Always using a raw and direct application of paint, Durner plays with depth and surface, coherence and dissolution, seriousness and frivolity.

Bearing in mind Matisse’s observation that the first four lines of a composition are the two verticals and two horizontals of the painting format, Durner uses the edge to toy with one’s perception of the canvas or paper and its boundaries (both literal and metaphorical)—variously ignoring, meeting, falling short of, or exceeding it—the edge is always important in Durner’s work. For instance, *Blue 06* (2006) appears to be a blurred fragment from a much larger painting, and, in her large-scale works on paper, the edge is raw and unmet.

Simultaneously intense and casual, Leah Durner’s work occupies the critical space between modernism and postmodernism—between postwar abstraction and post-Duchampian conceptualism and post-Warholian pop. This exhibition features abstract paintings on canvas and paper created between 2002 and 2006. Drawing her color from many sources, including fashion, surfer and skateboard art, and mass design, Durner uses



*Blue 06*, 2006, acrylic on canvas, 66 x 60 in





*dark blue dark violet ochre*, 2003, acrylic on paper, 46 x 54 in

In her essay entitled "Painting and the Post-Conceptual Painterly," scholar Jorella Andrews notes the unbounded quality in Durner's work:

*What is given is a plenitude, not of things or identities but of 'secondary qualities': color, rhythm, gesture—immersive but non-consumable. This is heightened by the (non)framing of Durner's works, particularly those on paper, where an effect of large-scale-detail (or cinematic close-up), combined with the dripped, lower-margin traces of generously applied paint, makes an expansive outside/unseen region palpable, but not takeable.*

For this exhibition, Durner requested the gallery space be transformed into a reading room with books on art and design available for perusal; Durner's "reading room" is furnished with midcentury modernist furniture. This installation resulted from Durner's own committed and wide-ranging reading, and the context of exhibiting in Loretta Howard's gallery--known for postwar painting. Durner began thinking of modernist painting and design--now aestheticized and made easy--but in its original time and context a response to the cataclysms of 1914-1945 including the world wars, revolution, the rise of totalitarianism, genocide, and famine.

Seen in this context, the individual, expressive painter became not merely a heroic posturer, but a person addressing dehumanization. Mid-century architects and designers used both artisanal and mass production means to create spaces and objects that offered a utopian and inclusive vision of a new way of living. So art and design both serve as a kind of invitation... to participate.



*Pale*, 2002, acrylic and oil on canvas, 66 x 72 in

Leah Durner lives and works in New York City. In addition to this exhibition at Loretta Howard Gallery, Durner has had solo exhibitions of her work at 571 Projects (2011), Nye Basham Studio (2009), Wooster Arts Space (2006, New York solo debut), Berry College (2005), and Limbo (1999).

Durner's work has been included in group exhibitions at Winston Wächter Fine Art (2011), The Convent (2009), Art Gotham (2005), Cazenovia College (2005) with Julie Evans and others, Barbara Ann Levy Gallery (2000), Markham Murray Gallery (1999), Steinbaum Kraus Gallery (1997), CBs 313 Gallery (1992), Coup de Grace Gallery (1991 and 1989) with Karen Finley, Barbara Kruger, Nancy Spero, Jenny Holzer, Kay Rosen and others, SoHo Center for Visual Arts with Glenn Ligon and others (1991), Wake Forest University (1994 and 1990), and City Without Walls (1986, 1987, and 1988). Durner was an artist-in-residence at the Leighton Studios, 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; Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* and art, money, and gender; the work of the artist Dan Graham; and the work of composers Maryanne Amacher and John Cage. Durner's current theoretical interests include beauty, joy, largesse, and incarnated consciousness.

Durner's practice includes both the paintings in oil, acrylic, and gouache on canvas and on paper, as well as works in poured enamel with sources in psychedelia and process art.

Critics and scholars who have written on Durner's work include: David Cohen (critic and *artcritical* publisher); John Yau (poet and critic); Jorella Andrews (Head of the Department of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths, University of London); and Michael Sanders (philosopher).

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.

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