Cynthia Daignault

SELECTED PRESS

THE OKLAHOMAN

A Baltimore artist's painting of the Oklahoma City bombing comes home to downtown OKC

Informed by her heritage, the Athens-based artist reflects on technology's gradual erosion of social relations at Spike Island, Bristol.

BRANDY MCDONNELL
APRIL 19, 2023

Cynthia Daignault: Oklahoma.

Cynthia Daignault was a high school senior in Maryland when a bomb destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City at 9:02 a.m. April 19, 1995.

Although she was about 1,300 miles away when the blast left 168 people dead and more than 500 injured, the tragedy reverberated deeply within her as a Baltimore teenager.

"There's just a poignancy to memory of that time period, like the way that the music we were listening to senior year is still so emotionally resonant. Everything is so visceral, like your first love and your first heartbreak and the music you listen to — and what's going on in the world," Daignault told The Oklahoman.
"Those become things that, I think, really lock in, in a way that we see them incredibly clearly. ... You're thinking about joining the adult world and what that means at this moment, and then the adult world really crashes on your doorstep in a pretty intense way."

Cynthia Daignault: Oklahoma.

Now an artist, Daignault channeled her lasting memories of the bombing into her 2021 oil painting "Oklahoma," an abstracted gray-and-white depiction of the wrecked Murrah Building. Now a part of the Oklahoma City Museum of Art's permanent collection, her painting was put on display for the first time in downtown OKC ahead of the 28th anniversary of the bombing in an unusual single-painting exhibit.

"It is absolutely unusual to have an exhibition of one painting, and it was really very much about creating a space where people could sit and contemplate it and look at it, to be alone with it or be with friends with it," said Rosie May, the museum's director of curatorial affairs and audience engagement.

"We wanted to make sure we were giving it the weight it would have in this community ... especially just blocks from the site of the Murrah Building."

What does the painting look like and how is it displayed?

A black wall with the words "Cynthia Daignault: Oklahoma" emblazoned in large, white letters greets visitors to the second-floor gallery of the Oklahoma City Museum of Art where the painting is displayed.

Before they glimpse the painting, museumgoers encounter an essay about the work and two quotes from the artist. One reads, "I have hopes that the remembrance of things past is something that brings us together. This is a shared history and in collective trauma there is a connection that binds us all."

The other reads, "Making this work now is an act of remembrance, of living back in that moment and connecting to what it means for us today."

Exhibited in a snug alcove created by three white-painted walls, visitors first see Daignault's small painting from a distance, where a bench invites them to sit several feet away if they choose. Or, they can walk to the black line on the floor and examine the instantly recognizable painting up close.

At a small writing desk inside the exhibit, a set of black, white and gray note cards and matching pencils are provided. Visitors are invited to draw or write their thoughts on "How does remembering the past bring people together?"

"I wanted to give people an opportunity to respond and reflect with a prompt based on what Cynthia was doing, as an outlet," said May, an Oklahoma native.

"If you are presenting a difficult subject in a museum, one that will evoke strong emotions in people ... and you're not giving them some sort of escape valve ... they'll just feel upset. But if you give them an opportunity to reflect, share and hope — and that's what this painting for Cynthia is all about — it reminds us that in shared trauma, there's an opportunity for us to bring people together and create a better future."

Why did the museum staff wait two years to exhibit the painting?

The Oklahoma City Museum of Art acquired Daignault's "Oklahoma" with funds from an Oklahoma City Community Foundation grant in honor of the community volunteers who assisted in the recovery from the 1995 bombing.

Jennifer Klos, a former OKC Museum of Art curator now based in Texas, contacted the staff about the painting after spotting it at the 2021 TWO x TWO for AIDS and Art, a large annual charity art auction in Dallas.

"It seemed a really appropriate thing for us to acquire because it was inspired by the photograph of the destroyed Murrah Building ... that made the front page of every major newspaper probably in the world," May said. "So, we acquired it, and then there was a discussion of where to put it and what to do with it."

Considering the sensitive nature of the work, OKC Museum of Art staffers knew that special care had to be taken in exhibiting the painting.

"This will always be a part of our collection, so I think for us, it was important to present it in a very thoughtful and isolated way the first time that we're showing it," said OKC Museum of Art President and CEO Michael Anderson, adding that the painting will be exhibited on its own through the end of the year.

"We'll show it many, many more times moving forward, and it probably will be shown in different contexts. But I think the image itself is so visceral that people who are familiar with our collection that are coming here not expecting this, we needed to do something different with it the first time."

For May, creating the single-painting exhibit meant making her first visit to the Oklahoma City National Memorial & Museum and consulting with staff there. "I think that art after the events in 1995 was a means of healing, and it's played large role in our story. ... So, I think it is a unique opportunity to talk about the role art has in dealing with traumatic events," said Stephen Evans, the national memorial's director of education and public programming. "It's easy to focus on the impact it had in Oklahoma City. But we have people who come from Germany, from Vietnam, to the museum and say, 'I remember where I was on April 19, 1995, and this is its impact on me.' It was a global event — maybe like nothing will ever be in the future, just because of the way media works and worked back in 1995. I'm from New York; I remember where I was. The impact that had on my entire generation across the country was massive."

How did an 'Oklahoma' painting by a Baltimore artist end up in OKC?

The Oklahoma City bombing was the deadliest act of terrorism in U.S. history until Sept. 11, 2001. It remains the deadliest act of domestic terrorism in U.S. history.

Even after she graduated high school, the bombing continued to haunt Daignault. When she assisted artist Kara Walker on her "A Subtlety or the Marvelous Sugar Baby," a landmark, large-scale contemporary artwork about white supremacy, the project involved delving into what Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh wrote and read.

"When I was making 'Light Atlas,' which is a seminal piece of mine, I ended up staying in the hotel room where he planned the attack — and not on purpose," Daignault said. "It just so happened while I was traveling the country making that piece ... so it became a real touchstone."

In 2018, she embarked on a series of paintings called "What Happened" to chronicle the last 100 years of American history and culture. She knew that the Oklahoma City bombing would represent 1995 in her series, and in 2021, she created her "Oklahoma," working from the iconic photograph that The Associated Press sent out worldwide of the Murrah Building in 1995.

"The cultural moment that we grew up in and the way that media functioned — it was pre-internet, obviously — I think you remember how ... whether we're talking about the O.J. Simpson chase or Desert Storm or the Oklahoma City bombing, those really were moments where everyone stopped and was looking at the same thing," she said.

"I think to understand just how deep of an impression some of those events made on people our age — the Challenger explosion, these touchstone media events that defined our lives — you have to have lived through that moment. ... It is different now how quickly things move through the news cycle."

As heavy as the subject matter of "Oklahoma" was, Daignault knew the painting was destined to end up in an institution rather than a private home, and she wanted it to be sold through a benefit.

But she had no idea the painting eventually would find its home in Oklahoma City.

"No one really had any idea that it would end up in Oklahoma City, at that museum, and when I found that out, I was very humbled and moved," she said. "I couldn't have been happier with the placement, as far as where it ended up. ... That's not something that I had any control over, but I can sort stand back in awe like, 'Wow, this is a beautiful thing that happened.'"

Cynthia Daignault

BRAINARD CAREY
MARCH 16, 2022

Gettysburg (Stereoscopic) 2021 30 x 60″ Oil on Linen.

Cynthia Daignault received a BA in Art and Art History from Stanford University. She has presented solo exhibitions and projects at many major museums and galleries, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New Museum of Contemporary art, the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, MASS MoCA, the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, Kasmin Gallery and White Columns. Her work is in numerous public collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Dallas Museum of Art and the Baltimore Museum of Art. Daignault is a regularly published author, and editor of numerous publications.

The first major monograph on her work, Light Atlas, was published in 2019, and a new paperback edition will be released in early 2022. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including a 2019 Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant, a 2016 Foundation

for the Contemporary Arts Award, a 2011 Rema Hort Foundation Award, and a 2010 MacDowell Artist Fellowship. She lives and works in Baltimore, Maryland.

Gettysburg (Rorschach) 2021 19 x 19″ Oil on Linen.

ELEPHANT

Cynthia Daignault: I Learned from Felix Gonzalez-Torres That Less Can Be More

The painter explains how the minimalist conceptual ideas behind the sculptor's work shaped her own approach to art

LOUISE BENSON
JANUARY 6, 2022

"Untitled" (Placebo), 1991. Candies in silver wrappers, endless supply. Overall dimensions vary with installation. Ideal weight: 1,000 – 1,200 lb. © Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Courtesy of the Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation. Installed in Felix Gonzalez-Torres: Specific Objects without Specific Form. MMK, 2011. Photo: Axel Schneider

Under the Influence invites artists to discuss a work that has had a profound impact on their practice. In this edition, Baltimore-based artist Cynthia Daignault, who uses painting to explore monument and memory, reflects on the profound influence Felix Gonzalez-Torres has had on her career.

A lot of work affects you in little ways, but certain things affect you in seismic ways, really shifting and shattering your whole practice. I'm an art historian by training, and after graduating from school I spent a few years working for the Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation during my twenties.

Getting very deep into the work of an artist is almost like an apprenticeship. My experience at the Foundation had a really seminal effect on my painting practice, and also on how I think about art in general, and what I want out of my own art.

Cynthia Daignault, Gettysburg (Rorschach), 2021. Courtesy of the artist and Kasmin, New York

I think Felix is an artist's artist. He's held in this almost saintly position, due to both the work and his biography. It was a real honour taking care of his legacy, celebrating and exploring the ideas. There was never a day that I didn't feel really moved by the work.

His work was revolutionary, in terms of how people think about sculpture and the bounds of it. Obviously, his works are concepts. There's a set of instructions or boundaries communicated to an exhibitor or a collector in a certificate of authenticity, and the physical manifestations are iterations of this idea.

Could a painting be site-specific, or change in different installations? Could you stand inside of it? I was moved to apply in my own work as a painter some of the ideas that he had explored through sculpture. In "Untitled" (Placebo) (1991), the candy pieces can be a carpet, a strip, a pile, a scatter. The flavour, the shape of the candy, lots of things shift.

Cynthia Daignault, *Light Atlas*, 2016. Collection of Crystal Bridges Museum of Art. Courtesy of the artist and Kasmin, New York

The work can be and has been all these things. Whether the candies are replenished every day or diminish really shifts the experience of it. It can be metaphoric to an ailing body, or a galaxy of stars, or a disco of lights; the piece can lean in very different directions.

I loved the idea that a painting could breathe like that. That was the word I started to use: could you make a painting that breathes to fill a room, or contracts the way that lungs do? When I started working on my new multi-panel works, it was a response to this idea. My piece Light Atlas has been installed as a room, as a panorama on a large wall, and as a cyclorama (a single line of paintings that connect around a circle).

Cynthia Daignault, *Gettysburg (The Wheatfield)*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and Kasmin, New York

I wanted to consider how a work could relate and bend to architecture. I thought of a painting which doesn't just present to you as a stalwart and intractable rectangle. It could be mutable or malleable and still be a painting, and that came directly out of "Untitled" (Placebo).

I work every day in a painting practice that's very solitary. It's conceptual and it's emotional, a place that you can communicate both ideas and feelings in visual media. I took that from Felix's work, this idea of both emotion and of minimalism.

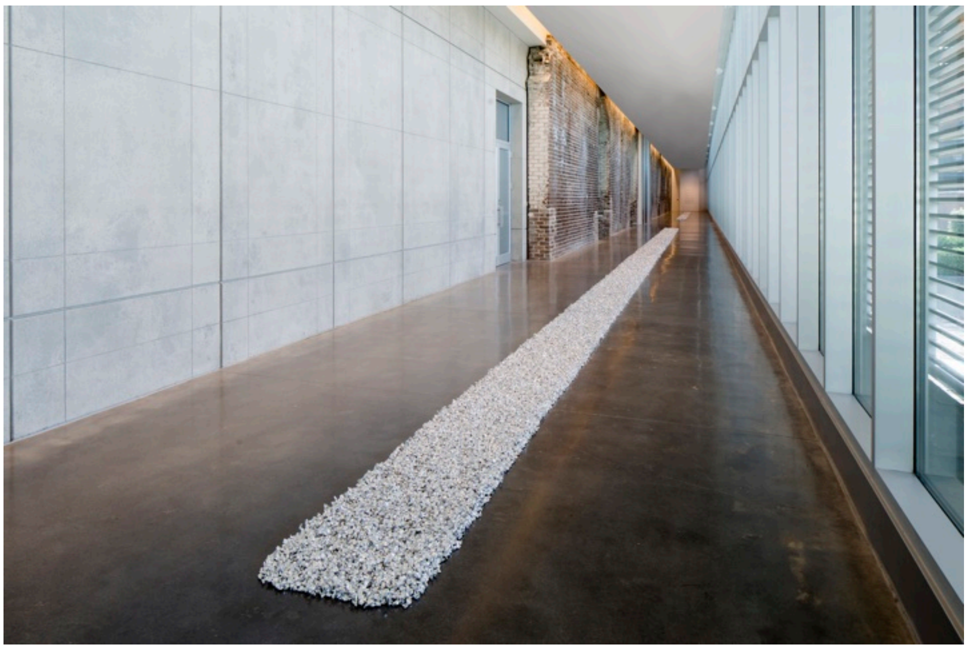
After I saw "Untitled" (Placebo), my own work really changed with this idea of emptiness and fullness. How much can you remove from a work without at all decreasing its meaning or magnitude? How much could you strip away and everything is still there?

Felix's works are so full; they're about everything. They're about the entire AIDS crisis, and love and death and the cosmos, and yet it's just a pile of candy. There's nothing in it. So empty, yet it contains everything. They're very emotional works. Could painting operate that way for me?

Cynthia Daignault, *As I Lay Dying*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and Kasmin, New York, and Night Gallery, Los Angeles

We talk so much about what a painting is about, but could you just feel a work? Could it be so non-language based that it's about body and not mind, just this essential nugget of feeling. I am striving to go to that place where it can become so full and yet so empty.

With artists who are really seminal to us, you return to them over time, and at different phases of your life or your art production. Amidst different cultural moments, you will see different things in their work. After the 2016 election in the US, it was the political side of Felix's work that resonated with me.



"Untitled" (Placebo), 1991. Candies in silver wrappers, endless supply. Overall dimensions vary with installation. Ideal weight: 1,000 – 1,200 lb. © Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Courtesy of the Felix Gonzalez-Torres Foundation. Installed in Felix Gonzalez-Torres, SCAD Museum of Art, 2018. Photo: Dylan Wilson

Now we're in this moment of the pandemic, and his works about medicine and the body connect to that. This is a wonderful piece for this moment because all of its metaphors are specifically about wasting, about placebo, about medicine, about the pharmaceutical industry and the failures of the government in regards to public health

Felix is a model for me of how you can be a political artist without being didactic. All of his works are political, frankly. They're about the AIDS crisis, and the failure of the government, and the failure of Big Pharma. These works are so powerful, and so non-didactic, and so timeless.

As told to Louise Benson, Elephant's deputy editor

ARTFORUM

Cynthia Daignault

Critics' Picks

WALLACE LUDEL
DECEMBER 7, 2021

Cynthia Daignault, *Gettysburg (Witness Tree)*, 2021, oil on linen, 96 × 48".

A friend asked me recently whether I felt that I moved through time or if I was still with time running toward me. I was told assuredly that there was no wrong answer, but I was oddly confident in my response: Time barrels on as I remain stagnant. My friend, however, felt the opposite, and I suppose science would tell us that either option is equally illusory. Cynthia Daignault's paintings often explore the subjectivity of time and the countless ways we attempt to wrest control of it, no matter how futile our efforts. In "As I Lay Dying," the artist's solo exhibition at Kasmin, she uses Gettysburg National Military Park in Pennsylvania—the site of the Civil War's bloodiest battle—as a springboard for interrogating temporality and death—the great equalizers. Her oil-on-linen works here posit that, while we clumsily hurtle through the millennia, the landscape holds a stillness—a quietude that acts as an objective

spectator. Take the large oak that silently watched fifty thousand men go to slaughter (as seen in *Gettysburg [Witness Tree]*, all works 2021) at the height of summer in 1863—how it remains an unjudging entity whose leaves turned bloodred in the fall before dying in winter, only to be replaced with new life the following spring.

Gettysburg (Infantryman) depicts a soldier's monument just as night has fallen, barely perceptible as the last fingers of light begin to lift their touch. A number of other paintings here also hinge on the metaphor of daylight's waxing and waning. *Gettysburg (Chiaroscuro)*, for example, is a diptych that examines a single tree from opposing vantages, with one panel showing it awash in light and the other cast in shadow. In *Gettysburg (11/19/63),* Daignault has painted the words from Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, but rather than rendering them sequentially, they're listed in alphabetical order—another manner of collapsing our drive for linear sense making.

frieze

Cynthia Diagnault

Kasmin Gallery

OCTOBER 2021

frieze

Contemporary Art and Culture
No. 222 October 2021

Cynthia Daignault, *Light Atlas* (detail), 2014–17,
360 parts, oil on linen, 20 × 25 cm each

CYNTHIA DAIGNAULT

Kasmin Gallery, New York, USA

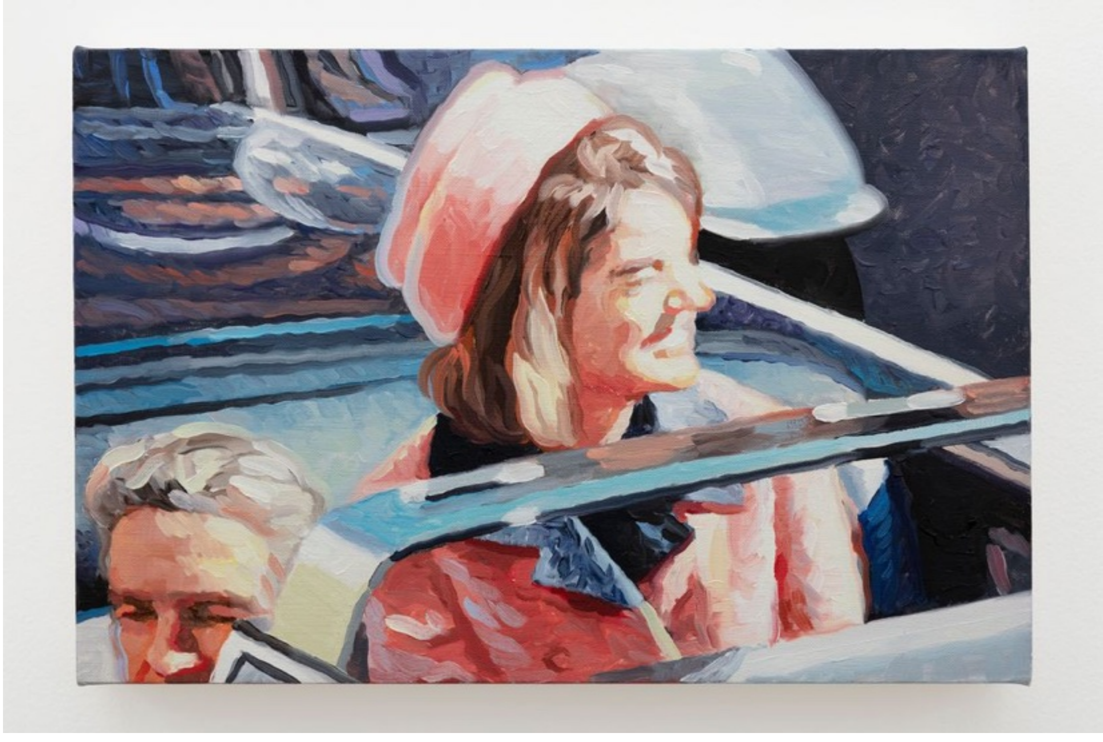
For Cynthia Daignault's first solo exhibition at Kasmin Gallery, the artist takes as her subject the Gettysburg National Military Park, presenting a series of paintings that reflect on the site's history and place in the ethos of American culture. Portraying the landscapes of the battlefield, the soldiers that fought on them, and President Abraham Lincoln's historic Gettysburg Address, which was given at the site in November 1863, this new body of work attempts to use the medium of painting as a way to convey the trauma and complexity of the country's troubled past. Building on her earlier series 'Light Atlas' (2014) – a suite of 360 paintings based on her yearlong road trip across the US – Daignault continues her exhaustive and indexical approach to painting the disparate views of Americana.

Cynthia Daignault's exhibition will be on view 18 November – 8 January 2022.

It is like spring in the art world': A more civilised, 'humane' Frieze New York bodes well for the market

Exhibitors praised Frieze for seamlessness of install and timed entry gave galleries and guests more time than usual for art chat, making deals and catching up

DANIEL CASSADY
MAY 6, 2021



Detail from Cynthia Daignault's 26 Seconds, (2021) Courtesy: Kasmin, New York. Photography by Diego Flores.

[EXTRACT]

For Kasmin's Nick Olney, there were multiple highlights to opening day, not the least of which was introducing new artists to new collectors—and being able to do so in person. "People were just excited to be here. Especially since it was in the city. There's a feeling that you're threaded right into Chelsea, you're part and parcel with all the galleries. People don't mind the timed entry or the two-hour time limit because they can explore the gallery district before or afterwards," Olney says. Kasmin sold 12 works on opening day priced between $8,000–$350,000 by artists including Cynthia Daignault, Liam Everett and Jan-Ole Schiemann. Daignault's oil on linen work, *26 Seconds* (2021), nine panels at 10 x 15 inches each, showing a cinematic view of the JFK assassination, sold for $48,000.

ARTFORUM

Cynthia Daignault

Night Gallery

ASHTON COOPER
NOVEMBER 2019

Cynthia Daignault, *Elegy (House on Fire)*, 2019, oil on linen, 64" × 96".

In Maurice Merleau-Ponty's 1945 essay "Cézanne's Doubt," the philosopher used the painter's work to propose that an individual's process of applying paint to canvas could serve as an index of the artist's phenomenological experience of the world. "His painting was paradoxical," Merleau-Ponty wrote. "He was pursuing reality without giving up the sensuous surface, with no other guide than the immediate impression of nature." While Cézanne repetitively painted Mont Sainte-Victoire from life, Cynthia Daignault has, for the past five years, devoted herself to picturing the American landscape—actual scenes observed from nature as well as from film stills, documentary photographs, and other images taken from our cultural history. These landscape paintings aren't simple records of an object or a place but testimonies to Daignault's "immediate impressions": her embodied experience, her observations, her browsing history, her fears, her research, her memories.

For her first solo show in Los Angeles, *Elegy,* Daignault built on her recent large-scale project *Light Atlas*, 2014–17, for which she drove across the country and stopped every twenty-five miles to paint what she saw. *Elegy*, however, presented a darker vision of the United States. Gone were the brightly hued beachscapes and perky Southwest cacti of the earlier canvases. These paintings were drained of sanguinity. Rendered exclusively in shades of gray, they meditated on the "abject horror" of "environmental collapse," as the artist wrote for the exhibition text. Their scale was equally formidable (as big as 86 by 129 inches, compared to roughly eight by ten inches for the paintings in *Light Atlas*), recalling Mark Rothko's seemingly counterintuitive comment, "I paint very large pictures . . . precisely because I want to be very intimate and human." In *Elegy (House on Fire)*, 2019, the painting's size allows for a more immersive interaction with Daignault's supple and sculptural handling of paint. Did the impression that we can see Daignault's process—conceivably her phenomenological experience of the world—heighten our own bodily response to the canvas in front of us? At the very least, the larger size invited the viewer to move around in front of the work. Seen from a distance, the burning house was relatively naturalistic, but from the perspective of a few inches away one could forget that the painting is representational at all. What once appeared to be leaping flames liquesced into dozens of twitching brushstrokes.

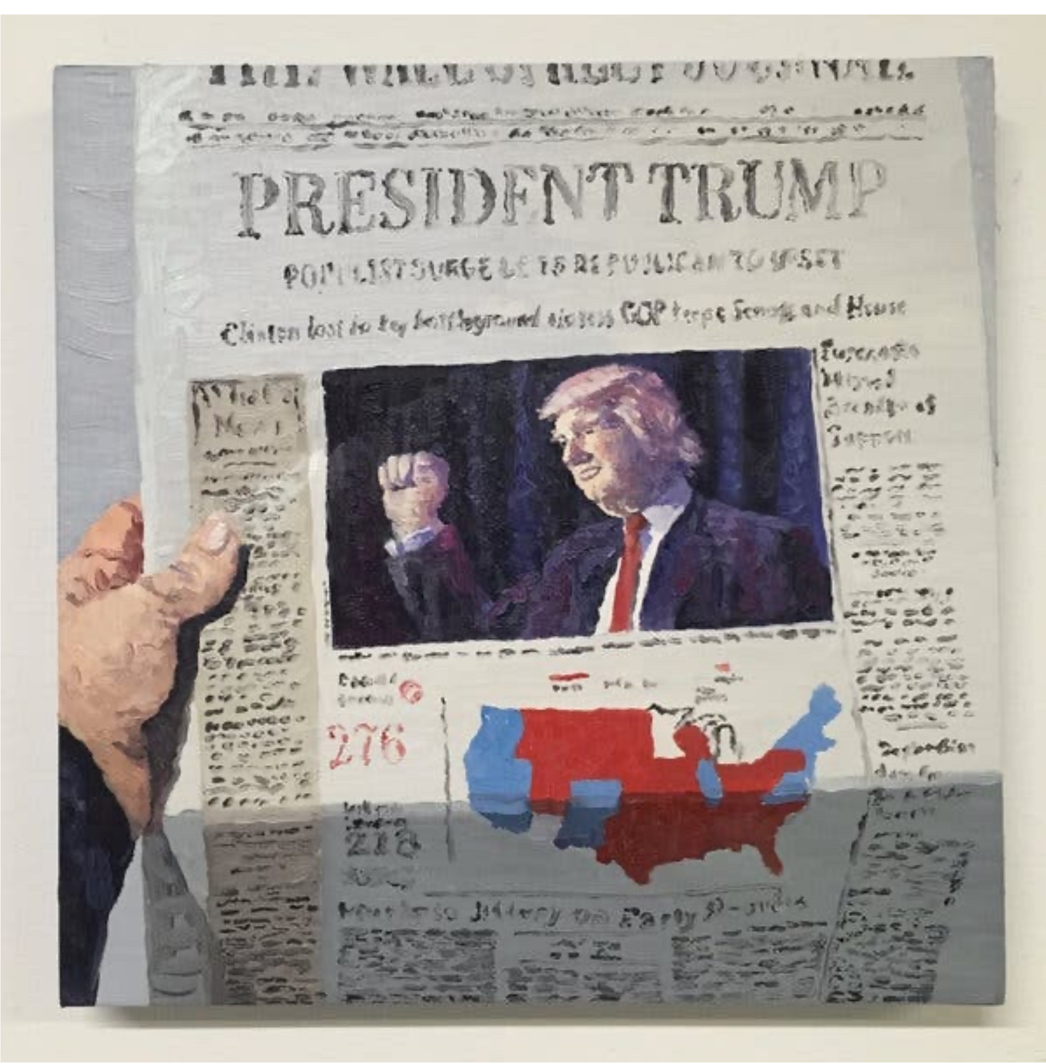
One alluring aspect of this show was how the images proposed different conceptions of "landscape." While some of Daignault's choices verged on the didactic (a ticking clock, a mountain vista, a portrait of John Muir), others were more capacious: a rearing horse on a dusty patch of land (comprising a scene that turned out to be a still from "The Misfits" [1961] and Al and Tipper Gore's infamously long kiss at the Democratic National Convention in 2000. One of my favorite pieces depicted Ernst Haas's 1969 photo of Helen Frankenthaler kneeling over a canvas in her studio. An assortment of terse little black brushstrokes abbreviate the bristles of the brush in her hand. The gesture of including Frankenthaler felt cryptic until I remembered that she often talked about her works as landscapes ("If I am forced to associate, I think of my pictures as explosive landscapes, worlds, and distances held on a flat surface," she said in 1957). Like Frankenthaler, Daignault sees landscape not as some circumscribed entity but as an expanse, a perspective.

Daignault's meditation on landscape, her elegy for it, foreclosed the possibility of a resolved idea or disinterested evaluation of the world. Instead, the artist invited viewers into the process, leaving them to navigate her web of imagery themselves. Her painted universe, set in mercurial strokes, shifts dramatically depending on your proximity to it—much like memory itself. In his analysis of Cézanne, Merleau-Ponty wrote, "Cézanne discovered [that] . . . the lived perspective . . . is not a geometric or photographic one." Daignault's dirge for the environment did not aspire to verisimilitude, but attempted to render the artist's own anxieties about the end of the world. The works paid homage to things that no longer exist, and to things that very well may not exist in the near future.

The New York Times

An Exhibition Worth Thousands of Words

ROBERTA SMITH
JULY 6, 2017



... Cynthia Daignault responds (posted Nov. 27, 2016).Credit Metropolitan Museum of Art.

[EXCERPT}

Two painters insinuated their preferred media. Cynthia Daignault invited Daniel Heidkamp to post only images of the paintings each made for their conversation, rendered mostly from life on 18-inch-square canvases to fit the proportions of the phone screen. While it is sometimes difficult to tell who did what, their glowing, seemingly textured prints warm up the show. (To see some of the actual paintings, with titles, visit Mr. Heidkamp's current show at the Half Gallery, a few blocks from the Met.)

BOMB

Cynthia Daignault's There is nothing I could say that I haven't thought before

The ethics of curating as an ethics of care

TED DODSON
MAY 11, 2017

Cynthia Daignault. *Sadie Barnette*, 2016, oil on canvas, 36 x 28 inches.
All images courtesy of the artist.

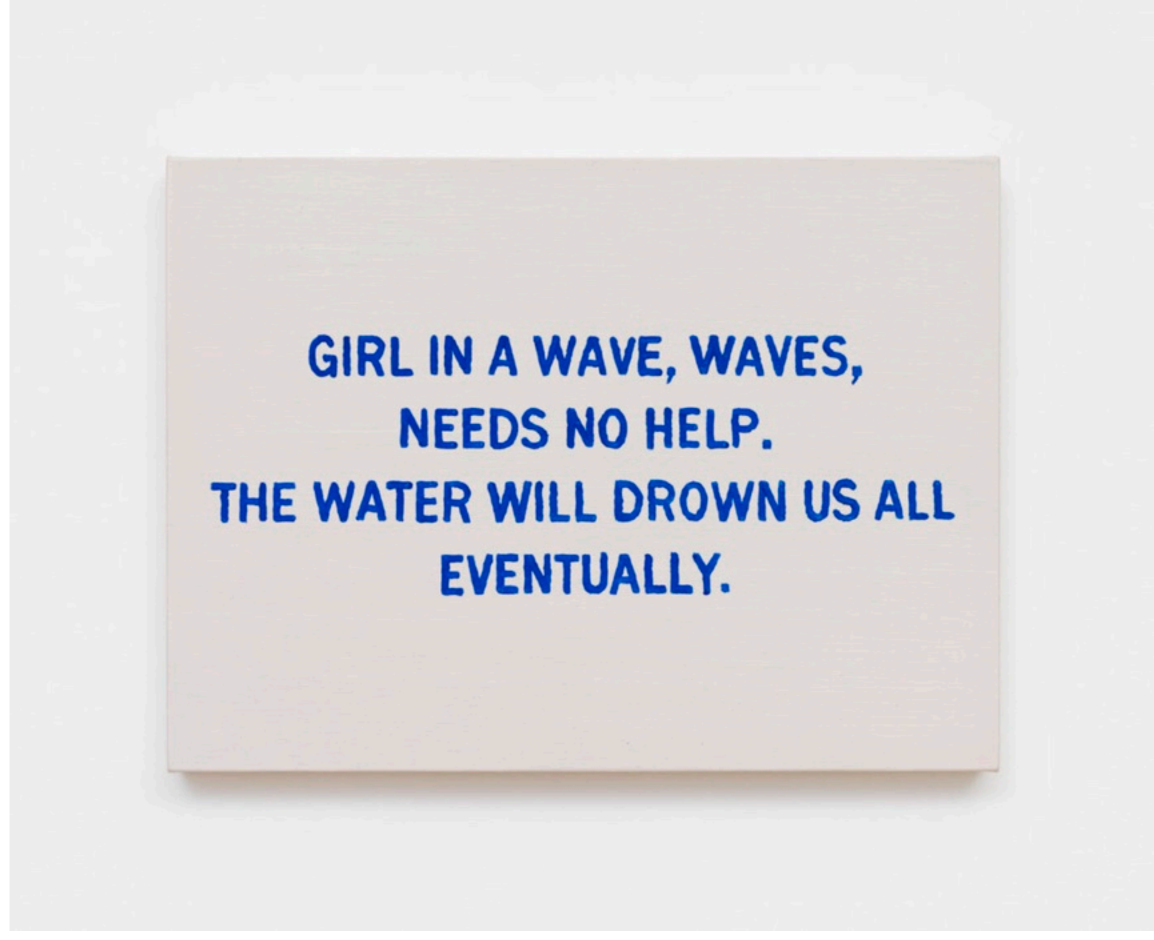
Cynthia Daignault's *There is nothing I could say that I haven't thought before*, now on view at the Flag Art Foundation, collects three separate series of paintings. Together, they continue her signature conceptual methodology, expanding on previous considerations of viewership, representative painting, and existential feminism to include a new imperative—ethics. All art has an ethics of sorts, but not many artists intend to detail the specific boundaries, freedoms, and covenants of that ethic through organizing phenomenological case studies that, in this instance, act as agents of care and consent, contending to where certain limits should be ethically upheld or breached.

The exhibition's eponymous series is composed of thirty-six portrait-sized, approved copies of other artists' work painted from JPEGs in Daignault's slightly fuzzy, deliberately material brushstrokes. If an artist's intent can be defined by the degree of responsibility they're willing to give an audience, what's often left unfocused are the bounds of this intent and where making meaning is the viewer's burden, not the artist's.

While this can seem abstract and attendant to the idiosyncrasies of an individual work, Daignault makes her intent here identifiable, concrete, and replicable. Mirroring the model relationship between artist and viewer, she engages in a consensual act with another artist, who in turn entrusts her with the responsibility of their work. If the intent were only to pay tribute, Daignault could've painted portraits of the artists themselves; however, if her previous writings on biography and identification bear any counsel, she might conclude that the look on someone's face is a far more superficial means of recording the substance of a life than it would be to testify to the products of their labor and explicitly engage with them. What she then places upon us is the responsibility to negotiate care through a scrim, through her subjectivity of rendering, de-rendering, forgery, and abstraction allows us to see these qualities not as impediments to compassion but concomitant with it. She does here what is seemingly impossible with a digital image—a medium whose nature is immortal mercuriality, forever recuperating an original image for an evermore-unclear posterity—and inscribes a static ethic.

MoMA*, 2017, thirty-two canvases,* 14 x 19 inches each. Detail below.

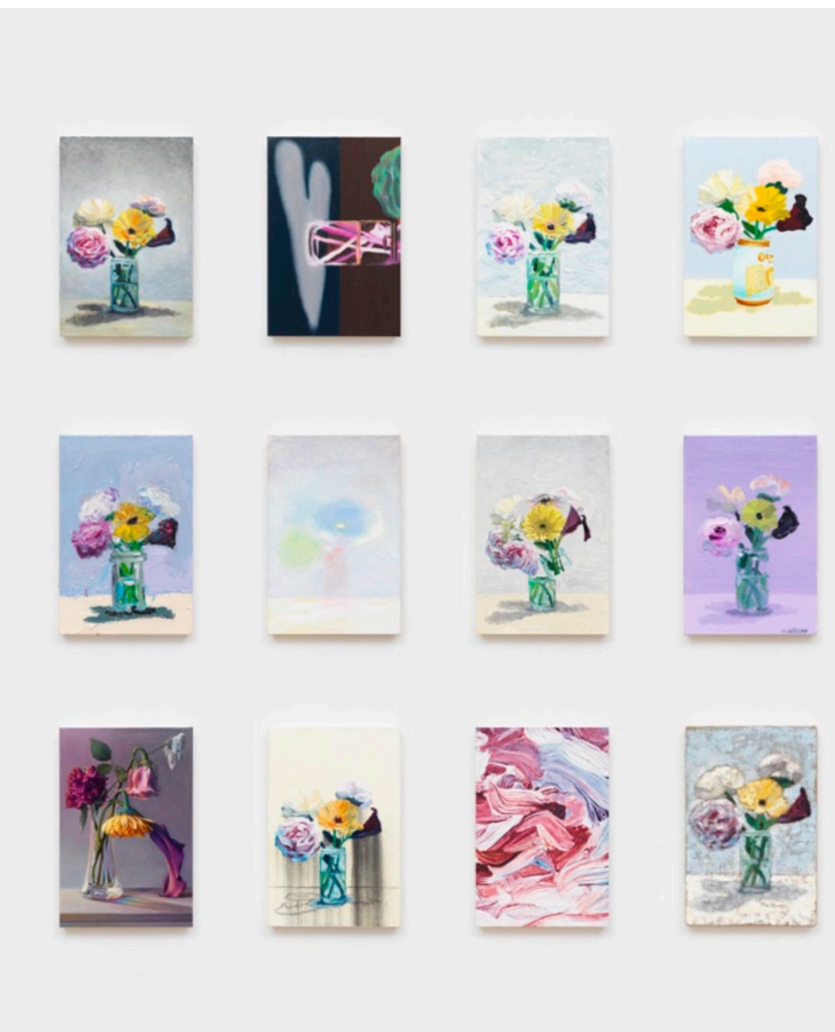
MoMA similarly de-renders its source material. Thirty panels gridded together like a pixel-level zoom-in stand in for historic works in the museum's permanent collection—as sourced from "top 10," "best of," and "must see" lists, all only showcasing the work of men. Each panel paraphrases a few limited essentials of the represented work, namely a single, emblematic color and a pithy textual description. It's as if you're viewing these paintings through a dilatant's eyes, and that could be the case, but it's more likely this is archetypical of the product of immortalization, a vacation from history. Salvador Dalí's *The Persistence of Memory* is here presented as a sort of unhealthy brown and reads "AT THE SEASHORE / SOMEONE LEFT A FACE OUT / IN THE RAIN."



MoMA*, 2017, thirty-two canvases,* 14 x 19 inches each. Detail.

This isn't too far from how it's generally encountered and remembered. Dalí himself is remembered mostly for his mustache. No one walks up to that painting and says, "Fuck that guy. He was a fascist sympathizer who made state-sanctioned art while he sold out his friends, made boatloads of cash, and watched the people of his country—especially the women of Spain—suffer and die under Franco's boot heel." That history is mostly forgotten or unknown, and with a greatest hits that, again, showcases only the art of men—mostly white, European or US American men—it's not a stretch to assume that similar histories exist for other works represented here or, more generally, a history of curatorial intent to erase the work of women, people of color, and artists outside of the Western canon—so, misogyny, racism, and imperialism. And what is Daignault's response? Curatorial détournement. But not in the sense of how institutional critique was levied in recent decades through irony and self-abasement. She chooses the more proactive and militant form: eradication. It could be argued that any art's "immortal" status has already done as much to eradicate its own disgraceful histories, though, and Daignault just has enough kindness to tell us the truth.

The Certainty of Others, meanwhile, differs from the other two series insofar as Daignault didn't paint them at all, rather commissioning a group of twelve male-identified painters to reconstruct her floral still life, *Everyone you ever loved will someday die* (2015), which was destroyed in 2016 as a part of a performance at Art Basel Miami. Though it takes up the smallest corner of the show, *The Certainty of Others* is the ideological center, most clearly exhibiting the show's foundational curatorial impulse. Curation is, at its most ideal, an act of compassion and not just an inoffensive arrangement of things, and it's here that Daignault is specific: consent between artist and curator is as



The Certainty of Others, 2017, twelve canvases, 15 x 10 inches each.

necessary as it is between the artist and their subject and, moreover, the subject and its viewer. The paintings here are small, and while they are variations on a theme, each piece is strikingly individual. They stand not only in contrast to one another but also to the uniformity of the rest of the exhibition. This uniformity doesn't just delimit the aesthetics of the show, but Daignault's phenomenological-ethical approach, too.

The Certainty of Others is the existential anchor, individual elegies for something gone, something personal. But Daignault is not seeking to memorialize, as there's no guarantee any of this work will last. It could go up in flames tomorrow, or we could all be struck dead! Daignault, and the whole of There is nothing I could say that I haven't thought before, is finding something much more human, a place where ethics and evanescence intersect, where we determine and renew bonds with the people we want in and out of our lives, what art we want to forget and remember as long as we can, what the work is that makes us.

THE NEW YORKER

Cynthia Daignault

MAY, 2017

For this meditation on authorship in the digital age, titled *There Is Nothing I Could Say That I Haven't Thought Before*, Daignault invited fellow-artists to lend her their work. The thirty-six who agreed sent her digital images, on which she based a series of oil paintings, each titled with the name of its contributor artist: Jeff Koons, Barbara Kruger, and so on. (It's worth noting that the show's title is itself borrowed from a Nirvana song.) Daignault's reproductions of the young Brooklyn photographer Sara Cwynar's image of a woman's fingers on a picture of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* and of the German conceptualist Peter Dreher's one-thousand-six-hundred-and-fourth painting of a water glass are especially funny. Elsewhere in the space, Daignault takes on the male gaze and institutional critique with equal gusto, if not quite equal brilliance.

Art in America

Cynthia Daignault

DAVID DUNCAN
FEBRUARY 25, 2016

Inspired by American travelogues of the past—and realizing that the canon consisted solely of works by men—Cynthia Daignault set out in 2014 to travel the United States for a year by car. She followed a back-roads route around the perimeter of the lower 48, avoiding interstates, and stopped every 25 miles, at each point recording the scene before her with paint or with a camera, the latter providing source material for paintings she made later in the studio. The 360 oil-on-linen paintings in the resultant body of work, titled *Light Atlas*, share a compact, uniform size (8 by 10 inches) and combine impressionistic strokes with vivid photographic tonality. Together, the paintings offer a kind of portrait of America, as seen in her recent show at Lisa Cooley, which featured 155 of them hung side by side at eye level.

As Daignault progressed through her journey—which started from her Brooklyn stoop, continued up the northeastern coast and proceeded westward—her eye repeatedly wandered toward man-made things, like those favored by painter and photographer Charles Sheeler. A stone wall runs through a Connecticut scene; in several other paintings, old barns and clapboard houses are portrayed frontally, parallel to the picture plane, which makes them appear modernist; rustic farm silos materialize elsewhere, and, on one canvas, we see a distant grain elevator

and concrete silo complex beside a stream, the image recalling Sheeler's *American Landscape* (1930), which depicts the Ford Motor Company plant along the Rouge River outside Detroit.

Daignault's evocation of Sheeler in this series, whether intentional or not, is interesting. The New England artist depicted distinctly American subjects—primarily objects and architecture, never people—in ways that seem to glorify industry and notions of progress. While Daignault's images likewise portray American subjects, they have an elegiac quality rarely seen in his work. Her paintings not only offer mundane scenes but also—particularly with images of isolated roadside structures, dilapidated buildings and graffiti-strewn walls—attest to a complicated notion of contemporary America, to a place that bears the effects of time, of class struggle. Daignault's series, then, serves as both a portrait of America today and a commemoration for an American optimism of the past, one that today seems far too simplistic.

The rear gallery held Daignault's 2014 slideshow collaboration with photographer Curran Hatleberg, *Somewhere Someone is Traveling Furiously Toward You* (titled after a line from a John Ashbery poem), which features a musical score by composer William Morisey Slater. Two 35mm projectors advance through road-trip snapshots (windshield views showing roadside signs, barren landscapes and the like) from the two artists' synchronized drives, over the course of one week, from opposite sides of the country on the same coast-to-coast route: Daignault left from New York, Hatleberg from Los Angeles. The artists stayed in the same motels and used the same kind of photographic equipment. When their paths intersected in Lebanon, Kans., as planned, they drove right past each other, continuing toward their destinations. Daignault and Hatleberg's act of foregoing a mid-country, face-to-face interaction serves as a poetic portrayal of two ships passing in the night.

ARTFORUM

Cynthia Daignault

Lisa Cooley

LAUREN CAVALLI
JANUARY 2016

Cynthia Daignault with Curran Hatleberg, *Somewhere Someone Is Traveling Furiously Toward You,* 2015, 35-mm slides, slide projectors, dissolve unit, stereo. Score by William Morisey Slater.

In 2014, Cynthia Daignault packed her bags, gassed up her car, and drove. For one year she traveled throughout the United States, stopping every twenty-five miles to paint the landscape. The result is *Light Atlas*, 2015, a series of more than three hundred modestly sized works, hung edge to edge in a tidy line in the main room of the gallery. The installation produces a crazy-quilt gradient field of blues, greens, and browns, culled from oceans, farmers' fields, and arid deserts.

Daignault's intimate approach undermines the macho grandiosity of American landscape painting. And a gooey optimism oozes out of these oils, as she manages to make America's poisoned landscape of fracking sites or an image of an abandoned building with graffiti spelling out the word "safe" on its walls feel seductive.

In the adjacent gallery is *Somewhere Someone Is Traveling Furiously Toward You*, 2015: You are startled awake. Projected floor to ceiling, 160 black-and-white photographs appear in rapid succession on a twenty-minute loop from two analog projectors. The slideshows, with a score by William Morisey Slater, flash through Daignault's and photographer Curran Hatleberg's separate road trip photos simultaneously on opposite walls. The whirlwind pacing of the images—and the kink in your neck from attempting to absorb all of them—imprints you with a stark portrait of this country. The projectors manage to be in sync only once, when two photos of paved paths stretching out infinitely into the horizon leave you to wonder: Is either direction safe?

Cynthia Daignault Killed Off Her Own Painting. For Art, Obviously.

The artist burned her own painting during Art Basel and threw a funeral in its memory. RIP young still life, we hardly knew ye.

KYLE MUNZENRIEDER
DECEMBER 7, 2015

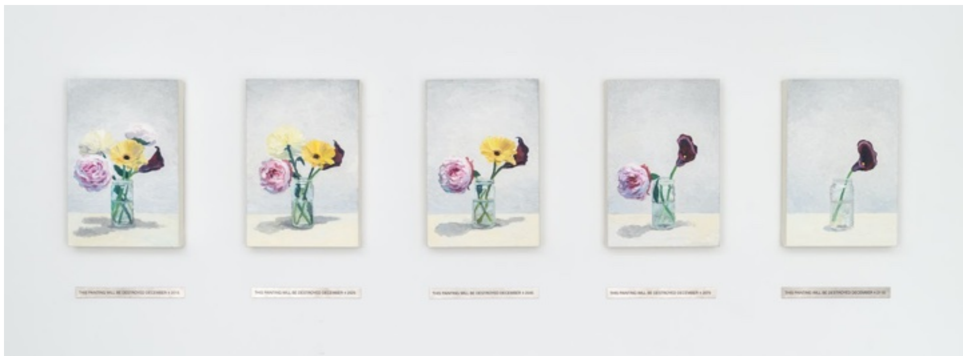
Dearly beloved, let us pause and reflect on the life and times of a painting that died too soon. The young still life was acquired just a year ago at the NADA art fair here in Miami, but it never got to enjoy a life like that of so many of its contemporaries. It will never sit in storage of the collection of a mid-level American art museum. Its hope of one day being sold for triple its original value at auction were cruelly dashed. Perhaps most tragically of all, it never even got a chance to pull together the interior decorating scheme of a collector's brand new Montauk home.

The fate of the first painting in Daignault's *Everyone You Ever Loved Will Die* series was instead dropped into a fire set inside an aluminum trash can on a fishing boat dubbed "Another Reward" as it chugged through Miami's Biscayne Bay on Friday night.

Daignault, whose work ties together traditional figurative painting with heady conceptual ideas, planned it that way.
"The idea was that all pieces will eventually be destroyed," she said "Everything will die eventually. These just announce the date of their destruction, which in some ways is a proactive role on the painting's part by choosing the date that it will leave the world." (Daignault's *Light Atlas* is on view at Lisa Cooley in New York through Dec. 20.)

The painting was the first of five small painting in the series. Each depicts a set of flowers sitting in a simple jar, but a blossom goes missing as the series continues until only one is left (Each painting was presented with a plaque underneath announcing the date of its destruction). Daignault intentionally designed them to be seductive to art fair buyers. Even though without the conceptual performance behind it the paintings still meditate on death and loss, it would have been easy to see them adorning a collector's hallway.

“It was playing a little bit with that notion that we buy pieces at an art fair, in a commodities sense, with the hope that they’ll accrue value,” the artist continued “These are literally losing value year by year as the piece itself is unraveling as you own it.”



Courtesy of the artist and Lisa Cooley, New York.

In many ways, Art Basel Miami Beach week is as much about collecting experiences as it is art. Invites to exclusive dinners are perhaps more coveted than Damien Hirst pieces, which most couldn’t afford anyway. So the painting didn’t leave this world without a ceremony. The collector who bought the piece may not actually get to keep his five paintings, but he had bought himself five events.

Daignault, dressed in a brightly embroidered liturgical dress and a crown of flowers, personally passed out kazoos and wooden percussive sticks to the crowd. She requested a soundscape for the painting’s goodbye. As it turns out Daignault can add master kazoo player to her resumé alongside painter, writer and curator. Few others managed to get the hang of it.She dropped the painting into the trashcan as the boat passed the Port of Miami, a hub of international trade. Her background at the moment was a wall of colorful shipping containers stamped “Chinese Shipping.”

The painting would not go out of the world alone. Daignault has passed out index cards and asked guests to write something they wished to say goodbye to. “Tonight is about letting go and being free,” she announced.
The cards were dropped one by one into the fire as guests continued beating on the rhythm sticks. Next, white peonies, the first flower to go missing from the piece, were handed out. Daignault read Mark Strand’s poem *The End*, and requested that the flowers be dropped into the bay.

By that point the boat’s view was of Miami’s ever expanding downtown skyline. The newer starchitect-designed towers shimmered in the moonlight. Much like the art at the fairs, the units in those buildings are acquired by the world’s elite as commodities. Like the peonies that has been passed out they too risk the fate of one day sinking into the bay. What better place to meditate on the fleeting nature of both life and the power, objects and money we accrue during it then the coastline of a city most endangered by climate change?

“The thing that will remain is the idea and the experience and the memory, and that the object part is the least important part,” Daignault said earlier of the performance. “It’s sort of disempowering the object and empowering the experience and human interaction and these events that will be social each time that we do it.”

The final piece in the series is scheduled for destruction in exactly 100 years. Daignault reminded us that every single person on the boat will be dead by then.

ARTFORUM

Cynthia Daignault

Rowhouse Project

BIBIANA OBLER
NOVEMBER 2015

Cynthia Daignault, *Neighbor*, 2015, oil on canvas, 12" × 9".

Cynthia Daignault's *Home. This must be the place.* was the fifth installment in a three-year series of site-specific shows that will cumulatively constitute the Rowhouse Project. Every season a new artist occupies 2640 Huntingdon Avenue, a row house in the Remington neighborhood of Baltimore; each installation coincides with a new stage of a very slow-going renovation. As of summer 2015, the house was still in the process of being stripped down. Refrigerator, stove, blinds, curtains, ceiling fans—all gone, along with various layers of paint and linoleum. But much remained: a claw-foot tub and a wisp of plastic ivy in the bathroom; whitewashed kitchen cupboards (stocked with Natty Boh, the official beer of Baltimore); charming if stained and dilapidated wallpapers now seeing the light of day after years of concealment.

Daignault populated the first floor with portraits of the house's neighbors. On the second, she hung a frieze depicting the block's architectural facades; a series of paintings capturing details of the house's current interior (irregular remnants of wallpaper and paint, an abject stain that would appear as abstraction were it not for the context); and another suite of lush green foliage (as observed either immediately outside or looking out from the windows).

The tone was nostalgic, the exhibition a love letter to a working-class neighborhood representative of a city in flux, a record of this moment. In her artist's statement, Daignault, who lives in New York but was born and raised in Baltimore, explained how she returned to her hometown to make the paintings, turning the house into her studio for a month in late May and early June. She characterized her engagement with this space and place as "institutional

empowerment"—most explicitly demonstrated by her decision to give the portraits to their respective subjects at the end of the show's run. But the installation additionally came across as an embodiment of the ambivalence of artists who know they participate in the gentrification that both destroys and preserves—or reinvents—the character of places they love.

"A year from now, everything will be different," writes Daignault. The question is, How different? Gentrification does not operate the same way in Baltimore as it does in New York. For years apparently on the brink of major revitalization, Baltimore has stayed relatively inexpensive—and volatile (this spring's protests following Freddie Gray's death were testimony to enduring unresolved tensions). But the city's affordability has attracted a growing community of artists and helped to create a vibrant art scene. Notably, the city's artist-run (or, in this case, collector-run) spaces have strong ties with New York, often providing New York–based artists opportunities for solo exhibitions. (All the artists participating in the Rowhouse Project thus far have come from New York.)

If the sluggish pace of the Rowhouse Project's renovation may be taken as emblematic of the glacial processes of gentrification in Baltimore, Daignault's *Home. This must be the place*. epitomized a certain fraught relationship between artist and location. The title thematized Daignault's uncertainty, as if she were trying to convince herself that this city must be home when she knew that sentiment wasn't quite right. Daignault loves Baltimore with a "ferocious passion," but she's aware that the utopia of diversity she portrays in her portraits—and the oasis of bucolic urbanism evoked by her views of sun-dappled architecture, verdant trees, and even the beauty to be found in musty stains—is elusive. Daignault surely knows better than to uncritically glorify the joys of authenticity, yet Baltimore is her uncanny. Here she can experience nostalgia for something that still exists.

THE NEW YORKER

Cynthia Daignault

Goings on About Town: Art

SEPTEMBER 30, 2013

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN: ART

CYNTHIA DAIGNAULT

Take your time with this subtly yearning poet of a painter. Big, creamy oils breed single floating images of windows or shadows or a pale sun in fields of close-toned beige and light-blue strokes. Three hundred and sixty-five small paintings render one-a-day skies in wide-ranging styles and share the title "I Love You More Than One More Day." A restive lyricism seethes within cautious formal constraints. The work stammers on the verge of transcendence, as if having forgotten and then just half-remembering some vital thing that it was about to say. Through Oct. 20.

ARTFORUM

Cynthia Daignault

White Columns

MICHAEL WILSON
OCTOBER 2011

Cynthia Daignault, White Columns Bulletin Board: *There is no dark side of the moon really. Matter of Fact it's all dark*, 2011, oil on linen. Installation view.

Like a conceptual puzzle with too easy a solution, Cynthia Daignault's project has a transparency that hews perilously close to the counterproductive. But while her art seems at first to refuse any possibility of mystery or "expression," instead dealing explicitly with the mechanisms of visual display and institutional context, it is more than just an arid joke. Unusually for a display of oil-on-linen paintings, Daignault's exhibition at White Columns was designed specifically for and in response to the existing features and proportions of the gallery's main space and lobby. Yet while unequivocally site-specific, this deadpan suite of pictures also inserted itself into an ongoing commentary around the intersection of naturalistic painting with photographic and videographic imaging.

The show's opening work prompted double takes from White Columns regulars accustomed to seeing the gallery's glass-fronted bulletin board, usually employed as a miniature project space, hanging on the wall adjacent to its entrance. Daignault has removed the much-used object and replaced it with a painted copy, in which Pink Floyd's

album *The Dark Side of the Moon* is pinned dead center. Introducing the show, this canvas also introduced viewers to the artist's painterly mode, a clean but unfussy photorealism that doesn't sweat the small stuff. Daignault does enough to make her depictions clear and convincing without chasing trompe l'oeil perfection.

High on the wall above the bulletin-board painting hung another, smaller canvas, *Slide Projector* (all works 2011). Depicting the titular piece of near-obsolete equipment as seen from the front, it appears at first to be a stand-alone work, but was hung here directly across the room from *Slideshow*, a painting of a fuzzy rectangle of white light. With this straightforward bit of simulation, the artist both electrifies the space between the two works and draws on a history of "blank" canvases that also takes into account the likes of Blinky Palermo's *Projektion*, 1971, for which he projected the image of one of his fabric works onto the exterior of a building. Slideshow thus combines stark realism with near-monochrome abstraction, extending the possibilities of each into the established territory of the other.

The same kind of interplay happened throughout the show; thus, the self-explanatory LCD Projector was paired with *White Light/White Heat*, a rectangle of primary colors evoking a digital test screen. (Likewise, in *Screen test: test screen*, a painted monitor displays SMPTE color bars.) Whereas *Slideshow*'s white-on-white look recalls Robert Ryman or a pallid Mark Rothko, the art-historical link here is to Barnett Newman's *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue III*, 1966–67. There is certainly an element of geekery to the inclusion of such iconic likenesses, but the deeper interest of their cut-'n'-mix approach to format, method, and subject remains. How would a painter go about making a Color Field abstraction today? What would it mean to do so? How has electronic media impacted the way we perceive and evaluate images of all kinds?

Two further inclusions complicate the project still further: Appropriately placed paintings of a black Barcelona couch and a pair of matching stools rope the politics of gallery furniture styling into the fray, while the appearance of a snippet from Samuel Beckett's *Molloy* (1951) in *The one I shall now describe, if I can . . .* (another "projected" panel) points in an intriguing literary direction. Daignault seems not to be trying too hard—borrowing a line from the Kinks, she titles one painting of drifting clouds *I think of the Big Sky, and nothing matters much to me*—but her work's apparent effortlessness conceals a multipartite promise.