

Slow View: Discussion on One Work

Slow View is an interview series centered on a single work. The aim is to generate thoughtful, in-depth conversation, and through this prolonged consideration provide an alternative to the quickness with which work is often viewed in our digital age. Julian Rogers is a Los Angeles/ San Diego based artist who employs still life to explore optical and phenomenological possibilities in painting. Working with a limited palette and 1:1 ratio, his approach to this historic subject matter feels open-ended and exploratory. His painting *Double Positive* (2014) is part of a series of still life paintings depicting fruit on rocky, uneven surfaces.

Anna Breininger: The first thing that strikes me about the work is how the imagery dissolves as the viewer moves around the painting. This physical flicker is reinforced by the almost twilight-like depiction of light in the work. Moving from a straight vantage point to a more peripheral one, the details of the fruit disappear and they instead become iridescent hints of form against a monochromatic surface. Can you speak a little more about this physical/ optical aspect of the work?

Julian Rogers: For a long time I worked in photorealism, and this took me to New York where I was able to make a living painting for other artists. But after years and years of this kind of painting I began to lose interest in illusion; everything became surface. So, I could look at a set of

identically painted Jeff Koons paintings and see that Marlene painted this one, Ed painted that one, Corey did this and Pat did that (even though they all looked as if they had been made by machines). I spent a few years trying to break away from this condition, trying to find new ways to make marks, but I found that if I reduced the amount of information in the image there was a new kind of seduction. I came back to realism with this in mind and saw that a darkened scene triggered something in my mind and made realism seem fresh. At times I think of Basquiat crossing out his painted text, and about how this makes people want to see what was written. It's not the same thing, but there is a way in which taking something away makes us hungrier to see it. That seems true across the board.

AB: Do you think of the painting as dealing with the subject of viewing?

JR: Definitely. The first thing that a lot of people notice upon first viewing these paintings is that their eyes have to slowly adjust to them, as if they had just been out on a sunny day and come into a dimly lit room. But once you get used to what you are seeing, you realize that the surface is actually a little reflective here and there. This usually gets people moving around the painting to see how it reflects different points of light. So in this sense the act of viewing is fairly physical.

Anna Breininger was born in the '80s in rural Pennsylvania. In 2013 she received an MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art and has attended studio programs at Goldsmiths College and School of Visual Arts. Currently she lives in Los Angeles where she maintains an active studio practice. She has exhibited in New York, Philadelphia and Los Angeles, and has been featured in *New American Paintings*.

This painting in particular partly mimics how it feels to look at a daguerreotype in person. Daguerreotypes and paintings are unique objects (for the most part), so it's a welcome comparison, or at least a conversation starter. Photorealism and photography have a stuffy relationship—as a couple they are not the life of the party—but there are plenty of contemporary artists who are working to make a fresh start.

AB: I'm curious about the choice of fruit. They are so ubiquitous.

JR: There's a long story about how I came to begin using fruit as a subject, but basically it came from one of my very first drawing lessons when I was probably six or seven: I learned that shape and color both inform an object. Fruit is one of those rare categories of objects whereby recognition of the object can come through either shape or color. For example, a banana can almost always be recognized by its shape alone, but oranges, lemons, limes, and other round fruits can be easily confused if you consider just the shape; color helps us recognize these without hesitation. As the painted fruit scenes are darkened and become harder to see, they slow down these light speed decisions our brains make to help us determine objects. Very often I am painting bananas blue or brown, but we don't read them like that because what's around them is different as well.

So that's where the idea came from, but moving forward I am thinking more about pulling still life painting apart a bit to find new ways that my paintings can function. There's a massive history of realistic painting that has nothing whatsoever to do with photography. I'm not ready to let that history go anytime soon.

AB: I'm thinking about how, in the tradition of still life, fruit becomes psychological on a metaphoric level. Do you view this grouping of fruit as functioning that way as well as being used to explore perception?

JR: Well I think there's a sort of take-it-or-leave-it quality about how the objects in still life paintings function generally, which I think is important because the way paintings operate can bounce around a bit depending on the situation and the needs of the viewer. In other words, I am totally fascinated with how Norman Bryson writes about still life, about how there are varying layers of metaphor and formalism that operate in different levels of reality in paintings of fruit and vegetables throughout the ages. But, I also just want to look at a painting and have it just kinda knock me back a little bit. Sometimes these two things work together, sometimes not.

There's basically a lot I could say about this question in regard to this painting in particular. There's a mountaintop, which is cold, hard, remote, unmoving, massive and fairly timeless, and then there's fruit: small, soft, consumable, moves through your body, etc. So there's something small you have total control over located in a place that totally dominates you. There's plenty of room for metaphor here, but I try not to think about it too much because it's nice when the formal relationships can still surprise me.

Julian Rogers was born in Nashville, Tennessee in 1981. Rogers works primarily in oil paint, but has worked in a variety of media, including video art and electronic music. Rogers completed an MFA from the University of California, San Diego in 2015. He has recently shown his paintings in Japan, Spain, and Mexico, as well as Commonwealth and Council, Sonce Alexander Gallery, and ACME. in Los Angeles.

Julian Rogers



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Julian Rogers, *Double Positive*
(2014), 68 × 54 inches, oil on canvas. Photo courtesy of the artist
(Photo: Heather Rasmussen).