

Kissick, Craven & Broadworth: Small is Beautiful

Leo Kamen Gallery, Toronto, Mar 28 to Apr 25 2009
by Pete Smith



“Small Paintings” 2009 Installation view Courtesy Leo Kamen Gallery

The exhibition “Small Paintings” offers an intriguing glimpse into the overall character of contemporary abstract painting. Confining the usually larger scale painters [John Kissick](#), David Craven and [Jordan Broadworth](#) to smaller substrates has brought a different temperament to this exhibition—mostly because it allows us to see a boatload of actual works, 34 in total. As fruitful as this shrinking has proven to be, this exhibition is most interesting in its presentation of three intensely analytical yet otherwise diverse approaches to the notion of gesture.



Jordan Broadworth *Spy* 2008

David Craven's works in this exhibition comically allude to the wires, circuitry and networking of contemporary information technologies. Titled after popular email and texting acronyms, these paintings use abstract forms and gestures as a vehicle to consider the fragmented nature of contemporary social relations. Despite sharing similar conceptual stakes with artists like [Peter Halley](#), Craven's wonky, walking lines have an idiosyncratic sensibility that is more formally akin to older models of abstract painting such as those offered by Joan Miró and Stewart Davis. Craven's palette, however, is exceedingly pared down. It provides these paintings with a starkness that complicates the comedy of their performances, which is exemplified in the playfulness of their lines and the strategic, hide-and-seek patches of underpainting that show through.



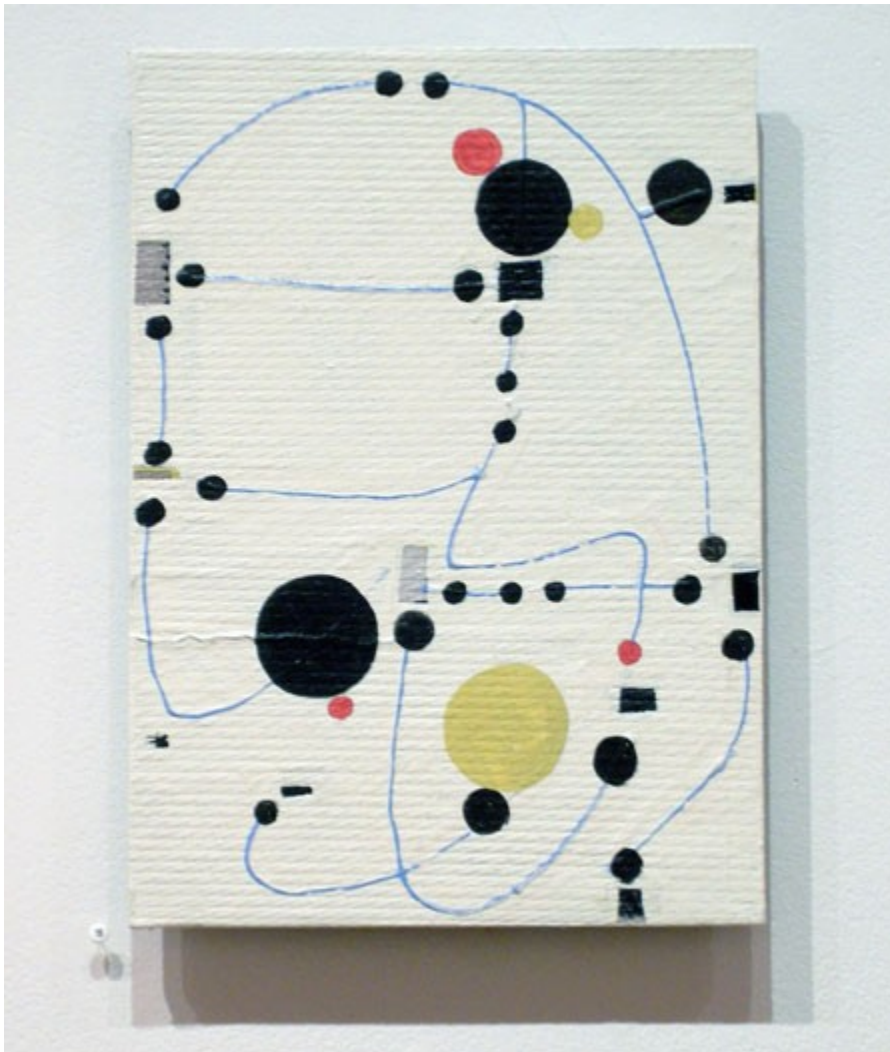
John Kissick *I Feel Better (than James Brown) No. 6* 2009

These small paintings by Jordan Broadworth are some of artist's finest works. The reduced scale lends itself perfectly to the gauge of his mark-making and gesture. All of these paintings are impressively self-contained, and the serial repetition of their formal relationships imbues the works with a sense of hypnotic reflection. The works consider the expressive potential of gesture in a world that seems drained of such possibilities. Their true sense of tragedy, however, comes from their insecurity: these marks are

painted, blurred, wiped out and painted again. Broadworth is searching for the perfect mark: one that can amply carry the full weight of its history and the burden of meaning attached to it.

John Kissick's paintings are a provocative blend of modernist tropes and conventions filtered through the kaleidoscopic lens of mass cultural absorption and dilution (think Rothko posters sold at food-court booths). The encrusted and congealed surface that Kissick is courting in these works, through a peculiar sort of "bad alchemy," gives them a sense of mould and decay. Despite the vast, playful range that his palette, forms and titles (e.g. *I Feel Better (than James Brown)*) elicit, these traits are ultimately overshadowed by the pathos of their rotting veneers: the encapsulated remains of gesture's once-living body. (406-80 Spadina Ave, Toronto ON)

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David Craven *O.M.G.* 2009