

SI: *This small-scale portrait here—the woman’s expression is interesting.*

DS: I was in St. Louis, walking with my husband. We saw someone get pulled over by the cops; I think she was stoned. It did not seem like she got pulled over very often. She seemed a little freaked. The expression on her face while being interrogated by the police was one of trying both to conceal and engage at the same time—I wanted to make a painting that was like that, where the person is trying to hide and also really engage with the viewer, but also trying to look as normal as possible.

SI: *What about this painting, with the odd child in it with these huge testicles?*

DS: It’s a boy, and I wanted his body to become like a painter’s palette that looks like the features on it could be moved around. His body has a torque to it. And I added a basketball for scale and because it seemed boyish. The body’s pose felt like Roman sculpture, and the basketball is so everyday that it brought it back to the actual world. Also, my husband, Ryan, had had this crazy dream about shrinking after we had our baby. It was like a hallucination, that first week, when you don’t sleep at all. You spend so much time staring at this little body. And then, in the middle of the night, Ryan was really worried; he kept asking: “Am I shrinking? Am I shrinking?” It was intense. And then he had this crazy dream about a little bald, mentally impaired troll, sort of like a leprechaun, but he was holding a basketball. The troll said, “I’ll be your friend.” In the beginning when you have a baby you are so tired and freaked out. But I should probably not talk about Ryan’s dreams, or any dreams, really!

SI: *What do you still have to do for the Petzel show?*

DS: I want to make a large painting of an intimate subject: something simple, like a couple in bed, from an aerial view.

SI: *Figurative painting has seen a resurgence in the recent past (in no small part due to your influence). But at the same time there has been an upsurge in process-driven abstract painting, most of it fairly homogeneous. What excites you these days, reminding you that there’s still work to be done in a fairly conservative medium?*

DS: I don’t think painting is conservative, or any more conservative than any other medium. But I do think it’s a good time: It feels very open. And there has been a lot of serious thinking and writing about painting in the past 10 years, which is exciting. About abstraction and figuration, I think there are bad and great artists in both camps and there really isn’t too much of a difference. It really only comes down to making interesting paintings.

SI: *In your work, the body occupies a fraught position—sometimes it’s dissolving, or exploding in violent gestures, or being dissected, or cannibalized. What sorts of bodies inhabit these new paintings?*

DS: I think they are all different. Maybe they are containers of a sort? Some of them feel like they could be Trojan horses, sculptural, or active. I want them all to engage the viewer directly, to be very frontal. Even the figures that are in profile, I feel like they are totally set up for a viewer. I want them to be pushing up against their physical limitations, the space of the painting—hemmed in by their interior space but able to step outside themselves. **MP**



UNDER THE INFLUENCE

HOMAGE TO HILMA

A tribute to a Swedish abstraction pioneer

JOSIAH MCELHENY WANTS to give undersung Swedish artist Hilma af Klint the recognition she deserves. Though her name is little mentioned in the modernist art historical narrative, she’s a key figure at the forefront of abstraction who painted her first nonrepresentational images as early as 1906. McElheny uses af Klint’s astounding oeuvre as a point of departure for a solo exhibition at **Andrea Rosen Gallery** in New York, opening September 10. “I’m attempting to fuse the history of various canonical works by Kazimir Malevich, Wassily Kandinsky, Ellsworth Kelly, and Ad Reinhardt with some of the ideas of af Klint, who might be said to have been the first abstract painter in the Western tradition,” says McElheny. Though the titles of his three series—“Prism Paintings,” “Projection Paintings,” and “Crystalline Paintings”—suggest a one-dimensionality, the artist, who is known for his works with blown glass, is still deeply involved with spatial concerns. In these paintings, composed of materials

Josiah McElheny

Blue Prism Painting III, 2015. Hand-formed and polished blue glass, mirror, cut and polished blue architectural sheet glass, sumi ink wood finish, oak, and plywood, 42½ x 42½ x 7 in.

like wood, molded glass, colored glass sheets, oil paint, sumi ink, and projection screen paint, “the ground is painted wood, the surface is the glass plane, and inside are prisms or crystalline forms,” McElheny explains. He sees these works as “an argument against the idea that painting is only the surface, which to me seems an echo of puritanical ideas of purity that have often haunted modernism.” —**JULIET HELMKE**