

Making Marks: Digital Sketches to Painted Stories

Curated by Chelsea L. Cooksey

Featuring the work of Steve Block and Kenneth E. Parris III

March 30 -April 16, 2017 | April 2: Curator/Artist Tour & Opening Reception 2-5pm

The present show features two artists — Steve Block and Kenneth E. Parris III — who share parallels in subject matter and theme, and commonalities in materials. But an even stronger bond ties these two artists: their painterly process incorporates contemporary technology as a key element in the creation of their paintings. Both Block and Parris have a multistep process or plan, an adherence to using digital technology as a tool in a back and forth modus between image manipulation and the more traditional painterly mark-making. Both of these painters' practices employ such diverse techniques as sketching on paper, drawing digitally, photographic compilation, image manipulations, conceptual experimentation in scale and perspective, collage and painting in various mediums. Both artists incorporate digitally-generated elements and traditional art-making techniques in the creation of their paintings.

Block's current series began with left over raw canvases that were used as a studio drop cloth to catch errant paint droppings and sharpen oil sticks for a different body of work. After a few days, the accumulated, random bits of colors under the easel began taking on a form of their own. Block saw the detritus as worthy of attention, prompting his current series *Released*. For the first time in his painting practice, Block began using digitally-drawn sketches as the origin for his oil stick and acrylic on canvas paintings. Prior to this series, Block used digital sketching solely as a means to

quickly capture an idea as it came to him, or when he saw something in the real world that spoke to him. Block is drawn to the versatility and speed of drawing digitally, his sketching and planning period is decisive; it is not tentative or hesitant. An idea forms, and through digital drawing, he capitalizes on the immediate ability to capture an image to the screen. His paintings, though modeled after the sketches, are worked in the opposite fashion. The painterly process is completed at a slower, more methodical pace,



Kenneth E. Parris *Punching Bag Portrait*

through a process layering and painting with enamel, acrylic paint and oil sticks onto unprimed canvas. As Block's process of basing his paintings on his digital drawing develops, the digital and painted works become nearly indistinguishable.

The narrative paintings in Parris' series, *How we make it and survive while trying, struggling for an extraordinary and peaceful life* are created with a multistep "Painting Plan"; a process of drawing, photography, digital manipulation, collage and painting. He starts with a process of writing and sketching images and ideas, which are often inspired by the news, television, printed materials and daily life experiences. Parris then compiles photographic compositions based on these exploratory sketches, and scans them into a Photoshop file, allowing him to generate different compositions from the same source file. The successful elements from the Photoshop compilations are used as reference for a second round of graphite drawing. The graphite drawings are scanned into InDesign and digitally manipulated with various techniques that allow for experimentation in scale and perspective, by layering transparent blocks of color to represent the possible placement of collage materials, adding and subtracting washes of color and rendering with digital pen and brush areas that he may want to execute in more detail. Upon completion, the scaled images are printed onto large format papers, affixed and layered onto the canvas with collage elements from found book pages, patterned wrapping paper from cut flowers, and printed materials. Using more traditional painterly techniques and materials, layers and washes of paint are applied with brushes, squeegees, palate knives and oil sticks (including the artist's bare hands). Each of these steps contributes key elements to the final painting. Parris' smooth, carefully constructed surfaces reflect his measured, multistep, painterly process.



Steve Block *CYC*

As viewers, we are encouraged to look closely at Block's and Parris' paintings and reexamine the artists' techniques, to explore their painterly processes including those of digital sketching, drawing, manipulating images and painting with various mediums. One series of work was selected from each artist to explore in depth their individual and collective uses of these mediums, and to prompt a closer look at the relationship between digital sketching and painterly mark-making. ■

— Chelsea L. Cooksey, New York, NY 2017

Chelsea L. Cooksey is an art historian whose specialty is modern and contemporary art; she received her M.A. in Modern and Contemporary Art from Purchase College and B.A. in Art History from the University of Colorado Denver. Her previous positions included Research Assistant to the Director of The Arshile Gorky Foundation working on the catalogue raisonne, assistant to the Program Coordinator of the Art Students League of New York and Assistant for Oral History interviews for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. She is currently the Registrar at Dorsky Gallery Curatorial Programs, where she has curated two exhibitions, *The Intimacy of Abstraction* and *Nearly Uniform: Contemporary Silverpoint Drawings*.