

October 2008

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Marc Van Cauwenbergh: *Loose Formations*

by Stephanie Buhmann

Kathleen Cullen Gallery September 4-October 18, 2008

For over two decades, Marc Van Cauwenbergh has explored the language of color field abstraction. He creates compositions that contrast monochromatic fields with isolated, predominantly vertical shapes by brushing layers of translucent oil paint directly onto raw linen. While Van Cauwenbergh's work might at first glance be considered an homage to the generation of Morris Louis, Helen Frankenthaler and Kenneth Noland, its point of reference clearly differs. Instead of exploring the emotive and non-objective, Van Cauwenbergh employs abstraction to capture the human figure, or more specifically, the human figure in motion.

Van Cauwenbergh has a thorough understanding of this subject matter. Born in Belgium and based in New York since 1994, he trained in dance performance while receiving his fine art education at Pratt Institute. For two years after his graduation, he simultaneously pursued both dancing and painting. He perceives the canvas, therefore, as a sort of stage on which the shapes and colors behave like performers empowered by the spotlight. In this context, each color defines a protagonist of sorts, in dialogue with each other as well as with the audience.



Marc Van Cauwenbergh, "Together Separate," 2008. Oil on linen, 80 x 60". Courtesy of the artist.

In his most recent exhibition, however, Van Cauwenbergh has begun to de-simplify the compositional structure of his paintings. Here, vivid horizontal brushstrokes dramatically interrupt the ethereal flow and overall rhythm. Many of the color banners have become more opaque and the groupings more complex. The "bodies" are often made of multiple smaller forms, which are less intertwined but arranged in stricter formations. Within these formations, the shapes appear more dissected, with stretched-out limbs and turned torsos seen from many different perspectives at once. In general, the new compositions are intentionally

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less harmonious and at times even confrontational. These are tougher times and it seems as if Van Cauwenbergh has embarked on a search for a different kind of body. It could be that his characters have matured, or perhaps they are simply helpless, clinging to one another as they tumble toward the future; what is certain is that Van Cauwenbergh has found a new pace within his established vocabulary, setting the stage for whatever might lie ahead.

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