

The Flood at the Center of Sight

Stuart Krimko

The three new monumental paintings by Argentinian artist Joaquín Boz that make up this exhibition are, despite their size and ambition, anti-heroic gestures that celebrate closeness of touch and the humble, earthbound nature of material things. Boz works with his hands and fingers, moving paint according to a subtle intuitive logic that allows him to harmonize a vast array of conflicting moods and textures. This process is the culmination of several years' worth of focused experimentation with the properties of oil as a physical—even sculptural—medium. It therefore reflects an approach to painting that isn't limited to seeing, and a take on abstraction rooted in a fully embodied stance before the real world. The aesthetic pleasures it generates are visceral phenomena that have as much to do with primal, non-art-related activities like digging in the dirt as they do with studied contemplation.

Observed from afar, Boz's compositions suggest what it might feel like if peripheral vision flooded the center of sight. Though he fills them with passages that flirt with identifiable form, he consciously endeavors to keep these from coalescing into fully recognizable images. Instead, he places his faith in the eye's ability to make sense of what it sees as it simply absorbs continuous swaths of undivided experience. His palette makes this clear. By placing clean hues and dirty ones in close proximity, and weaving his compositions together with the sophisticated use of complimentary tones, he unifies broad and varied swaths of terrain. Color theory is for Boz a nuanced proposition expressed in living, rough-hewn terms.

On closer inspection, however, each painting reveals the presence of innumerable discrete decisions and organic networks of hieroglyphic marks that record intimate, pointed conversations between the artist and his materials. Boz keeps the surface wet with continued application of medium, moving pigment within delimited areas and then coaxing these areas to interact with one another so that each gesture remains permeable to

the next. In this way he also takes advantage of the hardness of his panel supports, which prevent the oil from being absorbed too quickly and enable the painting to stay open as an ongoing system. Similarly, he prompts the viewer's gaze (and body, given the scale of these works) to stay perpetually in motion, scanning for formal connections it might have missed or inventing its own.

This results in a kind of action painting that refuses to relegate 'action' to a past instance of frenzied inspiration, or memorialize the artist as a larger-than-life figure. It also sets Boz's work apart from North American lineages of abstract expressionism whose effects are dependent upon the bravado of sheer scale. The states of immersion he conjures, rather, are introspective, and his visual language is confident enough to make room for exuberance as well as doubt, with the story told by the paint itself leading the way—a story that's epic in scope, despite the delight taken in its details. Boz thereby inhabits encyclopedic and poetic modes simultaneously, leaving behind vivid pictures of what it's like to live in world that can't decide whether it's shrinking or expanding, or where the periphery starts and the center ends.