



BEN WEINER

MARK MOORE GALLERY | *STATEMENTS*

"For Ben Weiner, his paint-splattered palette isn't just a tool, it's the basis of his work. In landscapes that magnify globs of oil paint a thousandfold, and in videos that turn the process of mixing paint–pigment, oil, varnish–into a slow ballet, he explores the line between documentation and creation."

–Nozlee Samadzadeh, *The Morning News*, November 12, 2012

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Mark Moore Gallery: *Statements* introduces a featured gallery artist through images and candid interview. From noteworthy early examples to present bodies, the works featured in *Statements* act as an overview of the varying practices and movements implemented by a given artist in tandem with their thoughts and interpretations.

By photographing paint and luxurious ephemera at close range, then using the resulting image as his subject, Ben Weiner creates works that pose a confusion of object, subject and medium. Weiner's paintings harness the idolatrous fetishistic desire of consumer culture, the fashion industry, and the art world. Thus, his paintings self-critically describe the duality of their own identity as both transcendent creation and commercial item. Likewise, all of the themes and references in the paintings reinforce their status as consumer/art objects. Roland Bathes' application of Freud's concept of "the uncanny" to landscape photography is the pertinent reference.

Weiner (b. 1980, Burlington, VT) received his BA from Wesleyan University (CT). He also studied under Mexican muralist José Lazcarro at Universidad de las Americas (Mexico) and has worked closely with artists Jeff Koons, Kim Sooja and Amy Yoes as an assistant. He has exhibited his work widely across the United States and in Mexico with solo shows in Los Angeles, New York and Puebla, and group exhibitions in Chicago, New York, Miami, New Haven, Ridgefield, Los Angeles and Riverside. His paintings can be found in the Sammlung/Collection (Germany), the Progressive Collection (OH), and the Frederick R. Weisman Foundation Collection (CA). The artist lives and works in New York City.



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Interview by: Marielos Kluck, Mark Moore Gallery

I read that from very early on you were photographing your palette. That seems to be one of critical moments that shaped your practice. What was it about that moment that catapulted you to the next stage in your art making?

When I first painted my palette as an undergrad in 2002, digital cameras and social media were beginning to catch on. I saw a connection between Clement Greenberg's concept of self referential art— that a work of art should tell the story of its own making—and the way people were telling the stories of their lives as they lived them using digital cameras and social media—self referential living. Painting my palette as mediated through digital photography was a way for me to explore Greenberg's conceptual basis for abstraction/pure painting, using the tools of my highly mediated contemporary environment. It made my own studio practice into the subject of my art.

I have continued to paint my palette since then, and it has become a form of process-painting, because the palette of one painting becomes source imagery for the next, and this spans back over the last ten years. Recently I did an entire series of paintings documenting the evolution of my palette over the course of a year. Painting's existence as object and image; as both a physical and

mediated experience, continues to be a central concern of my body of work.

Your work can be characterized as both abstract and realistic. It is also analytical and emotional, micro and macro, straightforward and multifaceted. How do you seamlessly balance these dualities in your work?

I am fascinated by painting's reflection of the dualistic separation between body and mind. The fact that people can view marks on a flat surface, and perceive illusionistic depth and symbolic meaning, reflects a basic aspect of perception. There is an ontological aspect to these dualities.

Also, there is always the opportunity to manipulate such paradigms. I love the way that Gerhard Richter manufactured a duality between realism and abstraction in his body of work. These are not necessarily opposite extremes, but he framed them as such it appealed to the way people think. When I create an image that reads as both realistic and abstract, I reflect the arbitrary nature of such classification.

What fascinates me most about your work is the many layers of processes involved including creating the very pigments you microscopically

photograph and then you laboriously paint with reference to the photographed subject/object/medium. Can you describe the process of creating one of your paintings? How does documentation play a role in these works?

I begin by viewing mass produced aesthetic materials such as paint, hair gel, body wash, through a digital magnifying glass. I mix and pour them in a painterly fashion, all the while observing from my computer monitor and saving screen shots of interesting moments. I use Photoshop to combine screen shots into rough compositions. Based on these, I project a loose sketch onto a canvas. I premix hundreds of shades of paint so that I can finish each section while the paint is still wet, in order to create the shifts in focus that give my paintings their optical quality. This process of premixing colors was what originally inspired me to photograph my palette, so my concept of documenting my palette grows out of its segmented nature.

I worked for Jeff Koons early in my career, and was fascinated by my position as a painter in his factory- as a cog in a wheel. My own process involves both mechanical and painterly aspects- I feel that I'm taking elements of that assembly line and gelling them together with the conception of the work. The fact that my work documents my own process allows me to streamline.

Knowing how much goes into each painting, I am curious, how long does it typically take to paint one?

Anywhere between two weeks and two months.

Page 2: *Peak*, 2013
oil on canvas, 55 x 65 inches

Opposite Page: *Gemini*, 2013
oil on canvas, 47 x 65 inches



Your fascination with paint and other ubiquitous materials is much deeper than a visual interest, you are also interested in these materials on the chemical and sociological level. Can you elaborate more on this?

Yes, I'm interested in mass produced aesthetic materials such as paint, hair gel and body wash. Within a consumer culture obsessed with youth and newness, these materials preserve us the way a painting preserves a likeness or a human gesture.

My practice as a painter gives me a unique perspective on mass production. I'm in the unusual position of actually making my products by hand. There is something revolutionary about this in the current environment of synthetic consumer products. My knowledge of paint chemistry gives me a window into the chemistry and production methods of many of the consumer products we use on a daily basis, because many of them contain similar ingredients and use similar production methods. After all, paint was one of Duchamp's first examples of a Ready-made.

So I am very interested in the way all of these materials reflect our corporality and ultimately, our mortality.

In the past few years, you've been pairing paintings, video installations, and sculptural objects, how is this a further extension of your practice?

This interdisciplinary approach allows me to explore the transformation of mass produced aesthetic materials as they pass from one state into another. In my 2012 series *SMUSH*, I made paintings depicting my palette, a video installation that

immersed viewers in the microscopic chemical processes through which paint is created, and sculptures made of crystals that I grew from the minerals in paint pigment. So it followed a process-based narrative that charted the production of a painting. It showed the refinement of painting materials from a natural, mineral state, through mass production, and then through the further refinement of my handcraft. I see my interdisciplinary practice as form of process art. In this exploration of materiality, I take inspiration from artists such as Yves Klein and Helio Oiticica, in the sense that they worked with painting materials in three dimensions, incorporating sculpture and performance to understand the multifaceted nature of paint.

With this new body of work, what new facets are you exploring? How would you describe the work?

In *MaximumStrengthAgeDefy*, I explore the common preservative function of paint, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals. I explore this parallel using two different lines of inquiry: through a series of large-scale oil paintings, and, alternately, a series of miniature drawings.

The paintings depict cropped, magnified views of mass-produced beauty products such as body wash, hair gel, moisturizer, and nail polish. It was my intent with this series to create sublime compositions that would function as monuments to the effort to preserve and extend our bodies, beauty and mortality using health and beauty products. These efforts are reflected in my own act of striving to achieve machine-like precision through handcraft.

I created the drawings by soaking ink-laden paper in drugs such

as 5-HOUR ENERGY, Molly, and Marijuana, which break the inks down into prismatic patterns. These chemical patterns are material representations of mind-altered experience. They reflect our efforts to extend our minds using drugs. They function as small-scaled, intimate companions to the over-sized oil paintings. They also approach my duality of realism/abstraction from the opposite end. I made the drawings on chromatography paper, which captures an impression of the inks as they chemically react with the drugs, in almost photographic fashion. So while the resulting image is abstract, it is also an objective depiction of a chemical reaction.

And lastly, what is on the horizon for you as far as your practice?

I plan to combine aspects of my paintings and drawings in my next series. I will do this by incorporating drugs and other commercial materials into my oil paint, and using materials that reference the body, such as skin glue, collagen, lavender oil, clove oil, etc. I also plan to create paintings by growing pigment crystals onto canvases. With these works, I will further explore corporality, and the painting as object. I see such material experimentation as having much potential and I think it will factor largely in the future of my work.



Above: Installation View, *Material and Illusion*
Mark Moore Gallery, CA, 2010



“Ben Weiner’s immaculately hyperrealistic canvases and films precisely capture the essence of their subject: paint itself.”

—Artsy, February, 2013

Left: *Body Party*, 2013
oil on canvas, 60 x 90 inches

Opposite Page:
C10H22O7 + C10H16 + C18H32O2, 2010
oil on canvas, 66 x 108 inches

Pages 10-11: *Mound*, 2012
oil on canvas, 42 x 80.5 inches (detail)







“For years, Weiner’s works have been composed of rich and organic formal qualities, often capturing light through manmade chemicals—effectively making the unnatural natural through seemingly abstracted compositions that fluctuate between different modes of experience.”

—Evan J. Garza, *New American Paintings*,
July 6, 2010

Right: *Emotion*, 2012
hand-grown carmine lake pigment crystals
10 x 10 x 10 inches (side-view)

Opposite Page: *Mound*, 2012
oil on canvas, 42 x 80.5 inches

Page 14: *Like Frozen Food My Love Will Last Forever*, 2013
oil on canvas, 60 x 90 inches

Page 15: *Future Fluids*, 2013
oil on canvas, 55 x 65 inches





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“Fusing two seemingly opposing practices—photorealism and abstraction—Weiner paints exquisitely detailed close-ups of consumer substances, including a 2011 series of radically magnified images of thickly impastoed paint.”

—Artsy, 2013

Right: *Shrine*, 2012
oil on canvas, 52 x 78 inches

Opposite Page: *Shrine*, 2012
oil on canvas, 52 x 78 inches (detail)

Pages 15-16: *Body Party*, 2013
oil on canvas, 60 x 90 inches (detail)





Left: *Emotion*, 2012
hand-grown carmine lake pigment crystals
10 x 10 x 15 inches

Above: *Lust to Dust*, 2012
hand-grown carmine lake pigment crystals
10 x 10 x 10 inches

Opposite Page: Installation view, *SMUSH*
Benrimon Contemporary, NY, 2012





Above: Installation view, *SMUSH*
Benrimon Contemporary, NY, 2012

Right: *Hole*, 2012
oil on canvas, 65 x 52 inches

Opposite Page:
C10H2207 + C10H16 + C18H3202, 2011
oil on canvas, 30 x 41 inches



BIO

BEN WEINER

Born 1980, Burlington, VT
Lives and works in New York City

Education

2003 BA, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2014 *MaximumStrengthAgeDefy*, Mark Moore Gallery, Culver City, LA
2012 *SMUSH*, Benrimon Contemporary, New York, NY
2011 *Ben Weiner: Paintings and Video*, The Tarble Arts Center, Charleston, IL
2010 *Material and Illusion*, Mark Moore Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
2007 *Glamtrance*, Mark Moore Gallery, Santa Monica, CA

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2014 *Pop Culture*, Boca Museum of Art, Boca Raton, FL. Curated by Billie Milam Weisman
2013 *The Alumni Show II*, Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery at Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. Curated by John Ravenal
Scientific Visions, Ochi Gallery, Ketchum, ID
2012 *Opening*, Haven Video Room, Miami, FL
2011 *Ben Weiner: Na + (aq) + C5H8NO - (aq) NaC5H8NO4(s)*, New Media Room, Bruno David Gallery, St Louis, MO
Red Force Fields, David Richard Gallery, Santa Fe, NM, curated by Marcia Lyons
OPEN, Mark Moore Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
2010 *Under the Influence of Fashion and Finance*, The Frederick R. Weisman Museum, Malibu, CA

- 2009 *Un-titled (Abstraction)*, David Richard Gallery, Santa Fe, NM
Elements of Nature, Carnegie Art Museum, Oxnard, CA
Project Space, Winkleman Gallery, New York, NY
Full Circle: Ten Years of Radius, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT. Curated by Regine Basha
2008 *Pretty Things: Confronting Sensuousness*, Artspace, New Haven, CT
Painting's Edge, Riverside Art Museum, Riverside, CA
2007 *La Historia de Llorar por El*, La Gruta, Mexico City, Mexico
2006 *Pod Art II*, video collaboration with Liz Magic Laser, Fine Art in Space/31 Grand, New York, NY
Ultrasonic International, Mark Moore Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Eastern Boys and Western Girls, two-person exhibition with David Shapiro, Kathleen Cullen, New York, NY
2005 *All That Glitters*, Kathleen Cullen, New York
RADIUS, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, curated by Jessica Hough Ridgefield, CT

Collections

Frederick R. Weisman, CA
Microsoft, WA
Progressive Insurance, OH
Sammlung/Collection Mondstudio, Assembled by Adrian Koerfer, Germany



Left:

Excesstraction, 2013
oil on canvas
60 x 90 inches (detail)

Front cover:

Excesstraction, 2013
oil on canvas
60 x 90 inches

Back cover:

Her Fantasy, 2014
oil on canvas
60 x 90 inches

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