

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS
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John Zurier, *Urður*, 2019, oil on linen, 84 × 58".
Courtesy the artist and Peter Blum Gallery, New York

NEW YORK

John Zurier

PETER BLUM GALLERY

176 Grand Street 2nd Floor

September 27–November 9, 2019

The thirteen paintings in John Zurier's solo exhibition—obliquely derived from the atmospheric conditions of Berkley, California, and Reykjavík, Iceland—affirm the artist as a deft painter of weather and light. For over two decades, Zurier's gestural works have made the most of his preferred medium's essential ingredients: color and surface. His intimately scaled canvases usually express an affinity for a pared-down palette of warm and cool grays. Yet this presentation offers a few lively exceptions.

Three commanding pieces from the series "North from Here" (all works 2019) hang together on the gallery's eastern wall. Each sports a variegated field of luxurious ultramarine against an airy white ground flanked by perpendicular bands. Despite their tenuous relationship to landscapes (especially given their verticality), one cannot help but read the white patches along each painting's upper edge as clouds gently drifting past an open window.

The most striking of the large canvases is *Urður*—its exquisite field of pale blue is almost completely obfuscated by an application of acidic green. Upon close inspection, the viewer can notice how the thin marks skate across the linen—recording every nuanced inflection of the artist's hand—until halting just before meeting the work's left and right edges where the slivers of azure have been carefully preserved. One finds oneself repeatedly pulled back into the painting's shallow space each time one's eyes wander toward its perimeter. *Urður*, along with its pink cousin *The Wind*, connote a sense of ethereal joyousness, distinguishing them from smaller canvases such as *Keisetsu no Kou* (Firefly and Snow, Success) and *Mure* (14 years ago), which embody a foreboding tone. Most of the works don't deviate from Zurier's signature program; yet the show underscores his ability to distill the essence of visual experience into images that achieve a rare synthesis of thought and feeling.

— Andy Martinelli Clark