

Mary Heilmann and David Reed Join Forces at the Hamburger Bahnhof

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David Reed's "#636," 2010-2013.

(Reed Studio, Courtesy Galerie Anke Schmidt, Köln, photo by Christopher Burke)

Surprisingly, “Two by Two,” at the Hamburger Bahnhof through October 11, is the first exhibition to pair Mary Heilmann and David Reed. Both artists have been important to an idea of New York painting since the 1970s — one that operates between figuration and abstraction and is influenced by the artists’ California roots, as evidenced by each one’s use of expressive color, relationship to craft, and interest in finish and surface. The exhibition operates by matching their paintings — 19 pairings in total, alongside some additional works—made over the course of their respective four-decade careers.

In most cases, the couplings reveal themselves to be affinities — matches made by the curator based on similar color palettes or coincidental forms rather than a true conversation between artists. For instance, Heilmann’s *Lifeline*, 1994, is tied with Reed’s *#93*, 1976. Both paintings employ a black-and-white palette, though in Heilmann’s contribution black subdivides two overlaid canvases in an

austere diagonal, while Reed presents six black goopy drags of paint vertically down a canvas, in an early version of the artist's signature brush marks.

Works are placed in such close proximity to almost merge into a new multi-canvas collaborative construction, an unintentional exquisite corpse that yields unexpected results. Such is the case with Heilmann's *Matisse*, 1989—in which a spotlight of white diagonally illuminates a grid of two overlaid canvases — alongside Reed's *#637*, 2003–13, in which metallic fuchsia brushstrokes roll onto themselves behind a cloud painted in a spectrum of blue. The pairing reveals a series of formally compelling comparisons: rounded and squared shapes, alternate uses of negative and positive space, if the request for historical context is suspended. In another very successful duo, Heilmann's *Roadtrip*, 2010, is juxtaposed with Reed's *#113*, 1976/2005–06. The first is a shaped canvas; washes of black draw one's eyes to the work's surface while two white lines suggest perspectival space. The latter is a long expanse of canvas in which a central red panel is bracketed by two white bookends marked with a black brushstroke. Like Heilmann, Reed evokes the feeling of driving down a road, though his approach engages peripheral vision in an abstraction of a horizon line.

The exhibition also makes space for comparison across media, including Heilmann's furniture: a set of brightly colored beach chairs that activate the colors in the paintings and ceramics of *Good Vibrations*, *Remembering David*, 2012, nearby. In *Scottie's Bedroom*, 1994, one of Reed's paintings becomes decoration in an installation that imagines the bedroom of Jimmie Stewart's character from Hitchcock's *Vertigo* played on a monitor. Heilmann's sound piece *A Vertigo Moment*, 2015, excerpts a passage from the same film's soundtrack.

The work presented by both artists is excellent; however, the curatorial premise is weak, defaulting to ahistorical, decontextualized affinities. Where the exhibition fails as a historical survey of two artists conversant in their parallel trajectory, it succeeds as a meditation on a set of ideas related to painting and place and a playful collaboration that revels in form and color.