

UNTITLED

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PHIL WAGNER

Gracias

January 16 – February 20, 2011

UNTITLED is responsible for presenting the first solo exhibition in New York of Los Angeles-based painter Phil Wagner.

Wagner's most recent work deepens his exploration in assemblage, a peculiar kind of composition of found objects which in his hands luminously reflects his many years of commitment to the practice of painting. Following a long tradition of artists who source their materials from depleted furniture and debris cast off for the trash collector on the street, he repositions these elements along multiple axes and joins the various fragments with a light touch to form a three-dimensional, highly formal experience inevitably redolent with rich allusions to painting.

Duchamp, Rauschenberg, Beuys and Gober are all artists repeatedly referred to in conversation with the artist in his recent work. Considering that the career trajectory of Phil Wagner thus far has taken him from the tradition of painting towards assemblage, his current work appears to be in a productive tension with his past. It is as if he is driving the vehicle of his art practice in reverse. In so doing, he could passively wait for the tide of history to shift, but instead he chooses to scavenge history much like he scavenges the street for the things that satisfy his intuition.

More than simply worn to patina and reduced to shards and fragments, his materials have been degraded through the wringer of consumer culture. Society has become his brush in motion as consumed consumer objects are replacing paint and history is becoming his canvas. Society has become the brush loaded with the products of our advanced industrial revolution, spent on the surface of the 21st century. If in painting the force of entropy is measured from the mix of colors once pure then blended towards mud, then in assemblage, in this incarnation, there might be a kind of reverse entropy that moves from rescued detritus to a refined formalism of balance and visual wholeness that suggests perfection.

Phil Wagner was born East Moline, IL in 1974 and he lives and works in Los Angeles. He has received an MFA from the San Francisco Art Institute (1998). Selected exhibitions include The Moon over Miami, UNTITLED at Art Positions, Art Basel Miami Beach (2010); Henry Taylor I Phil Wagner, Rental Gallery, NY (2010); Phil Wagner, Black Dragon Society, Los Angeles (solo, 2007); Fantastic LA - University Galleries at Illinois State University, Normal (2009); Pruesspress - Ritter/Zamet, London, England (2009); PRUESSPRESS, Rental Gallery, NY (2008); Atomations - Black Dragon Society, Los Angeles (2007); Oliver Twist, Rental Gallery, NY (2007).