

# UNTITLED

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## BRENDAN FOWLER

*Brendan Fowler with Joel Mesler and Carol Cohen (Spring 2011)*

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James Rains: It has been observed that your work is either so incredibly specific as to the point of leaving nothing left for the audience to determine, employing text works as though you are hoping to describe exactly how the work should be read — and we will get back to this strategy, if it is a strategy— or very open, such as is the case with your initial use of flowers as you described them as something like exhausted place holders for form.

Brendan Fowler: I would like to think of this work as having many points of entry, many "openings," to which end I think the exhaustion of over information can be a very useful thing coming on the heels of what may be a separate useful thing, which would be the text itself which may have proven exhaustive. I find that between bad and worse, I'll always take too much information over not enough. Like everyone, I am curious about this great openness that art can afford, but I don't want anyone to ever say I was withholding.

JR: This exhibition features no text, is that a first for you? Is that you looking towards this "great openness" that you mentioned?

BF: There is some text, but there is no interview piece or very demanding body of text as a print anywhere in the show this time. But the images are quite specific.

JR: Are you reaching towards a narrative within the multiple frame works?

BF: I still see the crashing pieces as frozen in time, a still of the collision when all of the players are improvising, playing free and then hit on the same note, [*hits hands together*] Boom! And I still see the walls as dealing with construction and space. But what happened was that my work until a few years ago was super narrative, almost all narrative, then I tried to suppress the narrative to assert the formal dialog that I saw developing, and now I feel like I'm to a third point, somewhere beside the two other places where I'm interested in the narrative possibilities afforded by these more formalized compositional strategies.

JR: How would you like for your audience to read these moments where it would appear less clear, or even that you have aspired to strip out all content?

BF: Maybe that could be described as the point of entry taking over the building. The door opened and the house fell through it, there's just an empty lot, now. What do you do with the lot? It's up to you, all that potential in the lot — insert joke about crass developers — but, in this work I feel like the content is back, hanging out with the form, hopefully they're on speaking terms again.

JR: And what about a press release as a place to overdetermine the read of a show?

BF: Exactly! Yes, completely.

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JR: I didn't mean it like that.

BF: You mean that you meant it as a place for a possible problem, a pitfall.

JR: Yes, as in the press release is *intended* as simply that, an announcement to the press that an exhibition is to occur?

BF: But I think that at this point that term has become more of an — what is the word for a word that has lost its meaning?

JR: An archaism.

BF: No, but you wouldn't say "press release" to sound old time-y.

JR: No, you wouldn't. I'm not sure if there is a word for that.

BF: That's crazy, though, right? There has to be, we need to look that up.

JR: We can add that in later.

BF: That would be great. Well, anyways, "press release" is a term that has definitely strayed from its initial meaning, right? At least in an art context. The press release can be just that which the term would have implied and which you described, or it can become what would amount to an incredibly verbose and un-critical essay, or anything in-between or beside, such as the first person anecdote, a parable, movie quote, a poem. At this point, maybe the worst thing about a press release is that there is no real way you could subvert it if you tried, right? Well, I guess that some sort of structural arrangement could be achieved, but I put all of my time into the objects this time around, and we've got you to do this interview.

JR: Well, what about the announcement cards for this show that you have placed within the work which also function as announcements for another show at a separate gallery?

BF: I did spend a while on them, but I always spend longer than I plan to on those little cards, and these wind up in the work at least, so there you go.

JR: They appear in some of the photographs, as well, right?

BF: They do, they appear stuck into some of the actual physical frames and are depicted, as well, as they were stuck in the mirror in the mirror photographs, the photographs of the mirror. The mirror photographs are meant to function literally as mirrors, as well as demonstrations of how a very dark image is in fact much more reflective than a very light image under a high gloss surface, which I understand intellectually and in practice, but still find counter-intuitive in terms of depictions of mirrors in catalogs and illustrations, which are often depicted as having light grey/silver surfaces. As well, those photographs are demonstrations of a potentially intimate, though very common, card

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placement, which is how one would place a card, a photograph, a note in the frame of a mirror in their home. I have been thinking of placing photographs or cards in the corners of the frames for a while, but I wanted to somehow encourage that read.

JR: And you mentioned earlier that there is a problem with them.

BF: There is. You know, there are so many details swirling, so many frames, backs of frames, wood screws, cups of stain, ink cartridges, rolls of paper and film and computer files and *text*, and it's like you're paying such close attention to every one of those details, and it turns out that the one item that you look at the most has the biggest mistake in it which you don't catch until it has been xeroxed, silkscreened purple on the back, cut down, re-photographed in a piece, re-re-photographed because the first shoot was a bust, placed into work as a sculpture *and* handed out to every person you run into. There is a typo on the card which I noticed halfway into hanging the show this week, which is that it says "*Brendan Fowler with Joel Mesler and Carol Cohen*" sans the "*(Spring 2011)*." The time specifier there is just as important as the names, which was in and of itself a long point of discussion in advance of the show, somewhat of an issue, and so the whole matter of this card kind of failing its job, which is to share this show title, is kind of like, well, there you go.

JR: I want to ask about the show's title, *Brendan Fowler with Joel Mesler and Carol Cohen (Spring 2011)*, how did this title come to be?

BF: I am obviously interested in demonstrating process, and my exhibitions are always, at least in part, about drawing attention to the actual exhibition staging itself.

JR: The show is about staging a show.

BF: Yes. So, as a tool, I often choose to clearly address the show's location in space and time through the title. Calling my show at UNTITLED "*Brendan Fowler with Joel Mesler and Carol Cohen (Spring 2011)*", is intended to do that, but also to lovingly pull down a wall that Joel and Carol have tried to assign the gallery, via their naming it UNTITLED. I appreciate their gesture, it is a modest and generous and, above all, sincere gesture, but by removing the mask of UNTITLED — admittedly, at the risk of some discomfort on the behalf of both Joel and Carol — I am seeking to address the love and dedication that I feel towards our relationship itself. In truth, I can say that as a part of this family — which includes all the other artists and crew, as well, of course — I would have followed them anywhere, and so the fact that we have wound up at a place called UNTITLED is beside the point to me. Every day as I work in my studio, when I think about staging this exhibition, imagining the finished work in the new gallery, I am so so proud to be showing it *with* Joel Mesler and Carol Cohen. I wanted the title of my show to reflect that as directly as possible.

JR: But what about the space? You have made no acknowledgment of the space itself, which, for you seems strange.

BF: That's what the show is.

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JR: I mean in the title:

BF: You know, I was leaving that for next time, hoping that this is just the first show I will stage in this space. I feel a tremendous amount of reverence for Andrew Ong, as well. He is the architect who designed the gallery — the space. There is a good chance that my next show will be called *Thank You Andrew Ong (Season and Year Pending)*.