

upcoming exhibitions

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Beatriz Milhazes
Periquita, 2004
Acrylic on canvas
97.6 x 66.5 in
(247.9 x 168.9 cm)
Heather and Tony Podesta
Collection, Falls Church, Virginia

POPULENCE June 25-August 27, 2005

POPulence brings together works by nineteen internationally known contemporary artists to trace some of the ways populism and opulence have come together in recent abstract painting. Coined by music video producer Sharon Oreck, the term "populence" originally referred to the confluence of accessibility and luxury. For example, high-end designs by such avant-garde designers as Philippe Stark have made their way onto the shelves of discount stores like Target in products no more expensive than the usual run-of-the-mill stock and badly designed items. In the eyes of guest curator David Pagel, who is an assistant professor of art theory and history at Claremont Graduate University and an art critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, "populence" also aptly includes the legacy of Pop Art and goes a long way to accounting for recent exciting developments in painting today.

In the early 1960s, Pop rose to prominence as an intentionally vulgar send-up of high art's solemnity. Its leading artists offered a barbed, unusually funny critique of fine art's refinements using the tools of commercial culture, which included such lowbrow enthusiasms as comic strips, advertisements, and cheap, mass-produced consumables. Since then, Pop has grown up. Its youthful irreverence and cheeky attitude have evolved. Over the last forty years, this has led to stylistic refinements and conceptual complexities that have transformed it into an art form as sophisticated as any other - and certainly more adaptive and long-lasting than the Abstract Expressionism it initially mimicked.

Today, Pop is the lingua franca of both the art world and the real one. The artists who speak its language most fluently are in the best position to say something compelling about the world in which we live. Yet despite Pop's maturity, it still does not receive the same seriousness that critics and commentators regularly bring to other styles and media. Trapped in the past, the critical response to Pop has not kept pace with the movement's far-reaching developments. Instead critics cast Pop as a second-class pest or benign amusement that has little impact on art's more august - that is, academic - forms.



Fred Tomaselli
Brain with Flowers, 1997
Mixed media on wood panel
24 x 24 in
(61 x 61 cm)
Collection of the artist

POPulence turns this conventional outlook on its ear. In the works it displays, the sophistication and nuance ordinarily associated with good taste intermingle promiscuously with the characteristics of bad taste: garishness, superficiality, and spectacular excess. Contemporary Pop embraces such typically uptown attributes as eloquence, subtlety, and refinement - but it always filters them through a streetwise vocabulary. This results in charged images that are dissonant and celebratory, vulgar and elegant, raw and refined, and most importantly, generously loaded with significance yet suspicious of privileges that are not hard won, intimate, and tested against one's own experience.

POPulence includes works by Chiho Aoshima, Polly Apfelbaum, Philip Argent, L.C. Armstrong, Tony Berlant, Sharon Ellis, Gajin Fujita, Christian Garnett, Rachel Hecker, Mary Heilmann, Jeff Koons, Beatriz Milhazes, Takashi Murakami, Jorge Pardo, Lari Pittman, Marcelo Pombo, David Reed, **Kim Squaglia**, and Fred Tomaselli.

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