

# HYPERALLERGIC

## Four Paintings in a White Box



*Installation view of works by Eric Sall and Britta Deardorff (all images via reginarex.org)*

Last weekend I visited [Regina Rex](http://reginarex.org) in Ridgewood, Queens, and it felt like a relief to be able to spend time in a gallery that also inhabits a studio building, which means being surrounded by artists rather than dealers. Regina Rex is a collective of sorts, run by 13 artists. Their exhibitions often

feel to me as if a sort of note from those on the ground, a field worker's journal into the state of things. I can respect that. While I might not love all of the things I have seen at this venue I have come to expect a certain level of integrity and tenacity lacking so often in other parts of town.

The latest exhibition *Four Paintings* is a careful juxtaposition of local talent. Four case studies of what it means to be a painter in Bushwick today. Let me be straight with you, I hate art writing that attempts to bend and coral artists unto convenient trends. It is not my attempt to do so by any means. It only occurs to me that these four local artists were chosen because they share something in common. In their work we see an exuberance and willingness to go for it. In a city full of art and its accompanying history — piled high and inconvenient like the clothing in my grandmothers closet — it is easy to ignore or be crushed by the weight of what has come before. It is refreshing then to see artists, both young and old who go for the gusto. To make art is to open oneself up to the ability to make mistakes; the four painters on display remind us that it is ok to make things with abandon.



*Installation View of works by Juan Gomez and Jackie Gendel*

Britta Deardorff's heavily textured pictures are like straw and clay wall reliefs. They conjure an image of what might happen were an 1980s graffiti writer to be stranded in the middle of Appalachia for 30 years submerged in a kind of folk reverie. They are immediately confusing, and frankly, a bit hard to look at. The more I did, however, the harder I found it to stop. Each layer of her painting is full of precision and color. They are the kind of paintings that pack a punch but require hard work to understand and appreciate. This is the sort of effort that often yields the most reward. Behind the swarming patterns and bright

colors, the heaped warfare of composition, there is a type of overwhelming unity, a happiness won only through surrender to chaos. I am reminded that being misbehaved is often a pleasant relief.



*Juan Gomez, Canta al Satin, 2012, oil on canvas, 122 x 84 inches*

Juan Gomez's massive canvas felt, to me, immediately kind of tacky. This is a smoothly painted, delicately colored painting perhaps too suave and self-assured to be anything but a little suspicious. Oozing and sexy there was something overly decorative. There is something

aggressive, perhaps important about the leave the artist has given himself. Having briefly looked at a collection of the artists work I had to remind myself that being indulgent can be healthy. In an all too serious world sometimes there is nothing more nourishing than sleeping in till noon and eating a plate of creamed spinach for brunch. Behind the flourish and gloss there are real moments of logic that promise to unfold. In this picture there seems to be a celebration of success and failure and an allusion that something important might happen. Like driving an unfinished time machine — not all of the connections have been made — but there is a hint of ambition and greatness.



*Jackie Gendel, "tbt" (2012), oil on canvas, 80 x 70 in*

Opposite Gomez's work, Eric Sall's painting is a raucous mishmash of geometry and smeared color that immediately throws the viewer off balance. His exuberance seems to push right past what might be considered acceptable into something beyond. His brushstrokes, color smears and black painted geometries



jostle one another in and out of the picture plane. The off kilter thrum of their trajectory is enough to make you feel uneasy.

Jacki Gendel's painting is the final in this quartet of works. The canvas lends a more literal figurative tune to the chorus of irreverent loose painting on display. Her work learns as much from psychedelic colors as it does from a kind of gaudy, boozy Matisse.

The vibe radiating from these walls is one of unfinished business. Ideas are captured in paint as they develop. Nothing is hidden. While the reality of this may be untidy it is certainly anything but boring. The whole experience brings to mind Sharon Butler's June 2011 article "[The New Casualists](#)" in *The Brooklyn Rail*. Championing young Brooklyn artists like the venerable Amy Feldman and the wonky but brilliant Patrick Brennan, Butler explored the path these young artists have forged through the sometimes paralyzing history of their craft. I think rather than this "provisionalism" it is unified refusal of restraint that seems to emanate from the walls of this studio building. I have recently come to terms with the fact that the picture we have of most artists is at least partially manufactured, the result of layer upon layer of selection and editing. I think it is the challenge to resist this glossy veneer and packaging and look past the finish toward the

creative process with all of the odd, awkward bits still attached — it's this roughness that makes painting still worthwhile.

Four Paintings *continues* at [Regina Rex](#) (1717 Troutman Street, Suite 329, Ridgewood, Queens) until June 20.

Tagged as: [Britta Deardorff](#), [Eric Sall](#), [Jackie Gendel](#), [Juan Gomez](#), [Regina Rex](#)