

notes on looking

Contemporary Art from Los Angeles

Gregory Edwards, Caitlin Lonegan, William J. O'Brien and Mariah Robertson at Acme

I suppose I noticed first Mariah Robertson's photos, I had never thought of a bald eagle as carrion fowl but here was one tearing at the flesh of a dead creature on the ground. This is in a circle at the top of the photo print, and it is bleached a blue-white. The man I see next is nude, his arms are raised, curving up from his shoulders, one of them anyway, the other disappears into (again) light. Shadows cover his dick and balls – this is frustrating, but nicely so: the artist wants me to want more, and I do. The photo is framed in brown wood, and the print seems jammed in and slightly bowed under pressure.

As I walked toward this piece, out of the corner of my eye I spied a glitter covered object on the wall. (William J. O'Brien – Untitled, 2010 mixed media, 20 1/2 x 19 1/4 x 7 1/2") I think this is made with slats like you would use to plaster a wall, these are painted pink underneath – a good solid Schiaparelli pink. Strings bind the planks together and parti-hued glitter covers the whole. It is pretty and dirty. The sculpture feels full of life, but not in a joie de vivre way, rather in the way a swamp is full of life: fecund, as though it rots, and bacteria divide and multiply in its space. (*I give myself to fantasy sometimes, it helps me recall what I am seeing.*)

Gregory Edwards' "Interior Blind 3" grabs my attention next. (*In fact I tell a lie. After looking at "102" by Robertson, I walked into the farthest room, surveying the show and landing at Caitlin Lonegan's two untitled paintings in the small room. More about these later.*) The painting and its style seem familiar, but upon closer examination become strange. The tripartate form of a Venetian blind is used, a bit off center, and this is a thing that

I recognize. The colors are simple primary and secondary hues, another comfort zone, and yet the combination, simple as it is, puzzles me. I keep looking, and am happy to do so. But why? What I see is not a doppelgänger, it is not a metaphor nor is it uncanny, really. This is a painting of a real thing, and it is kind of cheerful, *gemütlichkeit*. In the next room two oval paintings by Edwards are real things that are painted, vinyl siding spray painted abstractly. The tension among these objects is nice and weird. Good cheer is not a typical art sensation. I'm unsettled. This is nice.

Caitlin Lonigan, *Untitled*, (in the small room immediately on your left) makes me feel as though some redaction is going on. I use the term for blacking out text purposefully, because in several of Lonigan's paintings I discern letter forms, or I want to find them. (See for example, the *Untitled* painting in the middle room, and even the painting in the small room flanking to your right.) I don't recall that Lonigan uses black for these redactions. I remember colors.

Metallic silver paint blinds me at eye level in this painting, and there is a gold reflective square just below and to the right. This I only notice when I crouch, and the clay toned green touching this square's side becomes turquoise, when I look up from near the floor. The green itself is reflective, and is made with two colors painted in layers, gold upon blue.

And so my eye travels down the left side of the painting. I find an area of deepest periwinkle, then I see a brush of black, and a grey vertical band that is parenthesized by a sort of Bondi blue boomerang. Finally near the bottom there is a bruise, mauve like an old bruise that remains on the surface of one's skin after the pain fades. On the right, it looks like Lonigan has painted in a fold, a watery stain of orange suggest this crease to me.

The three areas of redaction want to dominate the events on this canvas, but they don't. Instead seductive drips and washes in grey-blue, pink, lilac, and pale lavender – along with gold – distract my eye. There is a vermilion area near the gold square

that occupies my attention for some moments before I move along.

When I step back and again survey Lonegan's paintings, as a group they seem confident without being overly sure of themselves. The compositions are open, and they lead my mind outward into space; part of Lonegan's success for me is that her loose way with forms and shapes and colors feels taut with ambition and ideas. I find quiet strange lines made with crayon, a dark blue right-angled squiggle that turns thick and black when it passes through an aqua polygon. Finally, in the front gallery I notice impressions in the paint, maybe from bubble wrap or stiff paper. I feel momentary triumph and then wonder why. Good lord, what I see are simply marks on canvas – but it seems so important.

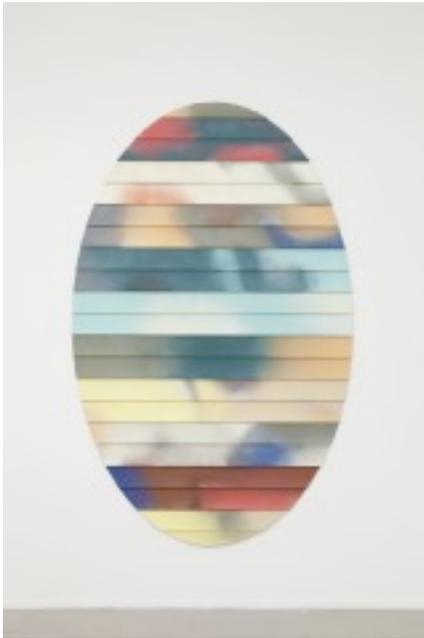
Mariah Robertson's "92" is waiting for me with bright Klieg lights, or headlights on a rain wet highway, and a Greek key design is splattered in two vaguely parallel bands; this device marks a rectangle and it emphasizes the strangely shaped photo print.

Muddy, fuzzy chemical reaction looking stuff is all over the place. I hunt for the nude I have come to want, but no – in a further toying with my desires, in "92" the artist withholds the whole of the man and not only his parts. To stoke my tension, Robertson's composition speaks of speed and action, but this object is still, it does not move, it is a photograph and it is pressed into its frame – like a torn away piece of a fervent desire that I place too hurriedly into a box.

Mariah Robertson's coy and knowing use of desire (mine and hers) in this work at Acme feels pre-postmodern and saucy – she's probably fun at a party and I smile and give myself up to her prick-tease act. In the space of her work we are equals, we seem able to laugh at ourselves and at each other; and her insouciant use and misuse of professional photography – make that Photography – is equally charming and intelligent. In a quote from one of the statements that I read Robertson says something

like, “I wish people would just laugh and quit trying to find so much meaning in what I do!”

Caitlin Lonegan organized “Someone Puts a Pineapple Together,” and it closes on Saturday, February 4 at Acme. <http://www.acmelosangeles.com/>



Gregory Edwards, Exterior View 1,
Spray paint on vinyl siding, 82 1/2 x
51 1/2"



Gregory Edwards, Interior Blinds 3,
2011 Oil on canvas, 60 x 48"



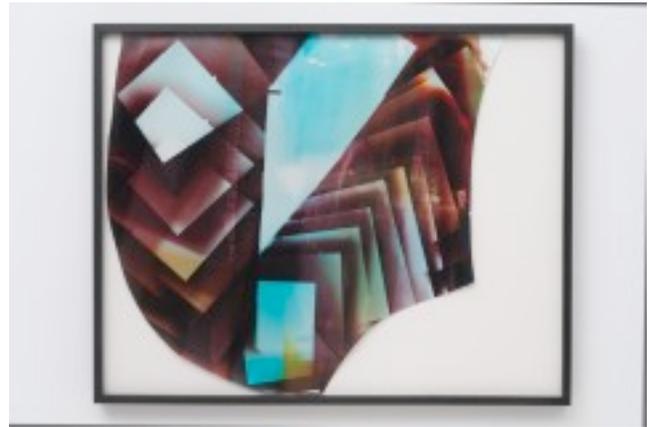
Mariah Robertson, 92, 2011 Unique C-
print on metallic paper 30 x 44" framed



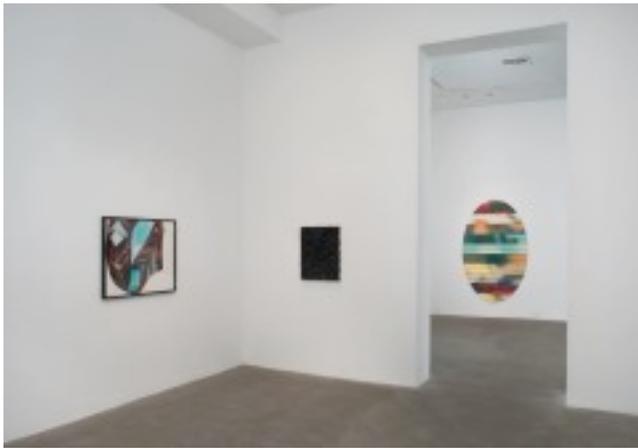
Caitlin Lonegan Untitled, 2011 Oil on
Canvas 72 x 96"



Caitlin Lonegan Untitled, 2011 Oil on canvas with crayon 78 x 72"



Mariah Robertson, 95, 2011 Unique C-print on metallic paper, 29 1/2 x 37"



"Someone Puts a Pineapple Together" installation view



"Someone Puts a Pineapple Together" installation view



William J. O'Brien, Untitled 2010
Mixed media 20 1/2 x 19 1/4 x 7 1/2



William J. O'Brien, Untitled, 2011
String, fabric, wood, paint, mixed
media 32 x 35 x 8"

Published on [February 3, 2012](#) by [Geoff Tuck](#) in [Reviews](#).