



Noa Charuvi, *Untitled*,
2008, oil on canvas, 12" x 15"

NotAbstract 1

**DAMIEN CABANES,
NOA CHARUVI, TED GAHL,
ANGELINA GUALDONI, STEFAN SEHLER**

November 6 – December 20, 2009

NotAbstract 1 is an international painting exhibition bringing together five artists of different ages and backgrounds. That they find themselves exhibiting together comes from common ground in their respective ways of conjugating the roles of representation and its abstract potentiality. Each of the artists is seriously immersed in the apparently evergreen exploration of paint's ability to simultaneously speak for itself, while also referencing something figurative. Here, the five painters (from the US, Europe and Israel) are all negotiating a particular territory between abstraction and figuration where the paint itself relies on a representational image to exist, and vice versa, but where both somehow remain independent of each other in a kind of on-the-edge, mutually parasitic symbiosis.

This intense ongoing conversation between the abstract and the figurative retains and reiterates a particular pertinence when it is farthest from any concern with abstracting the representational, but instead concentrates on heightening our experience of the world by grafting the substance of paint onto a figurative/representational subject or motif. Somehow the paint, in all its nuances and capriciousness relies on the subject to exist, while remaining an abstract, material, physical, independent entity. Conversely, the subject relies on the paint to exist in the painting but somehow does so independently too.

The European painters, Damien Cabanes from Paris and Stefan Sehler from Berlin represent the "older" generation here, and the breadth of their respective experience is of particular interest. **Damien Cabanes'** recent figure paintings on paper use the blank ground as a field onto which the figure, (emerging from a mantle of quite gestural paint) is placed. While this might presuppose that these figures would float on their ground, they actually have considerable weight. Cabanes' ability to make the vertical support and ground morph effortlessly into a horizontal painting plane might have something to do with the deep ongoing relationship he has maintained with abstraction, at various times undertaking experiments with vertical piles of colored canvases, or sculptures that are twists of abstract colored matter, resembling those a child might make with modeling clay, sometimes exploded to monumental proportions. In his recent paintings, the fact that he is able to suspend his figures between physical and imagined vertical and horizontal planes injects them with a strange temporality, detached from our own- perhaps because of the empty field that separates us. This device accentuates the resonance of the figure's presence and identity and gives real weight to the artist's statement that in painting these figures: "I'm expressing my own feelings, not those of the model".



Left: Damien Cabanes, detail of *Samuel reclining, Laura sitting*, 2004, gouache on paper, 60" x 73"
 Right: Stefan Sehler, detail of *Untitled*, 2006, oil, enamel and acrylic behind Plexiglas, 73" x 73"

A somewhat giddy sensation provoked by our perception of conflicting picture planes is also at work in the paintings of **Stefan Sehler**: The works draw us into a seemingly endless space; as we catch glimpses of the distant empty sky, we find ourselves immersed ever deeper in the claustrophobic tangle of an overgrown forest, Donald Kuspit, (Artforum, January 2008). Followers of Parker's Box will be familiar with Sehler's work in which his reverse painting technique on Plexiglas has been painstakingly evolved over many years. An integral part of this has been the development of his relationship to abstraction, since his work involves meticulously drawn contours of natural forms (vegetation) that become a boundary within which chaos and abstraction reign. This tension between representation and abstraction may reveal itself gradually to the spectator as at first sight these works may seem photographic. The Plexiglas flattens the image completely so that the materiality of the paint is both negated and accentuated by its very inaccessibility.

Different kinds of subtle tension are at work in the paintings of **Noa Charuvi** a young Israeli artist from Jerusalem. In order to better explore the potential of the physical matter and ordered chaos of her paint-marks and colors, she has chosen to fuse them with the rubble and debris of partially demolished buildings. The artist negotiates an incredibly taut relationship between the representational motif and the formal demands of her paintings. This is accentuated by the uncanny sensation that there is a kind of process of transferal in these works in which the painting experiences its own construction from the architectural fragments it depicts, as if at some point the deconstruction/demolition of the building and the construction of the painting meet halfway. This is as clear an example as any of the symbiosis mentioned earlier, of paint needing the motif and vice versa while simultaneously exerting their freedom from each other. In the case of Charuvi there is another force at play here too, further confirming and reinforcing this equation. As the artist focuses all of her powers on channeling this transferal in visual and physical terms, a potent fact seeps unannounced into the skin of these paintings: the damaged structures she depicts are actually the half-destroyed buildings of Palestine, even if at times they resemble views of the Brooklyn that Charuvi has now adopted as her home.



Left: Noa Charuvi, *Untitled*, 2008, oil on canvas, 30" x 38"
 Right: Angelina Gualdoni, *As We Sleep*, 2009, oil and acrylic on canvas, 18" x 20"

The potency of paint comes from the fact that from the very moment that it is applied to a surface, our eye begins to "read" it and seeks to identify what it may be trying to say, show, or depict. **Angelina Gualdoni**, another Brooklyn painter (who grew up in St. Louis, Missouri), uses this to striking effect by fully exploiting the ambiguity of a painted surface in a suggested space-

a painted surface that may, or may not simultaneously be depicting a painted surface in the painting. Our perception of the atmospheric strangeness of these places imagined and/or represented by Gualdoni comes precisely from her mastery of the subtle nuances that suspend the spectator inside the environment she has created. Here, the presence of the paint floats between the representation of concrete, often architectural objects, forms and spaces, and the simultaneously formal and poetic construction of the painting.

Ted Gahl is the youngest artist in the exhibition and currently the most eclectic, as he pursues a highly engaged voyage of experimentation and discovery. Most interestingly, in all of his recent explorations he seems always to be focused on understanding the limits of what paint can say or do, and foremost in this are questions about the point at which paint stops representing something. Like the other artists in the exhibition, Gahl most often wants the paint to revel in its own presence, while simultaneously conveying information, or a figurative motif. This "information", for example the subject in Gahl's painting, *Attic*, is once again most effective when it seems intrinsically to ignore the fact that it is also primarily a vehicle allowing the paint itself to make a visceral connection with the spectator. Once again this symbiosis, used in different ways by all of the artists in the exhibition, where paint and subject can be perceived as distinct entities while at the same time relying on each other to exist and thrive, with one perhaps graciously authorizing the other to operate on its territory, rather like the crocodile holding its jaws open wide to allow a bird to pick its teeth clean...



Left: Ted Gahl, *Attic*, 2009, oil and acrylic on canvas, 18" x 14"
Right: Ted Gahl, *Theater*, 2009, oil and acrylic on canvas, 41½" x 33"

Damien Cabanes is represented by Galerie Eric Dupont, Paris, and currently has a solo exhibition at the Salomon Foundation in France (catalogue); **Noa Charuvi** graduated from the School of Visual Arts, New York in 2009, and was a winner of the international MFA NOW awards; **Ted Gahl** is currently an MFA painting candidate at the Rhode Island School of Design; **Angelina Gualdoni** is represented by Kavi Gupta Gallery, Chicago, and her solo exhibitions include the St. Louis Art Museum and the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art; **Stefan Sehler** is represented by Parker's Box, and his most recent solo show was at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Nice, France (catalogue available at the gallery).

Gallery Hours: Thurs-Sun, 1-7PM. Further information: +1 718 388 2882 or info@parkersbox.com