

ARTFORUM

**OCTOBER 2020, by Suzanne Hudson
REVIEW**

J. Parker Valentine

PARK VIEW/PAUL SOTO

For “Year of the Sphere,” J. Parker Valentine’s solo exhibition at Park View / Paul Soto, the artist presented five untitled paintings, all made this year, comprised of rounded forms—as the title unambiguously suggests. Each canvas was unprimed, unstretched, cut up, and then reassembled by hand with needle and thread; taken as a whole, the show felt like a singly authored exquisite corpse. The reattached panels—circular and rectangular, contiguous and overlapping—were adumbrated by washes of ink, graphite, water-soluble colored pencils, and liquid graphite, which give these objects a hazy, palimpsest-like opticality. The pieces here were somewhat denatured versions of Valentine’s previous work, which makes sense, as they were created during the early—and so far perhaps most difficult—stages of the pandemic and therefore embody new studio routines. Yet in the artist’s active relocation of material and shape, this presentation also bore similarities to Valentine’s exhibition at Düsseldorf’s Galerie Max Mayer in 2018. There, large swaths of raw canvas were draped across the space’s walls, then overlaid with rough-hewn patches of painted canvas, which exaggerated the physicality of the textile, thereby turning it into an architectural wall covering.



Valentine’s draftsmanship is evocative: Sinuous, striated lines pass through and gird the more liquescent passages, where emergent images are both made and found. Indeed, though the paintings are largely abstract, various accretions of marks sometimes gather into humorous, phantasmagoric tableaux—such as a cartoony hand with a pointy middle finger that’s accompanied by a heavy drop shadow; a flying uvula being attacked by a pyramid, a fat scatological blob that seems to be spinning a Hula-Hoop, and endless clusters of eyes. The artist’s ocular objects call to mind Robert Delaunay’s Orphist works, whose forms were deliberately keyed to the round organ of human sight, as though the art could prove coextensive with perception or at the very least frame it. Valentine’s orbs contain a

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residue of accumulated decisions, establishing a kind of parallax between her somatic engagement and our witnessing in each work one provisional outcome of procedures for which we have neither experience nor memory.

Valentine's paintings are predicated upon displacements and acts of recuperation. Hanging free of stretchers, these pieces implicated the site of their installation, even as this physical intention knowingly ceded to the mediation of so many detail and room-scaled shots in the online-viewing conditions by which, as Valentine knew from the start, the vast majority of people would encounter it. The soft, banner-like panels—which seemed to indicate a kind of stasis after the exertion of their becoming, even as they remained light and mobile—conspicuously limned the architecture of Park View / Paul Soto, acting as adornments as much as anti-theatrical scrims. And in one diptych featuring a series of wet curlicues—*cum*—celestial bodies, Valentine played up the white-walled interval between them, particularly as the globe-shaped segment appended to the leftmost border of the right-hand panel looked to have been pulled into position in response to some invisible force. The two parts remained at a distance, establishing a surprisingly poignant tension that made me think of the Greek myth of Tantalus, a son of Zeus who was condemned by his father to spend an eternity in Hades, forever thirsty and hungry while trapped in a pool of water from which he could never drink, and beside a tree bursting with fruit that was always out of reach. But this staging of thwarted proximity was the exception, and even there, the aforementioned tension was less burdened than this invocation might have suggested. Elsewhere, the dominant theme seemed to be the expression of, or maybe yearning, for interdependence, a relationality wished for, if not at present necessarily possible to achieve.

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