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REVIEWS



# JONATHAN LASKER AT CHEIM & READ, NEW YORK

BY *Alexa Lawrence* POSTED 01/20/16 3:03 PM

Through February 13



Jonathan Lasker's show at [Cheim & Read](#) is a happy mix of contradictions. For his colorful paintings and his black-and-white graphite-and-ink series, he starts by drawing loose and spontaneous forms, like a cast of characters, and selects a few to combine into his final works. The result is a *mélange* of shapes, colors, techniques, and textures, formally arranged yet full of spontaneity. Thick strokes, swirls, scrapes, and lush globs of pigment are layered and combined with fine lines and empty space to form surprisingly coherent wholes. The components—for example, a grid of cursive tangles set within rigid black boxes and then the same shape, in thick orange, green, and purple, painted on top—at first seem like discrete entities pastiched onto a single surface.

In fact, the figure, ground, and line of each painting come alive with tension and secret relationships. Heavy forms dominate, rising to the surface of an illusory depth to assert some formal authority, while thin grids and edge-to-edge webs of color recede, falling back into a bottomless picture plane. The white space peeking through it all suggests an infinite world beyond the canvas' surface.

For the viewer standing in the center of each gallery, surrounded by the forms and totems, a vocabulary emerges. Strokes straight and squiggled, in thick impasto and thin lines, repeat within and among the canvases, like letters of an alphabet composed of several languages—an Esperanto of visual form, with all the possibilities of painted line represented. In *The End of Relevance* (2015), an upside-down yellow “L” leans over a smaller yellow square, as a storm of black scribble hovers menacingly nearby. The three large forms in the small *Trust Over Truth* (2015)—one in the shape of a cross; one, in solid bloodred paint, resembling a heart; another, a scribbled black mass with a single line straying out to the side, like a hand on a hip—stand condescendingly over three small scribbles, baby hieroglyphs, appearing to droop in shame.

It is these imagined scenarios that give Lasker's work its strength. The way his “characters” in picture-book colors parade around the rooms mingles a playful narrative into each non-representational canvas.

The contradictions in Lasker's panels draw attention to the act of looking, the projection of meaning, the urge to decipher, to anthropomorphize. In one painting, *Signatory Powers* (2015), the artist has scrawled his signature and the date in large, legible, Latin letters, in the upper right-hand corner, as though to bring everything back down to reality—a reminder of what is real, what is illusion, and what is art.

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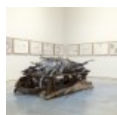




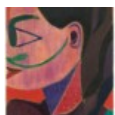
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