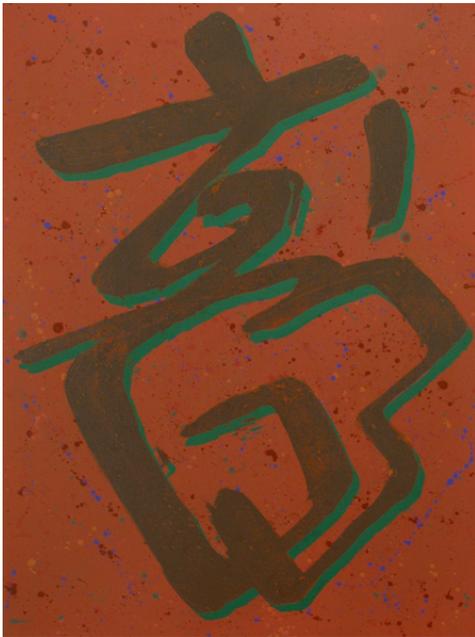


47 Orchard Street
New York, NY 10002

(212) 274 0064
info@racheluffnergallery.com
racheluffnergallery.com



For Immediate Release:

Human Arrangement

Stefano Arienti, Anna Betbeze, Allison Katz, Gregory Parma Smith, Dushko Petrovich, Jacob Stewart-Halevy, and Mamie Tinkler

Curated by Roger White

June 27 – August 8, 2009

Opening Reception: Saturday, June 27, 6-8 PM

What if I was traveling through the void, unmoored in space and time, a tabula rasa, with no memories or associations, no experience of art or the artworld, no Artforum, no Gallery Guide, no press release, and I came across this painting—would I be able to understand it? I heard several versions of this thought experiment performed in art school, usually by hardline formalist painters frustrated with works employing a more contextual model of meaning. The point is that unlike the supposed self-evidence of high modernist painting, in which everything a viewer needed to know was said to be found on the surface of the canvas, the painting in contemporary art is tacitly understood as one unit in a larger system of signification—to such an extent, sometimes, that the object itself comes to resemble a placeholder: arbitrary, contingent, and pointedly indecipherable in itself. You can most easily sense the effects of context on the meaning of an artwork, so suggests the experiment, by imagining that context suddenly ceasing to exist.

I thought about this when a gallerist, who ran an out-of-the-way storefront space, told me a story about being photographed for a magazine article. On the day the photographer came to the gallery there was a very minimal group show on display—several gray monochrome panels, a small framed photo, an architectural intervention, and some Xeroxed texts. They ran into a problem: how to set up the shot so you could tell she was being photographed in an art gallery, not an empty room in an office? They ended up taking the picture with the dealer perched on a stool in front of one of the monochromes—the most self-explanatory visual solution, under the circumstances. But it wasn't self-explanatory enough, she said, because as they were wrapping up the shoot a guy came in and asked if he could get a passport photo taken.

The question of artistic form and interpretive context is most vexing with respect to painting, a medium that paradoxically seems both more self-contained and more reliant on external support than others. How to imagine the connection between two sets of relationships: those happening within the object, and those in which the object makes sense? How to arrange a productive encounter between the two? This exhibition is intended to suggest that the answer is first to approach both terms—the object and its context—with something like the feeling of unfamiliarity evoked above: as if we're traveling through the void, or wandering in from the street.

Image: Greg Parma Smith, *Untitled*, 2008, oil on canvas, 32 x 24 inches, 81.3 x 61 cm

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