

BROOKLYN RAIL

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ArtSeen

J Stoner Blackwell & Masamitsu Shigeta

By Darla Migan
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Masamitsu Shigeta, *A night*, 2021. Acrylic on canvas, 30 x 24 inches. Courtesy SITUATIONS Gallery.

On View

SITUATIONS Gallery
April 10 – May 22, 2021
New York

The current exhibition at SITUATIONS, an untitled two-person painting show, pulls at the threads of both genre painting and abstract coloration with works by J Stoner Blackwell and Masamitsu Shigeta, respectively. While Blackwell connects hand to eye in their haptic "Neveruses," Shigeta plays with the relation between inside and outside—emphasizing the limits of translation in anti-pastoral scenes painted in acrylic on curvaceous canvases or on paper sculpted by candy-colored frames.



J Stoner Blackwell, *Neveruses (Rte 67a)*, 2019. Plastic, wool, silk, paper, ink, fabric, 26.5 x 18 inches. Courtesy SITUATIONS Gallery.

Together, the artists softly bend at conventions that make painting recognizable as such by cheekily shifting the medium towards sculpture and by stretching fine art back into its craft origins. The Neveruses (pronounced *never-uses*) are “lumpish, androgynous objects comprised of recovered plastic bags and colored fibers such as wool yarn, silk thread, and patterned cloth.” Viewers are invited to touch Blackwell’s paintings, to feel the different textures, and turn the works over in their hands, creating a live situation of public intimacy (similar to the one I longed for at the Whitney’s excellent *Making Knowing: Craft in Art, 1950–2019* exhibition). While touch is one of the most pleasurable (because it is usually prohibited) experiences one can have in a gallery, being invited to take hold of the Neveruses also becomes a kind of rehearsal for a nightmarish scene when we feel the plastic grocery bag working as the core apparatus beneath the textiles woven around them. In a gesture reminiscent of Cecelia Vicuña’s *Tres elementos (Precarios)* (2014), the preciousness of the *objet d’art* is subverted by the public commemoration of the ultimate artifice. By handling the Neveruses we acknowledge, in community, the relatively infinite permanence of plastics and feel the temporal clash around the waning hope for great art’s eternal glory against the failure of the human species to steward the earth.



Masamitsu Shigeta, *Tulip Garden*, 2020. Acrylic on paper, wood frame, 17 x 13 inches. Courtesy SITUATIONS Gallery.

For Shigeta, walking about during the COVID-induced pause on commercial activity meant noticing the landscaping in a Target parking lot or how mighty tree branches go unperturbed by the pandemic's massive toll on human life. The artist responded by centering nature in scenes where crowds have now returned, transforming mundane sidewalk scenes through his back-to-basics studies. The sensuousness of thick bushes and brushwork thrusting out from behind park fences or regal trees and weedy flowers (that perhaps went untended during the lockdown), get their glow-up in neon greens and yellows, vibrant lavenders, oranges, and pinks. Against faded brick tenements turned lavender-blue, impossibly catching the light of a lone fenced-in bush turned purple, the artist colors his vignettes in a downtown Pop-art palette but with shadows and textures mimicking silkscreen woodcuts to illuminate a literal concrete jungle. Here, we are in direct confrontation with musings on a world forever changed, but one that nonetheless remains easily recognizable. One viewer even returned to the gallery when they excitedly recognized the site of the escaping bush in *A night* (2021).

I was delighted to see planted flowers in *Tulip Garden* (2020), with their blooms playing at being wild outside instead of cut into the domesticated bouquets of other pandemic-era studies. These cityscape branches, buds, and bushes delight us, in part, because of how their frames work to hold the pictures like individually wrapped pieces of incongruously shaped hard sweets. With well-formed separations between inside and outside, mixing wholes and parts with technical bravado, and frames constructed in wood painted pink or in buffed-down aluminum, Shigeta allows each work the spatial depth needed to break both thematic uniformity and the regional color specificity expected of "nature scenes," while also allowing our attention to play between the spring blooming outdoors and the pop-star hues within the picture plane.



J Stoner Blackwell, *Neveruses (Evergiven)*, 2018–21. Plastic, silk, wool, cotton, paper rope, 26.5 x 18 inches. Courtesy SITUATIONS Gallery.

This exhibition really snaps and soars by way of innovation happening at the edges proposed and juxtaposed between the two painters. Shigeta's modestly sized paintings show what he saw while staying close to home. But the use of skewed grids and subtle curvature of both plane and frames is where the works require longer, subtle glances between shapes and color combinations. Reflecting on Kant's take on our experience of beauty in nature, Derrida writes: "The tulip is beautiful only on the edge of this cut without adherence. But in order for the cut to appear—and it can still do so only by its edging—the interrupted finality must show itself, both as finality and as interruption—as edging ... The tulip is exemplary of the sans of the pure cut."¹

In this ongoing reevaluation at the edges of the medium, the question or rejection of painting's limitations highlight why we do not get over what is arguably the most conservative of the fine arts. The cues towards reevaluation happen slowly, through conversation over the breaks from or ongoing celebration of canonical expectations. Together, Blackwell and Shigeta ask us to touch the colors and crack up genres to resituate the temporality of the eternal (already an artificial horizon for human beings) and to reorient the cut between nature and artifice.

1. Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 88–89.

Contributor

Darla Migan

Darla Migan is an art critic working in New York City. She is committed to thinking about how theories of culture and strategies of artistic making may implicate one another and potentially motivate the formation of justice seeking communities. Her writing on the conditions of contemporary art and visual culture can be read in *Art in America*, *Artnet News*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *CulturedMag*, *Spike Magazine*, and *Texte zur Kunst*. Recently, she has started curating collaboratively with artists at @variableterms.