

## David Roesing: Culture, Strength, Strategy

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“The maze is one thing—a trap, a confinement.  
The nature of the maze—in/of itself.  
To follow a thread (in/of itself).  
A way out, the way out.  
To enter the maze, to exit—Not the maze itself.”

—Jasper Johns, 1993

David Roesing's paintings speak: “Engagement,” “Strength,” “Analyze,” “Perform,” “Develop.” He uses language like an object, wedging prodding slogans between figures of varying scale and employ. The works presented in “Culture, Strength, Strategy,” evoke stock imagery of corporate life, modes of production, or scientific systems. Thankfully, he is thoroughly activated by informatics, spinning a web of marvelous pastel-colored amalgamations from the most pedestrian material. This might be what Jasper

Johns called “endless possibilities for connection, division, and modulation made available through the act of painting.” His figures are slightly cartoonish, existing in a highly saturated field of information, moving further into abstraction with each work, limbs extending and becoming more bizarre. I’m reminded of the trendy corporate marketing in which faceless pastel humanoid figures gather around a conference table among floating bar graphs, surrounded by devices and spreadsheets. These blobs are busy; we know they are smiling even though they don’t have mouths or eyes. Eerie and robotic yet languid with sagging limbs, the figures are identity-less, an amalgam of every race, class culture, and gender. The blob dances and performs for the viewer, tapping away on a laptop, serving capitalism with a smile—the fact that it doesn’t have a mouth is no trouble at all.

Roesing’s practice recalls the Belgian artist and poet Marcel Broodthaers, not only in the sense that he gives material form to time and language, but also in his desire to construct a meta-conversation about the role of the painter vis-a-vis other forms of creative labor. Roesing’s humanoid figures engage in disparate but consistently productive modes: writing, reading, typing, building. The paintings reveal the artist’s obsession with a process of ceaseless revision and reconstitution, highlighted by his proclivity to “reverse-study,” or to make a small, impressionistic take on a larger canvas. In dwelling on this visual language of production, Roesing demonstrates the artist at work, toiling away inside his brain. The product, however, is obscured. What is it the artist is after? Why does he keep making it? In Roesing’s compositions, lines and arrows lead nowhere, systems of logic unfurl into proliferated abstractions, and the formula ultimately equals “?” Perhaps the work is questioning its own existence (after all, Roesing began this series on a dry erase board), how can it be sustained under capitalism, what is its value in the world, what is the artist’s? These are the questions that run through the tangled veins of Roesing’s paintings. I agree with Johns’ sentiment—odd, indeed that any *thing* could be arrived at. —Gracie Hadland