

LAUREL GITLEN

122 NORFOLK ST.
NEW YORK, NY 10002

T 212 274 0761
F 212 590 6191
LAURELGITLEN.COM

Ryan McLaughlin *Raisins*

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OPENING RECEPTION SUNDAY, OCTOBER 27, 6–8PM

There was a time when it was widely accepted that the earth was flat. This theory, like so many others, was eventually disproved through centuries of exploration. It was around that time that painters were also grappling with their own kind of flat-ness. And yet, after centuries of exploring its possibilities and limits with depth and perspective—save for the pictorial illusions that may suggest otherwise—painting is indeed still pretty flat.

This is not to suggest that painting has somehow failed to live up to its potential nor to insinuate that painting has somehow proved itself unworthy or obsolete. Quite the contrary. How could painting—something that has occupied some of the world's greatest minds be anything but relevant? For centuries, painters have been the sole purveyors of what you could call a pictorial cultural consciousness. They have singlehandedly trained and developed humankind's ability to understand pictorial 'space.' For centuries painters groomed the human race in preparation for inventions like the photograph, the movie theater, and for the flat screen. If it weren't for their exploration of the medium, mankind would have no tools to differentiate between the flat world on our iPads and the round earth upon which we live.

No, but in all seriousness, Ryan McLaughlin is an increasingly rare species of painter: one with a deep appreciation for all of the painters who have come before him, and one who may—on occasion—have had similar daydreams (see above) about the responsibility that comes with the painter's profession.

For the exhibition *Raisins* at Laurel Gitlen, McLaughlin has created a group of oil paintings that seem determined to maintain their decidedly "painterly" qualities. These new works, however, have wandered far from the path of more traditional, pictorial depth and resurfaced downstream amidst a more graphic jungle of signage. Having lived in Berlin for many years, much of the imagery that surfaces in McLaughlin's new series of paintings is very specifically German-oriented. Those who are familiar might recognize certain ubiquitous logos and symbols in McLaughlin's particular variety of painterly 'almost-abstractions.' There is a certain kind of pictorial alchemy that occurs in his paintings. Unlike collage, outlines and shadowless shapes seem to morph into each other. The edge of

painting itself is the only clearly (and decidedly) defined edge at all. The flat graphic elements (some barely discernible) seem to retreat from their own graphic-ness into the (dare I say: appeasedly) flat depth of field—as if they had almost floated to the surface of the painting.

McLaughlin's painting (here a verbal noun) is impeccable—honest, methodical and skilled. Also the command of palette he demonstrates with his controlled, almost earthy tones brings us back to the issue at hand - we are looking at a painting. And isn't it beautiful?

Scott C. Weaver
October 26, 2013