

James Inscho

three left, one right

January 13th - March 9th

Tops Gallery
400 S Front street (entrance on Huling, basement level)
Memphis, TN 38103

Tops Gallery is pleased to present *three left, one right*, an exhibition of recent work by James Inscho. The exhibition includes a number of small paintings that Inscho made in his Memphis studio over the past two years. The show's title captures Inscho's provisional, improvisational approach to painting. "*three left, one right*" - as if an unseen voice is calling out instructions to the artist as he works; or the artist is engaged in a game for which only he knows the rules. All lower-case: suggesting a phrase extracted from mid-sentence, a syllable, a clip, no proper nouns. The viewer completes the sentences and paragraphs in the gallery - scripts her own movie, solves his own riddle.

The paintings in the exhibition, all acrylic gouache on panel, are modest in size. For Inscho, their head-scale allows them to operate as mental puzzles. Developing several paintings at the same time, Inscho deploys and recycles formal motifs, creating images in which abstract gestures, flat planes and messy scribbles hang loosely together.

Figure and ground - concepts that painting has obliterated and hastily resuscitated every few years for nearly a century - are treated here as transitory states, impermanent like everything else in life. Think of a stack of papers on a desk, frequently shuffled, or multiple browser windows open at once, easily toggled. In meditation, figure and ground can be made to disappear altogether. When we close our eyes, we can dissolve the boundaries of our own bodies, recognizing that space is continuous, that we are not the 'here' and objects are not the 'there.' What happens when we let go of our relentless tendency toward meaning-making, and experience existence as a flow of light, color, weight, sound, pressure? What might we see?

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We might see a ground of washy yellow paint revealing a past life of green. A character in soft coral pink is wedged into the frame, bracketed on either side with parenthetical columns at the plane's edge. It's nonsense-calligraphy. If it's speech, it's a joke overheard at a crowded bar, but you missed the punchline. If you say a word enough, it loses its sense; if you write a word enough it becomes an image.

We might see patches of green paint in varying shades make a leafy ground. A cartoon cloud interlopes - a speech bubble of flat white outlined with graphic black. Pissarro in the funny pages.

We might see flat brown brushstrokes criss-cross a flame-red field. Matte black marks become shadows, and now the brown strokes are transformed into sticks, a pile of logs, a mound. It takes so little for the mind to write a story. Look again and it's only brushstrokes.

James Inscho was born in Dothan, Alabama in 1984 and lives in Memphis, TN. He obtained an MFA from Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia, PA and a BFA from University of Memphis. He was a resident at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine. His paintings have been exhibited at Zeitgeist Gallery in Nashville, TN; Seraphin Gallery and Vox Populi in Philadelphia; and Crosstown Arts in Memphis. This is his first solo exhibition at Tops Gallery.