

**Leah Durner** is an artist who lives and works in New York City. She has exhibited her work at Wooster Arts Space, Art Gotham, Berry College, Cazenovia College, Barbara Ann Levy Gallery, Markham Murray Gallery, Steinbaum Kraus Gallery, Limbo, CBs 313 Gallery, Coup de Grace Gallery, and SoHo Center for Visual Arts and Wake Forest University. She was an artist-in-residence at the Leighton Studios for Independent Residencies at the Banff Centre for the Arts. She has also curated exhibitions, published art theory, and lectured on a number of topics, including the American landscape, gestural abstraction and phenomenology, conceptualism and its sources, the work of the artist Dan Graham, and the composers Maryanne Amacher and John Cage. Durner's current theoretical interests include beauty, joy, largesse, and incarnated consciousness. Durner received her B.A. from Wake Forest University and her M.F.A. from Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University where she studied art theory with Martha Rosler and painting with Leon Golub.

**Jorella Andrews** is a lecturer in Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths College, University of London and a member of the editorial board of the journal *Third Text*. Dr. Andrews' research is concerned with the relations among philosophical inquiry, perception, and artistic practice, with a particular emphasis on phenomenology and the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Dr. Andrews has published extensively on phenomenology and on twentieth-century, contemporary, and Dutch seventeenth-century visual culture. Dr. Andrews is currently completing a book entitled *Showing Off: Merleau-Ponty, Ethics and the Image-world*.

This brochure was printed on the occasion of a private view of Leah Durner's paintings and works on paper presented by Nye Basham on Thursday 24 September and Friday 25 September 2009 at the Nye Basham Studio 31 Union Square West New York.

**Nye Basham** is president of Nye Basham Creative Services in New York, his interior design firm for commercial and residential projects. Nye Basham is former creative director for Ralph Lauren, Europe and former head of visual merchandising for Asprey.



## LEAH DURNER: PAINTING AND THE POST-CONCEPTUAL PAINTERLY

by **Jorella Andrews** One way of approaching Leah Durner's large-scale, gestural works is in relation to practices of Western painterly painting — those of Titian, Rubens, the great Spaniards, Tiepolo, Fragonard, Delacroix, Manet and beyond — sources in which Durner, too, continually re-immerses herself.

cover image: *yelloworange bluegreen* 2003 acrylic on paper 44 x 50 inches

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Illustrations: *yelloworange bluegreen* © 2003 Leah Durner *Blue Center* © 2001 Leah Durner

*Stripes Drip* © 2001 Leah Durner *Lush* © 2005 Leah Durner *Sunday 18 February 2007* © 2007 Leah Durner

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*BlueCenter* 2001  
acrylic on paper 54 x 58 inches

**To do so is to open up shimmering comparisons and contrasts, and a plenitude of words, thoughts, and questions.**

Consider *Blue Center* (2001). Although its multi-layered strokes have an energy that is muscular and noisy/urban, the work also reiterates, varies, complicates and connects with the voluptuous earthiness of a Rubens' oil sketch. *Stripes Drip* (also 2001, and organised around a very differently articulated central blueness) recalls but also diverges from the 50's and early 60's

striped abstractions of a Morris Louis. In each case, despite their differences, a spirit of Baroque exuberance

and gravitas is embedded in visual 'part-objects' that are unapologetically non-figurative and non-narrative. But given the specifics of Baroque histories and intentions, what might we make of this inherence, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually? And how might Durner's compositions, here and in general, intersect in this regard with other contemporary, 'post-conceptual' painterly impulses towards abstraction — with the work of Edwina Leapman, Sean Scully or Yek Wong, or with Katharina Grosse's monumental installations of heaped-up earth and pigment (2005 and 2006)?



*Stripes Drip* 2001  
acrylic on paper 54 x 59 inches

It is also valuable, however, to remain in the register of the non-vocal in front of Durner's work, discovering, like the French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty's painter, a capacity "to look at everything without being obliged to appraise what one sees."<sup>1</sup> *Lush* (2005) is comprised of soft, somewhat Morandi-esque blurs (it's almost slurred in places). It is also almost-figurative — suggested in part by its title and despite its acidic, artificial color scheme, it evokes spring parkland or vineyard. But when viewing the painting in terms of its singularity, more resonant than the greyish tree-form towards lower left is a small hard-edged yellow square a little higher up, thickly framed in green. Echoing, perhaps accidentally, the proportions of the painting itself, it generates a pulsing spatiality that is



*Lush* 2005 oil and acrylic on canvas 66 x 60 inches

felt but which remains non-narratable because its effects do not belong to the realm of the already defined. "I do not welcome the confusion" writes artist/theorist Yve Lomax of such encounters " — it can send me in a spin — yet I do not wish to banish it for — and here I am taking a risk — something can come of it that hasn't been thought before, something surprising, something unexpected, something perhaps a little green. And what is this greenness if not the timid advance of the new?"<sup>2</sup> Certainly this sensation that cannot be easily articulated is not a condition of loss or lack. On the contrary, what is given is a plenitude, not of things or identities but of 'secondary qualities': color, rhythm, gesture — immersive but non-consumable.

This is heightened by the (non)framing of Durner's works, particularly those on paper, where an effect of large-scale-detail (or cinematic close-up), combined with the dripped, lower-margin traces of generously applied paint, makes an expansive outside/unseen region palpable, but not takeable. Note, too, the quality of selfhood that starts to assemble around these coordinates. At once stripped-back and pluralised, again there is an alternate plenitude, perhaps similar to the kind discovered by the American humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan when he first encountered the 'silent' richness, not of a painterly force-field of luscious/sharp color and line, but of the desert: "I felt as though I had met my geographical double, the objective correlative of the person I am, absent the social façade."<sup>3</sup> Merleau-Ponty (whose thought is another central resource for Durner) would call this our 'wild' Being. Put differently, it is an open-ended self, immersed in and of gesture, gesture (following political philosopher, Giorgio Agamben) understood as "a moment of life subtracted from the context of individual biography...The gesture," he continues, "is neither use value nor exchange value, neither biographic experience nor impersonal event: it is the other side of the commodity that lets the crystals of this common social substance sink into the situation."<sup>4</sup>



*Sunday 18 February 2007* 2007  
acrylic on paper 60 x 43 ½ inches

1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind', *The Primacy of Perception*, Northwestern University Press, 1964, p. 161.
2. Yve Lomax, 'A Twittering Noise', *Sounding the Event: Escapades in Dialogue and Matters of Art, Nature and Time*, I. B. Tauris, 2005, pp. 23 - 24.
3. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Place, Art, and Self*, The Center for American Places, 2004, pp. 20 - 21.
4. Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, University of Minnesota Press, 2000, p 80.