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Steven Charles Holds His Second Solo Exhibition at Marlborough



Steven Charles, *The Conversation*, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 144 x 60 in. © Steven Charles, courtesy Marlborough Gallery, New York



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NEW YORK, NY.- **Marlborough Gallery** presents an exhibition of recent work by Steven Charles will be held through Saturday, November 14, 2009 at Marlborough Chelsea, 545 West 25th Street, New York. This will be Charles' second solo exhibition with Marlborough and will consist of approximately three dozen paintings and sculptures ranging from gem-like two by two-inch paintings to a five by eight-foot diptych and several six-foot tall free standing sculptures.

Charles describes his initial process as a series of false starts and accidents. He uses a dizzying range of materials, some traditional such as paint, marker, and collage, as well as found objects that together act as both compositional devices and as thematic sparks. As he freely admits, these objects and ideas are frequently abandoned and "rescued" several times in the creative process. Previously in Charles' paintings and sculptures, these formal visual anchors were then embellished upon in a painstaking process of layering concentric areas of carefully controlled paint. These compositional elements served as focal points from which Charles constantly departed and returned. He created ever more complex layers of smaller and smaller painted areas in a process which he called 'targeting' that had a seductively detailed and topographical quality.

The results were mesmerizing fields that pulsed and glowed, drawing one continually inward to examine minutely crafted details and outward again to marvel at a powerfully cohesive whole. The carefully cultivated tension between broad abstraction of form and pin-point application of paint, between expressive gestural sweep and tightly controlled repetition and boundary, was at the heart of Charles' earlier work.

In the current body of work, however, the artist has allowed the initial process of rejection and rescue to play out over a much longer period, allowing a much more open contrast between his highly resolved targeting and the more raw areas of the work. As he notes, "the drive to unify my surfaces has become a problem and is treated like a bad habit. The 'bad habit' is what I already know... maps have become church windows. The paintings have switched from an aerial point of view to an intentional grounding. Land(scapes) has entered the dialogue as well as figures."

Whereas previously the completed works allowed most of the originally prominent and obvious compositional building blocks to become almost entirely subsumed within a complex web of radiating lines, concentric circles and fractal-like patterns, many of these areas are now highly visible in the recent body of work. This has increased the compelling tension between narrative and abstraction.

Charles himself seems both drawn and repelled by the suggestion of narrative. Sometimes one is encouraged to find narrative by their mysteriously incomprehensible titles like "painting that is painted" and "a return, a leaving and a return." These titles exist on the edge of meaning and gibberish. Yet while they sometimes represent themes of the painting, occasionally in a shorthand code using the first few letters of each word in a phrase, as in *spshofma* and *thtrhobl*, just as often they simply describe mundane aspects of a work's physical traits. Again we see a straddling of two worlds. There is a refusal to be either wholly conceptual - there is no "Untitled No. 18" - nor too obviously descriptive.

Charles rejection of convention, even that of his own making, is one that he proudly describes as a "willingness to guess for a living."

In his Top 10 review of the 2009 Amory Show, David Ebony (Art in America) describes Charles' painting *I had a good mother and father, 2009*, which is included in this exhibition, (acrylic, poster of Orlando Bloom, glitter, stick-on letters, gold leaf, silver leaf and enamel on canvas, 69 x 69 in.) as "the standout here....obsessively painted, countless dots of colorful pigment and gold leaf form long strands that seem to fall in a mesmerizing cascade before a backdrop of solid black."

Charles was born in England, raised in Texas, trained in Italy, and for the last several years has lived and worked in Brooklyn and Manhattan.

MarlboroughGallery | Steven Charles | Paintings and Sculptures | David Ebony |