

Daniel Lefcourt

Mark Flood, Judith Linhares, and Others Who Don't Need Your Darn Network

By Martha Schwedener

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A couple of years ago, art historian and critic David Joselit published an article on contemporary painting in the journal *October*. The article was sort of notable for a few reasons. One is that *October*, the formerly radical art journal whose founders now serve as overlords in Ivy League art-history departments, hasn't been a big supporter of painting. The essay also straddled the murky divide between art history and criticism—categories presently very much in flux.

Joselit's piece rested on the premise that painting could remain vital if it did more than just "hang on the wall." Instead, it should make explicit the "networks" in which it operates: the social space of the gallery, the world and history of images, its reproducibility. If painting does this, Joselit argued, it could get around being a luxury collectible, stuck over someone's couch or in a museum storage room, and continue circulating and producing new meanings and relationships.

The problem, for many artists, was that Joselit's essay offered only a narrow space in which to operate—or, alternatively, a criterion too broad and vague. It also privileged a particular lineage of conceptual painting. Even before reading the article, one painter I know said, "I can already guess which galleries and artists he mentions." More problematic was the idea that painting in commercial galleries could break the commodity-collectible cycle. You don't need a Ph.D. in art history—or economics—to see the complications there.

If you look around Chelsea right now, though, there are plenty of paintings that happily resist Joselit's manifesto, succeeding on other terms. And while much of the work "just" hangs on the walls—an element central to his critique—it makes the case for looking at pictures made by artists, in addition to all the mass media images that invade our consciousnesses on the street, subway, computer, smartphone, and elsewhere.

Daniel Lefcourt's gray-black monochrome paintings at Taxter & Spengemann (459 West 18th Street, through March 26) offer the least, visually, of this roundup. They are an interesting experiment, though, based on digital photographs output into molds into which he poured acrylic paint and fixed the results on the canvas. Self-consciousness pervades this enterprise. "Is this Painting behind itself?" the press release asks, paraphrasing the title of Joselit's essay, "Painting Beside Itself."

After hitting Chelsea, I attended a lecture by T.J. Clark, a pioneering Marxist art historian with '60s Situationist pedigree. More than 500 people packed an auditorium

on 23rd Street to hear Clark talk about Picasso's Guernica (1937). Clark described how, by creating a history painting, Picasso knew he was engaged in an anachronistic enterprise. And yet, he was depicting "heroic actors living through a world historical change." The language was romantic; the lecture, surprisingly formalist. But for Clark, painting remains the site of radical struggle. He tied Guernica to the present as a war-protest emblem, reproduced in posters and street murals in India, Paris, and outside an army base in North Carolina. Painting's problematic status as a collectible commodity was not mentioned.