

LOWELL RYAN PROJECTS

artand**cake**

A Contemporary Art Magazine with a Focus on the
Los Angeles Art Scene

FEBRUARY 10, 2020

AUTHOR

John Millei at Lowell Ryan Projects



John Millei, This & That, Lowell Ryan Projects; Image courtesy of the gallery

John Millei, This & That

Lowell Ryan Projects, Los Angeles
through February 22

Written by Eve Wood

John Millei has had a long and illustrious career as a quintessential Los Angeles based artist. Over the years his work has been described as “anthropomorphic abstraction,” and with his most recent solo exhibition, the first in over ten years, at Lowell Ryan Projects in Mid City, Millei turns his attention away from more familiar themes of women sitting in chairs, their faces contorted into undulating shapes and swathes of glorious color, to focus more precisely on the

LOWELL RYAN PROJECTS

intimate gesture. Millei's earlier works appear to be direct antecedents of Pablo Picasso and Willem de Kooning, both of whom brutally abstracted the features of their respective women, and while these new images also take the human form as their main focus, Millei's approach has softened, perhaps because these are paintings based upon images of his own young children.

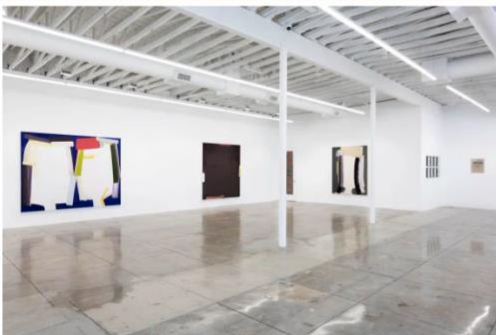
Perhaps more than anything, these paintings function as visual testaments to tenderness and the sheer force of a father's affections, and Millei utilizes abstraction as an artistic choice to fortify these simplified narrative structures, wherein a few lines of solid color might come to represent the profiles of a girl and boy facing one another in "Siblings (Same Same), 2019. The lushness of the materials including oil and flashe on canvas, only intensifies the elegance and simplicity of the image as a whole. The two large heads face off in a series of diagonal and vertical lines that compose the features, and Millei's economy of line is used to great effect in that he is able to capture the bond between the two figures whose faces are touching ever so slightly, the girl's form delineated by a single thick red line of paint standing in perhaps for a bow or a beret at the top of the canvas, where the boy's features are less formalized.

It's a difficult task to impart the quintessence of any relationship within the formal boundaries of a two-dimensional picture plane, yet these paintings are successful specifically because they capture the essence of tenderness in the simplest of terms. In the small painting entitled "The Monk," (2018) for example, human features are reduced down to two lines where the eyes might be and a tonal wash in place of a face. The result is startling not only because of its sheer reductiveness, but also because the abstraction allows us further entry into the artist's own psyche, thus heightening the psychological and emotional impact of the show as a whole.

Millei's work has a history of creating harmony from disharmony, i.e. form from abstraction, and this recent body of work is further testament to his ability to transform the human figure into linear space while also simultaneously embracing deeper more metaphoric content, and where once this content was writhing and brutal, now it is suffused with playfulness and whimsy. This work is living proof that the saying is indeed true – that having a child keeps you forever young at heart.

Lowell Ryan Projects
4851 W Adams Blvd
Los Angeles, 90016

LOWELL RYAN PROJECTS



LOWELL RYAN PROJECTS

