

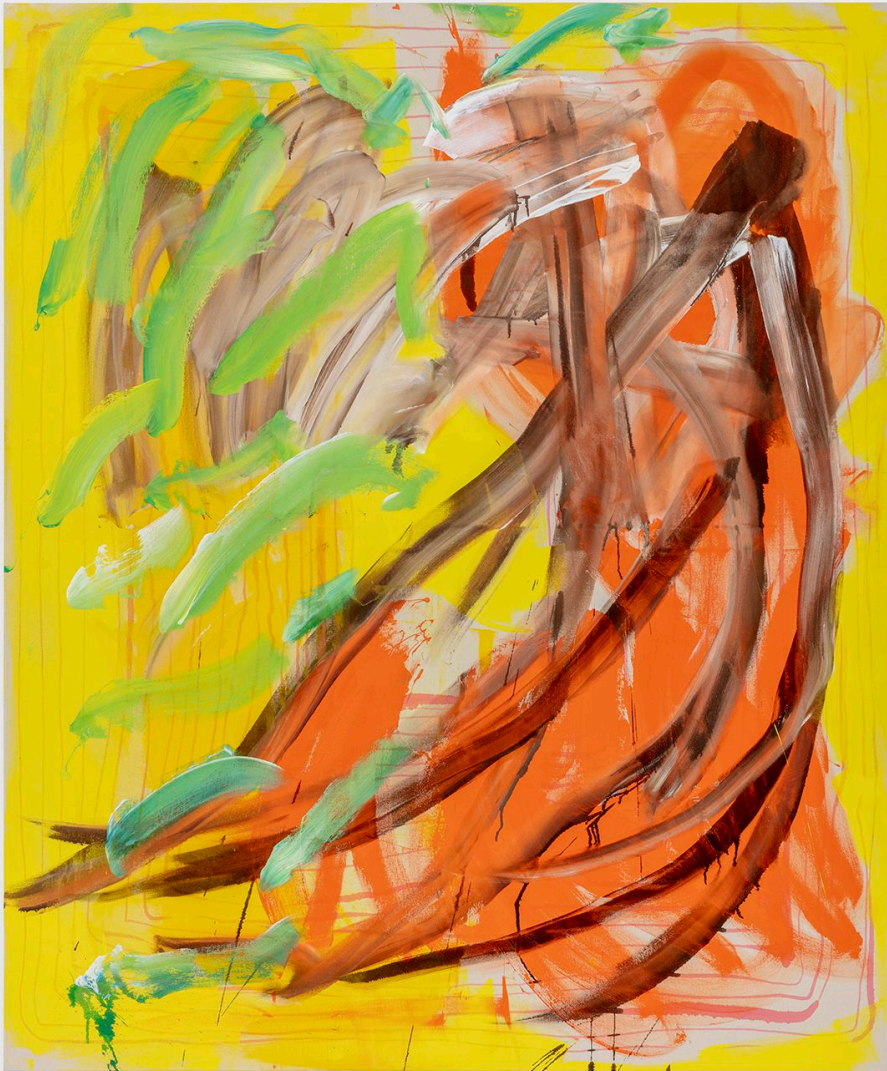
# LOWELL RYAN PROJECTS

## Wallscrawler

Writings on visual art. Short and to the point.

Tuesday, December 22, 2020

### Hot Take



Will Bentsen, Untitled No. 1 (8-14-20) WB-004, 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 60 inches.  
All images courtesy of the artist and Lowell Ryan Projects.

# LOWELL RYAN PROJECTS

## Exhibition Review

*Hot Damn!*

Will Bentsen

Lowell Ryan Projects

November 7 – December 19, 2020

It ought to be illegal to review a painting exhibition remotely. With abstract painting especially, scale, texture, and surface are important parts of the content of the work. But given the global pandemic, and despite a distance of 3000 miles, that is exactly what I will attempt to do. Because of the limited number of works in *Hot Damn!* and the availability of generous documentation—large individual images of the works plus installation shots—it seems possible, in this case, to say something meaningful about the exhibition.

Will Bentsen's show at Lowell Ryan projects in Los Angeles consists of nine paintings, all acrylic on canvas, all untitled except by numbers. All are body-sized at 72 x 60 inches. The works generally have a maximum of four colors, in distinct areas rendered as contiguous fields or flurries of strokes. The reduced palette of the paintings gives them a raw, primal feeling, as captured by the show's blunt, cheeky title.

With the works installed as an ensemble, the colors cover most of the spectrum. There is a recurrence of green, gold, orange, pink, and ultramarine blue. Few darker colors appear, except in WB-004 and WB-008 which are partly structured by the use of brown. Bentsen's chunky strokes, with limited variation in size, range from a long dash to thick loops that recall the net-like structures of Brice Marden's Cold Mountain series. Joan Mitchell's paintings of the 1980's, and Howard Hodgkin's mature style may also be influences on Bentsen's loaded arching strokes. The artist occasionally departs from this technique: tall thin loops of green appear at the right side of WB-002, and WB-004 has concentric squares of pale orange that undergird the composition.

Bentsen sometimes pours acrylic paint, producing an effect that evokes Helen Frankenthaler's work. Lower layers are often stained into the canvas, with another color pushed up against the poured area or laid on top of it. Large shapes move toward the edge of the rectangle, with upper layers loosely woven and white strokes sometimes applied on top. Blank canvas is persistently visible at the edges or through semi-transparent layers of paint. Untidy organic shapes strain against the neat rectilinearity of the paintings' supports.

There is an undeniably performative aspect to Bentsen's works, and the gesture so much in evidence is one of reaching or yearning. These abstract compositions do not feel like landscapes; rather there is a persistent suggestion of animals, or animal-shaped parts. The flat fields of color are like skins laid out. Brush strokes may be bones or antlers. Yet ultimately, a lightness and slapdash quality render the works hopeful and exhilarating. Just as Bentsen's expressive use of color owes a debt to the Fauves, he himself paints like an exuberant, wild beast. - Jeff Frederick

# LOWELL RYAN PROJECTS



Will Bentsen, Untitled No. 1 (8-14-20) WB-005, 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 60 inches.

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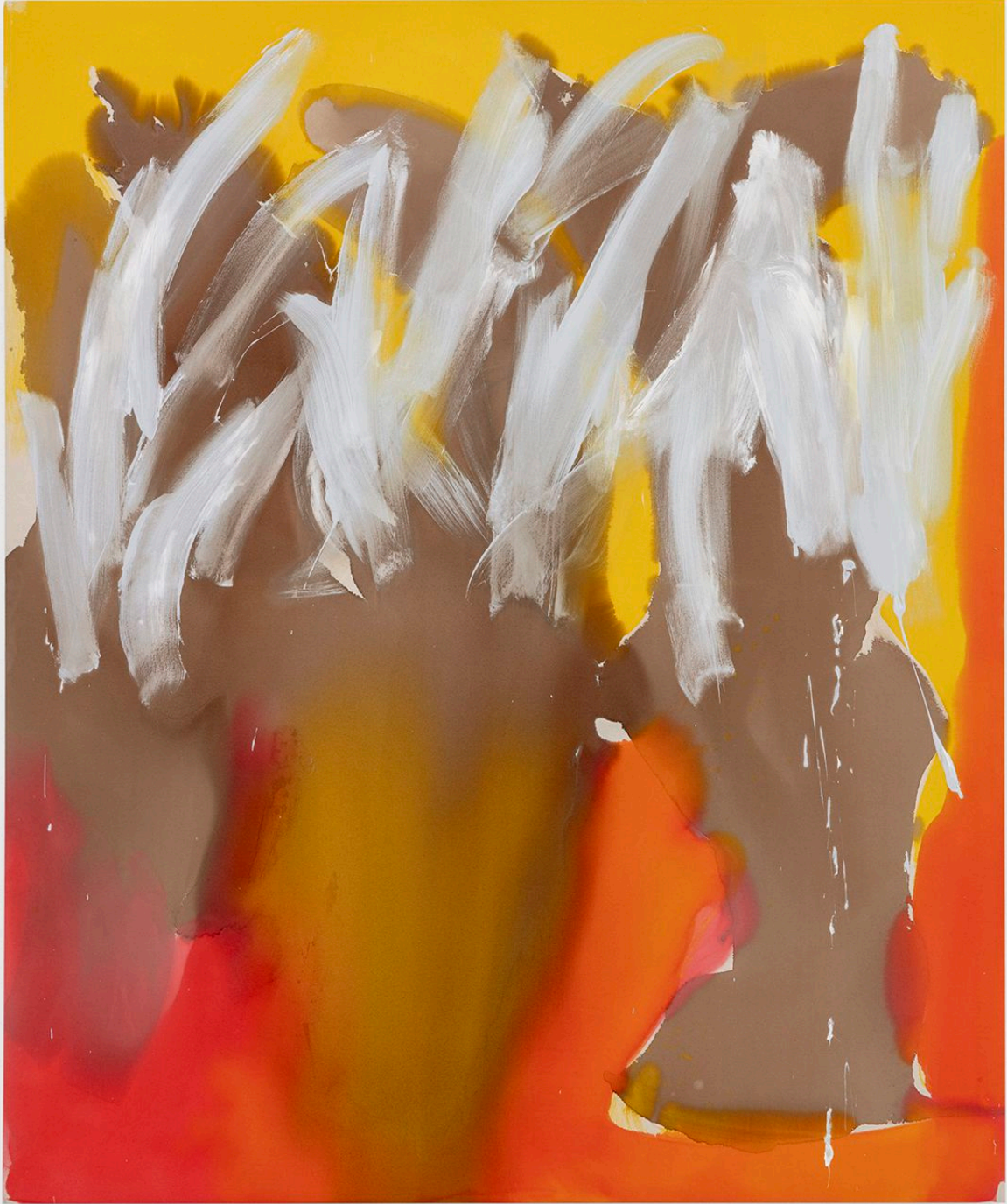
Will Bentsen, Untitled No. 1 (8-14-20) WB-006, 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 60 inches.

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Will Bentsen, Untitled No. 1 (8-14-20) WB-002, 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 60 inches.

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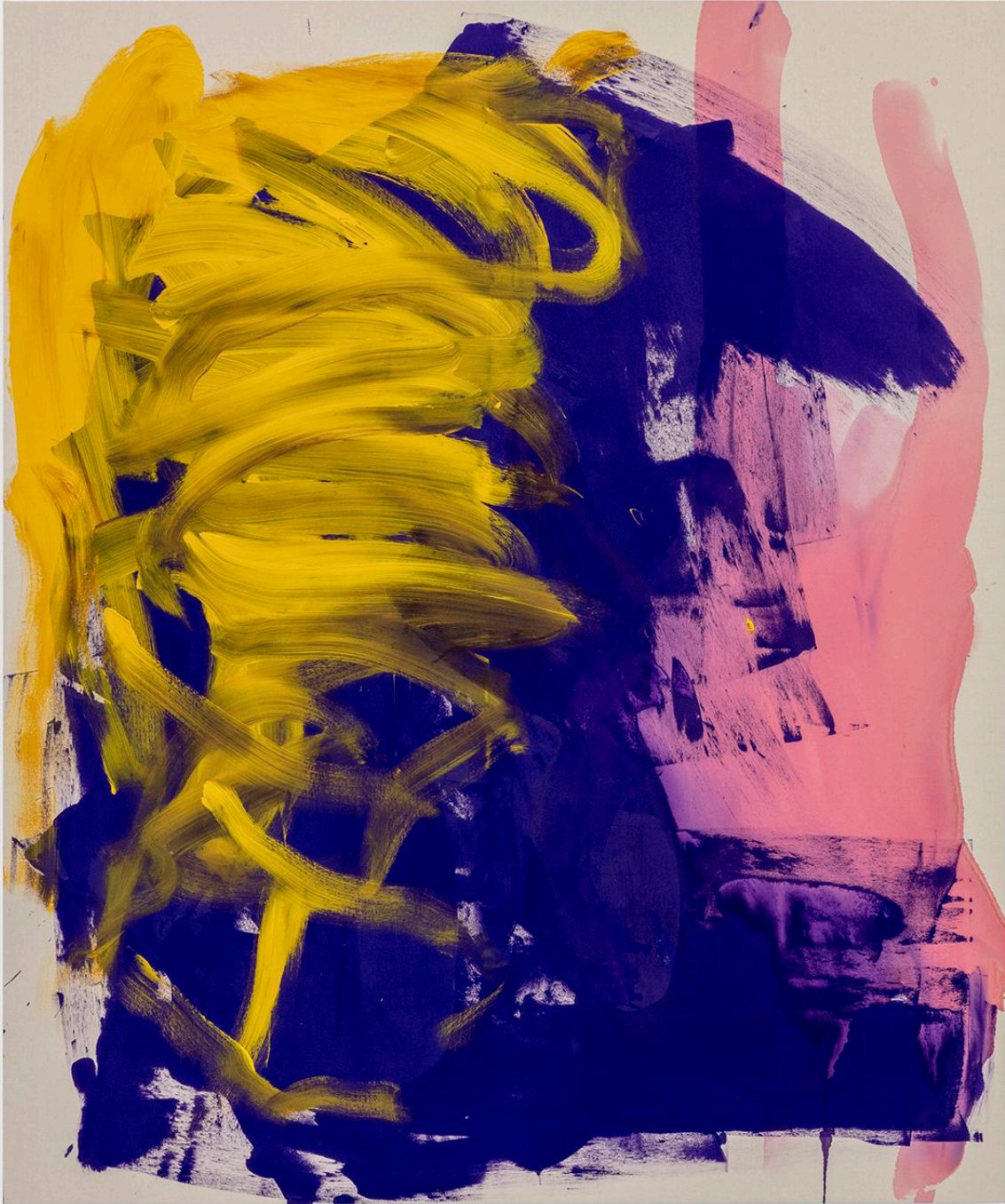
Will Bentsen, Untitled No. 1 (8-14-20) WB-009, 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 60 inches.

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Will Bentsen, Untitled No. 1 (8-14-20) WB-008, 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 60 inches.

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Will Bentsen, Untitled No. 1 (8-14-20) WB-003, 2020, Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 60 inches.