

# LOWELL RYAN PROJECTS

## What's on Los Angeles

February 13, 2020 / John Millei at Lowell Ryan Projects

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John Millei  
*This & That*  
Lowell Ryan Projects  
January 11 - February 22, 2020



John Millei



### Pick of the Week

by Jody Zellen

There is something satisfying about the simplicity of the gestures in John Millei's exhibition *This & That*. At first glance the works appear to be geometric abstractions where large swaths of color fill the picture plane. It does not take much time to realize these paintings are in fact quirky portraits and the areas of color loosely define facial features. Millei reduces his figurative subjects into thickly painted brushstrokes set against washy backgrounds while retaining their personalities and human qualities.

Four large-scale works hung together on one wall are different representations of Millei's daughter. Entitled *Girl (Pink Bow)*, *Girl (Orange Bow)*, *Girl (Blue Bow)* and *Girl (Red Bow)*, (all 2019), they are variations on a theme. In each painting, Millei captures the essence of a girl with a bow in her long flowing hair. She looks out from the canvas with large oval eyes. Her mouth—a horizontal band of color is neither happy nor sad, but matter of factly presented. These large heads are cartoon-like illustrations where basic features are reduced to primary simple painted in bright colors.

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In addition to these images, Millei also creates a work entitled *Siblings (Same Same)*, a double portrait of two figures against a deep blue background. Here, the large faces are empty white shapes surrounded by horizontal and vertical bands of color that suggest hair. In another suite of paintings, Millei references Bruce Nauman. *Hand Signals* is a triptych in which crudely painted white and yellow-green abstracted arms and hands enter the canvas from the top, side and bottom, set against a deep black ground. The thumbs of the three fingered hands point toward and away from each other as if signaling or calling for attention. In the small work *Mind's Heart*, (2018), two thickly painted purple arcs are set over small blue dots. Positioned toward the top of a gray-green rectangle, these marks become eyes and eyebrows bringing the painting to life.

In addition to the large-scale paintings, Millei also includes a suite of eight smaller works on paper. In these untitled graphite drawings, Millei captures the essence of the human form through minimal marks. He explores how the different opacities of his gestures can sign for emotional states. A darker line that extends from an eye becomes a tear. The blackened oval shapes in one drawing appear to be sun glasses. Two arches represent eyebrows in one work and two "c" shapes sign for ears in another. In these reductive works, Millei still plays with figure ground relationships, exploring where shape and texture intersect.

*This and That* is an exhibition that elicits smiles. In a time when the drama of national and international events is on many people's minds, brightly colored abstract depictions reflecting the innocence of children offer some reprieve.