

Artist's Statement: New Paintings

As an abstract painter, my studio practice combines a natural attentiveness to formal problems with a reflective consideration of conceptual ideas. In my new work I am interested in developing a visual vocabulary derived from the curiously narrative forms of everyday commercial packaging—the unfolded shapes of the cardboard cartons and containers that hold the stuff of our necessities and desires, and the eccentric visual structures that occur when these contours are combined within the picture plane. While my engagement with the formal is vital, at the same time I am equally interested in conceptual implications and applications that derive from focused play and invention with these chosen shapes and constructed spaces. For example, the created geometric structures within the compositions are far from the painterly architectural spaces of pure formalism, of modernist hard-edged abstraction. Often labyrinthine, their spatial complexity and oddness—derived from the commercial packaging that is their source and the inherent associations with desire, exchange, acquisition, consumption, and loss—activate the paintings as visual metaphors for the operations and effects of late or neoliberal capitalism.

Within this framework, the paintings function as a kind of intuitive mapping of late capitalism's social and cultural architecture, and its participants' and servants' passive acceptance of its incessant demands. The paintings become a portrait of a kind of twisted aesthetic that is capitalism's seamless, unrelenting system, function, and effects. They suggest late capitalism as pervasive and nearly inescapable context—not only in terms of economics and linked socio-political mechanisms and activity, but also culturally and personally. Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, his 1967 critique of this condition, seems more relevant than ever. Of the phenomenon Debord describes as the spectacle, "...a social relation between people that is mediated by images," he writes: "[The spectacle] is the sun that never sets over the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire surface of the globe, endlessly basking in its own glory." Art historian and cultural critic, Jonathan Crary, concurs in his 2013 book, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*: "It is only recently that the elaboration, the modeling of one's personal and social identity, has been reorganized to conform to the uninterrupted operation of markets, information networks, and other systems. A 24/7 environment has the semblance of a social world, but it is actually a non-social world of machinic performance and a suspension of living that does not disclose the human cost required to sustain its effectiveness."

Theorist William Connolly's book, *The Fragility of Things*, published in 2013, is yet another contemporary critique of the detrimental effects of late capitalism and neoliberal ideologies: "If you ignore any of the relevant dimensions—[...] the acceleration of pace in some domains of contemporary life, the hegemony of neoliberal capitalism, the fragility of things, the need for an expanded image of the human sciences, heightened patterns of sensitivity and experimental shifts in role definition, and the imperative to democratic activism—you deny something essential to our engagement with the contemporary condition...[W]e are surrounded by many who fail or refuse—for reasons rooted in conceptions of science, religious faith, or economic activity—to be moved by the situation." We are also

unmoved by the contemporary situation because of our unrestrained participation in the ubiquity and aesthetic allure of consumerism--a kind of infection that Debord attributed to the commodity's total colonization of social life and our "passive acceptance" of it. This "perfected denial" is an everyday, overall occurrence that permeates our lives. In fact, all of the packaging shapes in the paintings come from my own household, making this work a meditation on my own participation in capitalism's social condition-its ubiquitous cultural context--and the difficulty of bypassing it. Within the paintings, my construction of visual ambiguity and indeterminacy through negative space and the interplay of shapes parallels the warped aesthetic of the spectacle's abstract beauty--its seductive dispatches and our subjective submission to them.