

## REVIEWS

### NEW YORK

#### Aaron Bobrow

Andrea Rosen Gallery // February 9–March 23

WHEN DOES THE HISTORY of an art object affect its value? In Bobrow's debut solo show with the gallery, the main space is filled with rather large paintings made from untouched, individually stretched construction tarps that were ripped from a building's facade and found by the artist strewn about Coney Island after Hurricane Sandy. Such recontextualization of found materials is enjoying a renaissance, thanks to the influence of '90s artists like Sarah Lucas and Cady Noland on a new generation looking to move beyond the polished object. Yet what is quizzical about Bobrow's series of paintings is their material reference to place and event.

That is not to say that Bobrow's tarps are without their charm. Even at the young age of 27, this artist is highly aware of the subtle boundaries the history of painting has carved into our collective consciousness and plays these to great effect. One way this is accomplished is through the use of cartoonishly hefty stretcher bars, which create an enjoyable foil for Bobrow's sad, frayed tarps. There's an odd pathos in the way the screw-sized holes in these tarps mirror the shiny silver screwheads that glint behind the scarred black mesh. A particularly satisfying visual attribute of these works is the way the tarps' orange parallel stripes (aside from a severely ripped one that wears its stripes in tan) become randomly

disjointed due to their uneven stretching, a minor touch that nevertheless highlights the invisible force of the human hand. In the end, these paintings work on the level of paintings. Bobrow's works are technically three-dimensional abstractions of places via material, but his choice of format forces the viewer to perceive them through the lens of painting—which is nevertheless gratifying to a degree. Yet the fact remains that whether these tarps are from Coney Island—as opposed to Oakland or St. Petersburg—is less important than the visual impact of their surfaces.

*Acoustics (Eaton Canyon)*, 2013, offers evidence that Bobrow might in fact have a knack for oddly removed aesthetics. The video shows the artist clapping by a reservoir, creating a reverberation that bends and quickens depending on where Bobrow's hands are placed in relation to the cement walls surrounding these stagnant waters. The background holds a marvelous group of interstices: the faint sound of a helicopter, the

glittering green liquid, a meandering bumblebee. Bobrow's irregular sound structures are reminiscent of the randomly distorted stripes of the stretched tarps in the next room. He seems to delight in this type of minimally invasive artistic interference, which plays on the edges of what a medium is supposed to offer. The formal scrutiny that accompanies something presented as a painting somewhat muddies the intended effect of Bobrow's tarps, but the mesmerizing video piece proves that he is able to convey his particular and complex aesthetic stance across media with ease. —**Ryan E. Steadman**



**Aaron Bobrow**  
*Untitled*  
(extortion 2),  
2013. Debris  
mesh,  
122 x 68 in.



### NEW YORK

#### Jon Kessler

Swiss Institute // March 6–April 28

KESSLER'S MANIC INSTALLATIONS, which critic Jerry Saltz once categorized as "clusterfuck aesthetics," fuse the absurdity of kinetic art and the media savvy of Nam June Paik with a dystopian view of contemporary networked culture. I first encountered Kessler's work at MOMA PS1 in 2005, in the site-specific installation *The Palace at 4 A.M.*—clusterfuck aptly describes that sprawl of closed-circuit surveillance equipment, banks of TV monitors, mechanized devices, and photomontages that sharply critique the pornographic theater of war imagery. Viewers passed between two galleries via a huge photo cutout: One side had the image of George W. Bush's disembodied open mouth; the other, a headless woman's vagina.

*The Web*, 2013, Kessler's Swiss Institute commission, targets the ubiquity of the Internet and mobile devices. Where the artist framed *The Palace at 4 A.M.* with a penetrative gesture, he constructs the entrance to *The Web* as a mise en abyme. Visible from the street, a succession of blown-up photos of MacBooks, mounted at eye level with the screens cut away, mimics an infinite mirror effect. The installation in the main gallery translates the Internet's ephemerality into something clunky and physical. Under a web of blue yarn generated by a knitting machine, Kessler creates a complex labyrinth of circulating images with surveillance cameras, arrays of monitors, iPhones, and iPads that critique the iconography of technology ads. Here, viewers can see their image inserted via video feed into

FROM LEFT: AARON BOBROW AND ANDREA ROSEN GALLERY; DANIEL PEREZ; JON KESSLER. AND METAMATIC RESEARCH INITIATIVE, AMSTERDAM



## NEW YORK

### Suzan Frecon

David Zwirner // February 13–March 23

SCROLLING ACROSS THIS showcase of Frecon's watercolors and other small-scale works it is easy to overlook one uncharacteristically colorless diagram, *painting plan drawing for a large painting*, 2004. The 10-by-12-inch graphite line drawing strictly conforms to its utilitarian title, thus illuminating the work process of an abstract painter whose finished pieces often give the impression of being the result of careful and quiet resolution.

Three vaulted shapes appear in the drawing, formed by arcs with axes set at the intersection of perpendicular lines. The placement of these lines echoes the external dimensions of the whole figure: two golden rectangles stacked vertically. Like most of Frecon's paintings—including the larger oil paintings, not featured in this show, and the small oil-on-panel works like *version o, dark to light*, 2008, and *cathedral series, variation 10*, 2012, on view here—the plan's forms originate from a process of interior projection following outward conditions.

Frecon's forms exist not only for themselves, but as a space for her distinctive palate to occupy in the 26 watercolors on display. Incarnated here, the colors become familiar material entities, empirical identities, and it is as such that Frecon conjures them. The deductive logic that shapes form in *painting plan* doesn't apply here. For proof, try mixing a truly secondary purple from primary red and blue pigments: the inevitable result, a muddy brown. Without a wisp of cynicism or resignation, Frecon takes up the charge of midcentury formalist abstraction, calling upon the picture plane to do the work of the philosopher.

—Nathaniel Lee

**Suzan Frecon**  
yellow-orange  
on more  
conventional  
format with 3  
holes, 2012.  
Watercolor  
on found old  
Indian paper,  
13½ x 17½ in.

static images of device screens. Visitors can participate by snapping photos in the space via the exhibition's iPhone app. But rather than the thrill of the experience, the encouragement to take pictures in such an oversaturated mediascape turns interaction into free labor—much like the tracking of consumption habits via check-in apps on social networks.

Among the plasticized signifiers of Internet marketing, Kessler includes three uncanny sculptures of "Global Village Idiots," a recurring motif. Cast from the artist's likeness, the hyperrealistic figures embody a pessimistic inversion of Marshall McLuhan's ideal of a connected world. The laconic gray-bearded Idiots respectively scroll through images on an iPad, iChat with visitors, and masturbate. Their slacker-style verisimilitude provides a startling counterpoint to the commodified images of Web slickness. Drained of aggression and agency, isolated from one another, the Idiots lend a melancholy presence to *The Web*. But when contrasted with Kessler's previous searing critiques of the media, the torpor of the Idiots suggests an insidious apathy. Kessler's work asks if citizens of the iPhone era can escape the reification of our own images, and answers with a shrug. A more polarizing aesthetic question remains: Does countering the Internet's false consciousness begin with demystifying its seductive, nimble surface or with embracing the clusterfuck in its virtual realm? —Wendy Vogel

**Jon Kessler**  
Installation  
view of *The Web*, 2013.

