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Interview



SURFACE TENSION

Once upon a time, in the 1960s, if you were a “good” painter, according to contentious critic Clement Greenberg, you made abstract works with big blocks of color and a little bit of shading to acknowledge that no matter how hard you try, there’s still always some sense of 3-D illusion involved when pigment gets on canvas. Half a century later, a “good” artist makes no fuss about a painting’s status as an object. Which is why 32-year-old Los Angeles-based painter Alex Olson finds herself in the middle. “My paintings have to do with how you read surfaces,” the

CalArts graduate says, referring to her groups of works on very thin stretchers that aren’t quite a series but “a giant conversation among paintings, some of them louder than others.” If her paintings could talk, they’d speak of recurring, very basic shapes, and thin, brushy oils. “They’re of an abstract vernacular but with loads of signification,” Olson says of the deceptive shadows under her flat painterly patterns. Olson makes her solo New York debut at Lisa Cooley Fine Art gallery on September 12. More info at lisa-cooley.com —ALEX GARTENFELD