

NORA GRIFFIN

Nora Griffin was born in New York City in 1982. She received a BA from Oberlin College in 2005 and an MFA from Columbia University in 2011. Nora makes abstract paintings with an emphatic relationship to color, space, and memory. She has shown her work in solo and two-person shows at FIERMAN and Louis B. James in New York. Recent exhibitions include: Chuck Nanney & Nora Griffin at FIERMAN; "Modern Love" at Louis B. James; Intimacy in Discourse: Unreasonable Sized Paintings, curated by Phong Bui at SVA Chelsea Gallery; EXPO Chicago with Louis B. James; Paradise Café, curated by Olivia Smith at Spring/Break Art Show; and NADA NY with Louis B. James. Nora has twice been a resident at the Edward F. Albee Foundation in Montauk, NY and was a fellow at the BAU/Camargo Foundation in Cassis, France. Nora currently teaches painting at Cooper Union in New York and has been a visiting artist at Oberlin College and the Hoffberger School of Painting at MICA. Her writing about contemporary art has appeared in *Art in America* and *The Brooklyn Rail*.

NORA GRIFFIN

Born 1982, New York, NY

Lives and works in Brooklyn, NY

EDUCATION

2011 MFA, Columbia University, School of the Arts

2005 BA, Oberlin College

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2016 *Modern Love*, Louis B. James, New York

SELECT EXHIBITIONS

2017 Chuck Nanney & Nora Griffin, FIERMAN, New York

2016 Abstraction, EDDYSROOM, Brooklyn, NY

2015 *Unreasonable Sized Paintings*, (cur. Phong Bui), SVA Chelsea Gallery

EXPO Chicago Art Fair with Louis B. James

Paradise Café, (cur. Olivia Smith for Exhibition A) Spring/Break, New York

Oysters with Lemon, Ventana244, Brooklyn, NY

2014 *Sisrahtac*, Torrance Shipman, Brooklyn, NY

Image Makers, Novella, New York

My Big Fat Painting, Brian Morris Gallery, New York

Sargent's Daughters, Sargent's Daughters, New York

NADA NY: Nora Griffin, Isaac Resnikoff, Eve Sonneman, Louis B. James

Off White Desert, (3-person show), Louis B. James

2013 *Come Together: Surviving Sandy, Year 1*, (cur. Phong Bui), Industry

City, Brooklyn, NY

Diff'rent Strokes, Louis B. James

Signature Works, Guided By Invoices, New York

The White Album, Louis B. James, New York

2012 *The Double Session*, CTSQ, Long Island City, NY

2011 *Sailors and Shamans*, Marvelli Gallery, New York

Tigers in Red Weather, LeRoy Neiman Gallery, Columbia University

Columbia MFA Thesis Exhibition, Fisher Landau Center, Long Island City

2010 *Durer's Rhinoceros*, LeRoy Neiman Gallery

B-Sides, 6-8 Months Project Space, New York

Hell, No!, St. Cecilia Convent, Brooklyn, NY

Paper Works, Janet Kurnatowski Gallery

2009 *Soft Edge*, Camel Art Space, Brooklyn, NY

Party at Chris' House, (cur. Phong Bui), Janet Kurnatowski Gallery

It's a Wonderful Life, Sideshow Gallery, Brooklyn, NY

2008 *Girl and a Gun*, (solo exhibit), Abaton Garage Gallery, Jersey City, NJ

Party at Phong's House, (cur. Chris Martin), Janet Kurnatowski Gallery

FELLOWSHIPS + RESIDENCIES:

2014 BAU Institute/Camargo Foundation, Cassis, France
2014, 2011 Edward F. Albee Foundation, Montauk, NY
2014, 2011 Woodstock Byrdcliffe Guild, Woodstock, NY
2006, 2010 Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, VT (Wolf Kahn Fellowship)

TEACHING:

Adjunct Professor, Cooper Union, Painting 1, 2016-
Adjunct Professor, School of Visual Arts, 2015-
Adjunct Professor, Columbia University, 2013
Visiting Artist, SUNY New Paltz, 2016
Visiting Artist, Oberlin College, 2016
Visiting Artist, Cooper Union, 2015
Visiting Artist, Maryland Institute College of Art, 2014

WRITING:

Critic, Art in America
Critic, The Brooklyn Rail

COLLECTIONS:

Susan and Michael Hort
Lauder Family Collection
New York Presbyterian Hospital Collection

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Darragh McNicholas, "Nora Griffin: Modern Love," The Brooklyn Rail, April 2016
David Cohen, "Nora Griffin at Louis B. James," artcritical, March 2016
Paul Laster, "10 Things to do in the New York Art World," Observer, March 2016
Alexa Gotthardt, Editorial on Nora Griffin at Louis B. James, Artsy, March 2016
Anneliese Cooper, "9 Must-Sees at Spring Break," BLOUIN ART, March 2015
Kate Messinger, "20 Art Shows to See this Spring," Paper Magazine, March 2015
Roberta Smith, "Art, A Balm After A Storm," The New York Times, Dec. 2013
David Cohen, review of Fool's House, artcritical, Oct. 2010
Becky Brown, cat. Essay, Nora Griffin at Abaton Garage, Sept. 2008

Nora Griffin: *Modern Love*
by Darragh McNicholas
April 6, 2016

In 1962, the American film critic and painter Manny Farber remarked that the idea of a painting as an “expensive hunk of well-regulated area both logical and magical, sits heavily over the talent of every modern painter.” In the half century since Farber’s critique, the grip of this idea has hardly loosened. *New York Magazine* critic Jerry Saltz recently lamented on Instagram that the work of “crapola artist” Adrian Ghenie sold at Sotheby’s London for “\$3.1 million,” stating that Ghenie was “just another artist who makes art that looks like other art that art collectors buy because it looks like what other art collectors buy!” Saltz later apologized and corrected his mistake—the painting sold for \$4.1 million.



Nora Griffin, *Material World*, 2015. Courtesy of the artist and Louis B. James. Photo: Stan Narten.

However frustrating the art market, it’s useful to remember that most artists make work that doesn’t sell, or at least not for much. Many of them simply fail to produce expensive hunks, but others find liberation and pleasure in shirking the baroque stupidity of the market in favor of more serious painterly study. Nora Griffin’s solo exhibition, *Modern Love*, at Louis B. James contained eight works (all 2016) that display a willingness to veer away from the easy sell. *Kamikaze Harlequin*, for example, a painting with a preponderance of convulsive yellow, is incoherent, disparate. A camouflage-patterned zigzag, a wide brush stroke of turquoise, a black and white detail from Edouard Manet’s *The Fifer* (1866), and marks of purple, red, and blue paint don’t offer a respite from the yellow, but an intensification of it.

The painting is self-contradictory. The seemingly haphazard placement of the abstract and representational elements is belied by the studied finish of the painting as a whole. Both the yellow

ground and colored splotches are applied in flat, even layers that point toward careful planning. The disparate elements share a two-dimensional surface like images on the atom-thin plane of a computer screen. As if to subvert this flatness, Griffin integrates the wooden frame, enveloping it in the same skull-shaking yellow as the surface.

Other works in the show recombine the same elements more harmoniously. In *Laight Street* her visual vocabulary of brush strokes, splotches, and zigzags is grounded on un-primed linen. Oil from the paint leaches onto the raw linen, creating an echo of the camouflage motif. In *Material World* the zigzag is reconfigured as a crown, evoking Jean-Michel Basquiat. Other elements, especially those in *1982*, conjure the work of Keith Haring. Her work can embody the same manic, joyous energy as the work of those artists—the same sense of marginalia overtaking some unseen center. Pop, art history, and popular culture all meld together in her paintings. Just as *Kamikaze Harlequin* contained the rather serious reference to Manet, *Sci Fi Scorpio* contains a black and white image of a young Bob Dylan.



Nora Griffin, *Diamond Heart*, 2015. Courtesy of the artist and Louis B. James. Photo: Stan Narten.

While her paintings are laden with references to the history of painting, they're porous to the world around them. Titles like *Laight Street* might resonate with personal meaning for the New York-born artist, but they could just as easily reference one of the early hubs of painting culture in TriBeCa. The date mentioned by the title *1982* is Griffin's birth year, but it also marks the introduction of the loft-law in New York. The city itself seems to blur some of the lines between personal experience and the art historical. In the catalogue for the show, a photograph of her studio wall displays a different kind of porosity. A black and white reproduction of *The Fifer* hangs beside text scribed directly onto drywall, an image of Dylan torn from a magazine, and a mandolin. Another image shows her studio wall stained by oily paint, as in *Laight Street*. For those who have just seen the show, these walls seem like loose studies for her works. They're full of the same eclecticism that mingles the personal, cultural, and historical in inextricable and fluid ways.

artcritical

the online magazine of art and ideas

Sunday, March 27th, 2016

Nora Griffin at Louis B. James

by David Cohen



Nora Griffin, *Diamond Heart*, 2016. Oil on canvas, wood frame, 5 1/2 x 58 1/2 inches. Courtesy of the Artist and Louis B. James.

In the brief interview with painter Peter Gallo that forms the catalog text of her solo exhibition at Louis B. James Gallery, Nora Griffin defines modernism in quirky, poetic terms that befit her winningly idiosyncratic compositions. “I think of modernism as a sensibility that conjoins the emotional inner world to the world of culture,” she says, and goes on to argue that abstraction “was invented to give form to this new sensibility.” It is a “look” that she finds in the eyes of Manet’s portrait of Berthe Morisot. Androgynized transcriptions of Manet faces pop up with some frequency around the show, sunk amidst provisionally executed yet art historically informed stylized grounds. Her paintings feel strangely poised between studio wall notations or scrapbook entries, on the one hand, and big statements about gesture, field and color, on the other. An attitude of studied nonchalance pervades, a throwaway formalism, a hard-won lightness of spirit.

David Bowie, Lucky Cats, and Édouard Manet Mingle in Nora Griffin's "Modern Love"

ARTSY

FEB 26TH, 2016 6:29 PM



Across the walls of Nora Griffin's Brooklyn studio, reference images and scrawled phrases peek from behind the paintings slated for her first New York solo show, at Louis B. James on Manhattan's Lower East Side. In one corner, a detail of Manet's *The Young Flautist* (1866) and an image of Bob Dylan are surrounded by a constellation of scribbles that read "Kamikaze Harlequin Romance" and "The Savage Glitter of Downtown." On another wall, the words "Elizabeth's Studio" are jotted next to a paper cutout of a lucky cat, the cartoonish, talismanic figurines that line windows of Chinese restaurants. "They're kind of gaudy, but I love that they're actually charms; they hold meaning," explains Griffin. "That's something I think about with painting, too. Painting is all things. It's an object that's bought and sold, but it also absorbs a lot of different meanings, whatever the viewer is putting onto it. I guess I have this belief in the magic potential of a painting." Indeed, like the lucky cat or the surfaces of her studio, Griffin's paintings hold many meanings. The canvases on view at Louis B. James aggregate a vast array of techniques, colors, and cultural shards. In *Modern Love* (2015), the show's namesake work, Griffin's own painted rendition of Manet's flautist shows up, floating amongst large, lively brushstrokes, one of them filled with a pattern that recalls Warhol's 1980s camouflage series. The painted phrase, "Modern Love," joins the fun, too, as a nod to David Bowie and perhaps the dance hall-energy of Griffin's gestures as they boogie across the composition. It's a jumbled, pleasing taxonomy of the history of art, where all references are created equal.

Griffin grew up in New York, surrounded by art of all kinds. Her parents worked in film and introduced her to the movies of Muybridge and Godard—she’s reimagined stills from magnum opuses by both directors in earlier paintings. As a child, she rollerbladed around the studio of painter [Elizabeth Murray](#), the mother of a childhood friend and the inspiration for Griffin’s “Elizabeth’s Studio” scribble. Looking at Griffin’s new paintings, one has the impression that she has always been a sponge, absorbing images and information from countless facets of cultural output. Painting, for Griffin, offers a means to fold these sundry references together—and cement the concoction in place. This process becomes especially relevant in a time when images, flashing across social media feeds, rarely have a long shelf life. “I’ve been really concerned with how the image has taken over the social; the way people interact with each other is through images—it’s like a narcotic,” she contemplates. “People have become obsessed with the image and the image standing in for the person, and I think it’s made time rapidly increase. I think of painting as a way to slow down time.”

A visit to Griffin’s show drives her point home. Hers are paintings to spend time with—and draw connections between. “In my mind, each painting leads into the next.” She gestures to *1982* (2016), a loosely composed, graphic painting where pink outlines of shapes resembling amoebas or an exploded camouflage pattern careen across the picture plane, extend onto the frame, and off the canvas. “In this piece, the shapes are moving off the frame, and here they’re contained within the frame. I like that tension and energy,” she says. Across from it hangs *Diamond Heart* (2016), a bright, tightly constructed painting where a monochromatic field of sun yellow is intercepted by hard-edged areas of topsy-turvy patterning, and another Manet detail, this time drawn from *The Old Musician* (1862). Here, Griffin zooms in on the faces of two boys at the center of Manet’s canvas. Their eyes, like black wells, gaze off of opposite sides of the canvas. For Griffin, Manet isn’t only a touchstone when it comes to painterly technique and art historical import. “The faces of the people he paints have what I think of as a modern consciousness,” she explains. “Their eyes are both alive and nonliving. It’s this very strange liminal state.” It’s a state that could characterize our modern existence, caught between physical and digital experiences. It could also describe the effect of Griffin’s paintings—enchanted liminal spaces where symbols that represent cultural history and present mingle.

—Alexxa Gotthardt