

KEVIN GILMORE: RECENT PAINTINGS

Jessica Hagen Fine Art + Design
226 Bellevue Ave #8
Newport, Rhode Island

August 2 through September 7

In his fourth solo show at Newport's Jessica Hagen Fine Art + Design, emerging artist Kevin Gilmore returns to his former locale with a body of mixed-media paintings redolent of journeys, destinations and new digs in Brooklyn.



LEFT: Untitled, MIDDLE LEFT: 03910, MIDDLE RIGHT: Arrondissement, FAR RIGHT: Helmsley Spear

Originally from Rhode Island, Gilmore received his BFA from Rhode Island College in 1999, with a concentration in collage and painting. Looking west, he explored Jackson, Wyoming and Portland, Oregon, embedding himself in their art communities.

Eventually returning to his native state via Newport, he was discovered by gallery owner Jessica Hagen when he wandered as a cold call into Station 29 Gallery, for which she served as director prior to opening her own gallery in 2005. Hagen responded immediately to Gilmore's work, agreeing to represent him exclusively to her well-heeled regional clientele, who gravitated to the unpretentious work of the young painter.

"People that don't typically collect contemporary art also collect Kevin's work," Hagen noted. "There is just something about it, and I think part of it is about the surface, its patina..."

And surface is what Gilmore explores, through non-representational, grid-focused compositions heavily layered in paint, and now the reintroduction of found paper elements with his return to collage. In a welcome departure from the smooth, cool grids

typical of his earlier watercolor and oil paintings, the new work shows a maturity and depth that sprouts from a change of scenery combined with a determined intensity of practice.

Last year, a three-month getaway to the Puglia region of Italy served to imbue Gilmore's once cool, cake-icing palette with a newfound warmth and licheny crackle. Returning stateside, Gilmore made only a brief stop in Newport for a solo show before trading his seaside views in for the hustle and grit of Brooklyn.

The excitement and strain of this extreme shift in lifestyle is evident in "Arrondissement," a tight little painting in acrylic and collage on canvas. The title, found in the silver cover text from an old Parisian map book, clings like a badge to the painting's horizontally banded surface. Like an aged wall, it appears to crack open in minute areas, allowing a hint of crimson lifeblood to peer between strata of peachy veneer tinged with blue.

While the artist has shifted his focus back from the purist application of paint to what he identifies as the "immediacy and adhesive qualities" of archival collage, this exercise has effectively loosened up his

palette and brushwork in a way that allows for a more satisfying exploration of surface. By virtue of symbol recognition, the incorporation of found text also opens a wider dialogue between the image and the viewer.

The introduction of printed or incised text often references locales, such as the work "03910," which incorporates a collaged tag of the same number sequence; and, at least to the American eye, might suggest a zip code. Consider this a coincidence, as the artist does not intend to present a specific place in his work; rather, the emotion of geography translates to a surface, which may or may not contain the elements, shapes or colors of a found map, the artist's surroundings, or collective memory.

If the paintings themselves were not so expertly executed, with their rich surfaces and mature color relationships, one might find this apparent contradiction problematic. Instead, a satisfying balance is struck, as Gilmore sets his stage in such a way to permit the viewer to react on a gut level to his work while still reading formal cues integrated through text and collage. At his best, Gilmore presents a vehicle for savoring the journey to any destination.

Meredith Cutler