



NEW YORK

Aaron Parazette
Marlborough Chelsea

In his second solo show at Marlborough Gallery (this time in its new Chelsea space), Aaron Parazette presents nine large, acrylic-on-canvas paintings that are pure wordplay. Actually, it's a fierce game of circles, lines, crosses and curves, where words as carriers of language lose out entirely to the voluptuous elements that comprise them—letters.

From a distance, these paintings register as bright, loose arrangements of letterlike shapes on flat backgrounds. Up close, they become almost purely abstract: geometrically segmented areas of pastel color edged by fine lines in complementary hues. In terms of style, execution and palette, this group reasonably follows earlier Parazette work that took up decorative, graphic-design-inspired imagery (i.e., splashes, drips, ovals and “curls and swirls” on striped backgrounds).

Regarding Parazette's new work reminds me of listening to a typographer discuss his art and being struck by its otherworldliness—ascenders and descenders, kerning, the width of serifs, etc. There is powerful seduction in the shapes of letters that readers generally take for granted yet thoroughly perceive on an unconscious level. Indeed, hyperawareness of typography gets in the way of reading. Despite its rigor and richness, the typographer's art must remain a humble sleight of hand.

Under no such constraints, Parazette appears to share the typographer's passion but not the humility: the backward-arching curve of the *r* in *Trim* is flamboyant and decadent; the hard, white *o* in *Surf Dog* has the punch of a bull's-eye, made more emphatic on a black background. Though I enjoy the dynamic interaction of the paintings' shapes and colors and greatly admire their precision (Parazette's measuring, taping and application of paint are sheer perfection), I wonder what is to be gained by

L. Aaron Parazette, *Surf Dog*, 2007; acrylic on canvas; 70 x 64 inches

R. *Trim*, 2007; acrylic on canvas; 56 x 46 inches

pondering the words in these works (the other seven incorporate their respective titles, *Bitchin*, *Bomb*, *Da Cat*, *Kook*, *Dialed*, *Frothing* and *Full On*).

Unlike, say, the work of Christopher Wool or Glenn Ligon, where words remain linguistically charged though visually transformed, Parazette seems to bypass linguistic meaning altogether to get at the imagemaking potential of words. Yet whether an amusement or an annoyance in their whole form, these words are not tools for production until they're broken apart.

Parazette is a Southern California native and surfing aficionado, so it's tempting to attribute his bright, colorful palette to a fondness for sunny climes and the presumably shallow depths of beach culture. Other “sunny” artists come to mind, namely Wayne Thiebaud and Ed Ruscha. Though Thiebaud, an Arizona native who transplanted to Southern California, is best known for painting cakes and pies, they are no more the subject of his work than words are the concern of the Los Angeles-based Ed Ruscha. Parazette fits easily into a discussion of these quintessentially American artists because in all three cases, production and consumption are the real subjects of the work. But since this is visual culture we're talking about, it's the eyes that are doing the consuming. Not coincidentally, all three artists are seduced by the tricks of the graphic design trade: color, line, shadow, typography, the relationship of fore- and background—all the elements that grab and guide the eye. Frankly, I don't know if any of this plays a part in Parazette's thinking. It might be pretty simple. If pictures are worth a thousand words, perhaps Parazette sees things the opposite.

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