

Emojis and Emotion: New Painting by Margaux Ogden by Natalie Hegert



Margaux Ogden: Chekhov's Gun at ltd los angeles

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Pain'ing. In casual parlance that's how we usually pronounce it, isn't it? The "t" drops off the lazy American palate, moored on the tip of the tongue. How's your pain'ing going? Are you still pain'ing?

Margaux Ogden makes pain'ings. It's a convenient contraction for thinking about the young New York-based artist's work. There's pain there, definitely. But there's also an ease about her work. I don't mean to imply that she paints with blasé indifference. No, these are real pain'ings — full of struggle, anxiety, sadness, confusion, redemption, turmoil — but they're not agitated, overworked, or even particularly expressive. Rather, they're composed of fluid and confident freehand gestures, in evenly fragmented compositions, rendered in blocks of cool mint pastels, luxe lavenders, rich burgundies, and little pops of fluorescence. Sleek but not slick, there's nothing jarring or discordant in these paintings. They're easy on the eyes, is one way to put it.

But get a little closer, close enough to read the Basquiat-like texts embedded within the composition, and you find blips of neurosis, little obsessions, anxious mantras, mysterious notes and numbers. The phrase "high hopes for ya" floats in bright pink script at the top of a painting, ominously titled *Cursed from the Start* (all works 2015), almost sardonically out of reach, while the message "5/386 RELATIONSHIP SABOTEURS" screams slightly from the side. A kind of symbolic shorthand emerges throughout the suite of seven paintings, on view now at ltd los angeles: dollar signs, rectangular forms that resemble open laptops, a little desert cactus, a yin yang symbol, winking eyes — "emoji lyf," she writes. Some forms are more inscrutably evocative: a four-legged shape is repeated among several of the canvases, like little Lascaux cave paintings, or maybe they're representations of the "analytic sofa" whispered in pastel blue on a canvas called *Being Human is Embarrassing*.



One pseudonymous observer of Ogden's first solo exhibition, at Freight + Volume in New York earlier this year, proclaimed that her work "[speak\[s\] to our generation, the millennial.](#)" It's an apt characterization, in fact. These paintings pulse with pieces of the fragmented, distracted, abstract self, out there fixed in the digital ether or reverberating ad nauseam in your skull. Overheard phrases, something your ex said, awkward text messages, ephemeral Snapchats you just can't forget. "THANK U FOR THE SEX." Ogden's paintings exhibit a cool and calm exterior, punctured with stabs of anxiety, humiliation, worry. A visual approximation of the gap between the real you and the you of your Instagram account. One composition, with its contrasting blocks of vivid turquoise and raw canvas, stands like a *Guernica* (1937) for a generation that's never experienced war firsthand: equivocal, conflicted, chameleonic. The title of Ogden's Los Angeles show is "Chekhov's Gun," referring to the dramatic principle that you should only put a gun on the stage if at some point in the narrative it goes off. No element is superfluous, she suggests. But I don't know if I take her word for it.



Perhaps the invocation of this dramatic device serves more as a way to reassure us: all this is necessary. All the pain and drama and failure and elation and fucked up dreams. All the promissory notes and overdrawn bank accounts and paranoid thoughts. This whole collection of material objects, this paint on canvas: it's all vital, needed, intentional. But in the end, it's all theater.

Ogden paints on unprimed canvas. Mistakes and missteps can't be gessoed over. There's no "undo" button in her painting. Like life, of course.