

# SOMETHING TO ADD

John Haber - 2010  
New.York Art.Crit

## CLAIRE SEIDL

Topics: Brice Marden, Claire Seidl, Horton gallery, Lesley Heller, Matthew Marks, Rachel Uffner, Roger White, Wallace Whitney

At seventy-two, not every artist has something to add. Brice Marden does—and not just seven new canvases, a dozen large works on paper, and a room of older drawings. He also adds gray, in a border to either side. But addition was always a vital part of his painting. Curves and ground weave and trace over one another, sometimes fading out at their own edges, in degrees of brightness, opacity, color, and shadow. Each painting's date, the entire range of years since Marden's 2006 retrospective, also makes clear how painstakingly it grew. However, its stopping short of the edge, at Matthew Marks through December 23, is something new.

For the catalog, Jeffrey Weiss describes the addition in formal terms, as "a complex play of color and value in pictorial space." For me, the gray acts more as the paradox of a neutral point of reference in an indefinite space. And Marden's underpainting recedes more than ever before. The strips also represent a margin, identifying the central field with a page and its characters that much more with calligraphy. A trip East helped inspire his transition in the 1970s from nearly monochrome compositions to long, gentle lines an inch thick, with their echoes of Asian art. Marden has traveled again since his retrospective, and he calls the new series "Letters." In an age of globalization, one could call it his letters to the world.

One can see the verticals, too, as in quiet dialog with his own earlier paintings. In fact, for a time his work had fields at top or bottom. Now in gray, the additions are literally self-effacing (not to mention a little boring). They are also figuratively so, refusing the

"all-over painting" of Jackson Pollock. Meanwhile, by still extending to the top and bottom of the canvas, the increasingly muted central swirls refuse self-expression in the western tradition of a framed, signed image. They are a majestic signature all the same.



### BYGONES WILL BE BYGONES

For some time, gestural abstraction has promised a sure route to academic drivel, especially on an easel scale. Wallace Whitney, at Horton through today, gets away with it by making a real virtue of drivel—or even taking it literally. He combines broad strokes out of Willem de Kooning with watery colors closer to Arshile Gorky, like expressionist sign painting. Roger White replaces de Kooning's or Gorky's echoes of human flesh with the clothing to cover it. What look like flat, floating shapes out of early Ad Reinhardt, at Rachel Uffner through December 19, derive from shirts and rags. Today even an apparent return to esthetic purity embraces signs of the times.

Claire Seidl, at Lesley Heller through December 19, comes closer in form to Marden himself. She works in layers not always easy to order or to tell apart. The topmost often approach calligraphy, in thin marks that sometimes break up entirely. Up close their textures, from liquid to dry, contrast with the denser painting below. From further back the entire composition may resemble brickwork or water. One could take the reds or greens for substance, shadow, or reflections.

Seidl's photographs from a few years ago work much the same way. In time, the dark interiors settled into people and furniture. The paintings use color freely, but with the same sense of darkness. The deeper the pictorial space, the closer it comes to shadow or surface. For all I know, it might have swallowed up her whole family again. That could give new meaning to the term second-generation Abstract Expressionist.