

Meliksetian MB Briggs

John Miller *New Horizon*

November 18, 2023 - January 20, 2024

Opening Reception:
Saturday, November 18th 4-7pm
Artist Walkthrough 5:30pm



Meliksetian | Briggs is pleased to present *New Horizon*, a selection of works by New York and Berlin-based artist **John Miller**. This exhibition, the artist's first in Texas, features paintings, sculpture, works on paper, and photo-based works spanning the 1980s to the present. Comprised of various series from a forty-plus-year career, Miller's project critiques systems of representation, commodification, and production, of political and libidinal economies and social relations in the public and private space.

While an integral part of Miller's practice since his early career in the 1980s, painting is the genre Miller has consistently challenged, particularly its inherent associations and reception. Whether ironically quoting styles like regionalist painting or social realism, or using generic imagery from postcards, comic books, or reality TV as subject matter - "pictures of pictures" - or making abstract works in a "surrogate" style, intending to evoke a layman's idea of artistry, Miller remains acutely aware of the implicit culturally-loaded, regressive nature of painting. Hence, he deploys strategies to subvert and destabilize the genre. The current exhibition features an early brown impasto abstract painting, a pedestrian painting, various game show paintings, and new paintings that juxtapose photographic elements with brown impasto forms.

In the 1980s, artist and critic Thomas Lawson argued that, as part of a critique of value in art, the "impetus...was to bring the political agenda of alternative media (i.e. performance, video) back to painting" using it as a veritable "trojan horse," as a rhetorical platform. *Untitled* (1987), a totem-like abstract painting, is made using what became Miller's "signature" burnt sienna brown, alluding to dirt, excrement, and the human body, "a trademark no one wanted, a repugnant trademark" in the artist's words. The work comments on the abstract expressionist tropes of the ostensibly transcendent art object, the brushstroke, and mark-making as an index of subjectivity and the artwork as the product of artistic mastery.

This early abstract work appears alongside a mandala-like, figurative painting, *Learning to Cope* (1999). Here, Miller juxtaposes the repeated form of a *Price is Right* contestant against a blue sky and multicolor pills. This early digitally printed painting, a machine-made work, seemingly eliminates craft and expressive brushstrokes so prominent in the abstract artwork beside it. The political economy of this game, that there is a correct price for every commodity, confronts the prospect of tending to the psyche with religion or drugs.

In *Stasis* (2017), the depiction of *The Price is Right* stage highlights the "double staging" inherent in representation. A television screen within a television screen is the focal point of the painting. This nesting calls attention to the subject matter depicted in the painting's illusionistic space and the viewer configured in the real space on the opposite side of the picture plane. This configuration represents a surrogate family - the subject and object of TV technology - the jocular host, his attractive assistants, and the jubilant contestants. Also implicated is the unseen vicarious viewing audience, engrossed in the circulation and accumulation of goods via chance or luck rather than a usual work/labor equation.

Photography manifests itself throughout Miller's oeuvre. His ongoing *Middle of the Day* project (1994-present) serves as a reservoir of photographic imagery. Often, between the hours of 12 - 2 pm, no matter where he happens to be at that time, Miller shoots a photo, and this has led to an archive of hundreds of portraits, still lifes, and landscapes made in locations worldwide. Here, this imagery appears in graphite drawings based on, at one remove, pictures in this archive. The centerpiece of the main gallery, a large-scale wallpaper installation entitled *Reflection* (2023), also derives from this archive, as does the pedestrian painting (2016) that sits alongside it.

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Standing in a group on a street corner, the figures in this work form a “social portrait.” Miller rendered the group by hand in grayscale on a shaped panel, standing directly on the gallery floor. In so doing, he cropped-out the background cityscape. In their near three-dimensionality, the figures address the public space, social relations within it, and its conflation with the gallery space.

In *Untitled* (2004), a photograph of an empty road serves as a backdrop for Miller’s investigation into the social hierarchies of the personal ad. Once seen as a somewhat desperate last resort, the personal ad, in which a person tries to “sell” him- or herself, has now become a widespread and socially acceptable practice. By making one’s taste, class, race, sexual preferences, and socioeconomic status explicit, these ads transform one’s own need for emotional and sexual fulfillment into another good or service in the marketplace. Miller took extracts of these ads from various magazines and newspapers and superimposed them over this image.

In Miller’s most recent works, his signature brown impasto reappears as an intervention or interruption in public space, namely that of Manhattan’s Civic Center district. It is an area rife with government and corporate apparatuses: checkpoints, barriers, guard booths, and surveillance cameras. It has also been a destination for political protests in recent years. Miller photographed this neighborhood to produce digital inkjet prints over which he superimposed thick, rectangular impastos. These sometimes read as public sculptures (albeit those that interfere with the physical negotiation of the public space) or as barricades.

Commercial mannequins have appeared in Miller’s work since the early 1990s. When exhibited, they function as a stand-in or surrogate for the viewer and thus activate the gallery space. In *Sideboard* (2012), Miller flips the mannequin’s legs over its torso, a theatrical, absurd Dada-esque gesture.

Artist, writer and musician John Miller (b. 1954, Cleveland OH) has exhibited extensively since his first solo show at White Columns, New York in 1982. Major solo exhibitions include a 2021 exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bielefeld entitled Public / Counterpublic, An Elixer of Immortality at the Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin 2020, a 2016 mid-career retrospective I Stand, I Fall at the Institute of Contemporary Art / ICA Miami curated by Alex Gartenfeld (catalog); a 2011 exhibition at the Museum Ludwig, Cologne in conjunction with his being awarded the prestigious Wolfgang Hahn Prize (cat.); A Refusal to Accept Limits, a 2009 mid-career retrospective at the Kunsthalle Zurich curated by Beatrix Ruf (cat.); Consolation Prize at the Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver (a two-person collaboration with Mike Kelley) (cat.); and Parallel Economies, Le Magasin, Centre National d’Art Contemporain de Grenoble, France (cat.).

Miller has been a professor at Barnard College, Columbia University, New York since 2000 and this is the artist’s fifth exhibition at the gallery, including two shows with frequent collaborator Richard Hoeck. His work can be found in collections worldwide including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Whitney Museum of Art, New York, the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam among others.

Miller’s extensive archive can be found at www.lownoon.com. Follow him @[the_middle_of_the_day](https://twitter.com/the_middle_of_the_day)