

NEW YORK
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FAX

Eva Lundsager at JACK TILTON, 11 January–11 February
David Moreno at FEATURE, 15 December–14 January
Carl Ostendarp at JAY GORNEY, 7 January–4 February

Eva Lundsager exercises drip management, meticulously ornamenting the fact that dry paint is a still image of its original sticky viscousness. When paint runs, its many little legs obey gravity according to the density of its dilution. Lundsager, by skewing her supports while applying paint, renders its wetness festively weightless. Paint-drips conventionally signify a relaxation of the artist's control, even when that loss has been rehearsed over and over again. Lundsager's small paintings, however, leave no doubt about the drip's iconographic character: They are insistently and ingeniously constructed.

Lundsager's arrested drips appear as jewels embedded in diminutive, densely organized picture settings. Surrounding marks register different speeds of application as they move in and around the frozen spills. They assert that the spill's flow has stopped, while articulating the enveloping space. In *Old Wound Aches* (all works, 1994), orange dots punctuate the drips. Lundsager gets *inside* the drip, sometimes slowing its pace and at other times giving it a prosthetic extension. In *Makes It Matter*, drips run uphill: Gravity obeys unfamiliar rules in a reoriented, horizonless habitat.

A spill effectively washes away traces of the hand that made it, but Lundsager multiplies variations of her hand's trace around each picture. Carefully painted dots, flat shapes, and blurred smudges give a sense that the artist has modified her work numerous times. Her spills are trimmed and pruned, cultivated like a garden. The paintings organize wildness in a pastoral mode; each image coheres like a miniature world where order and disorder each have their measured place.

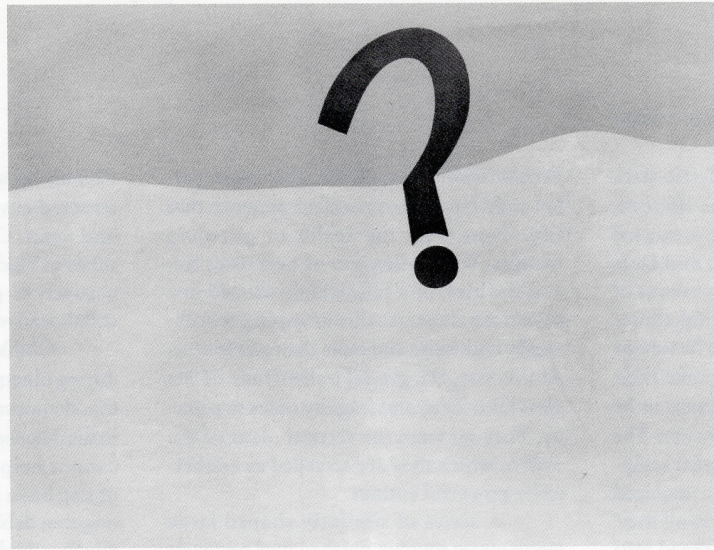
While Lundsager's attention fixates on the spill, David Moreno's inheres in surface disturbances. His paintings are like membranes: The thin wall that separates our space from the fictional world within the picture is given special prominence by the way Moreno alternately highlights and dissolves the presence of his paintings' surfaces. In *Dark Devi* (all works, 1994), radiant little ball bearings, each surrounded by a halo of light



Eva Lundsager
Makes It Matter, 1994
Oil on wood
6" x 8"

David Moreno
The Sun Is Old and He's Falling, 1994
Oil, pigments, and plaster on polyester
84" x 54"

Carl Ostendarp
A Kick in Time, 1994
Casein and latex paint on linen
106" x 140"



dots, are distributed like constellations across a washy nocturnal expanse. A necklacelike string of nonrepeating colored balls drops from the top of the picture to encircle the expanse. *The Sun Is Old and He's Falling* likewise represents a large area of sky punctuated by surface interruptions. Instead of tiny hard ball bearings, however, these celestial orbs are deflated larger ones; their equivocal radiance is rendered by wrinkles in the canvas where each shriveled ball, like a dead flower, is attached. The dramatically vacillating scale, between diminutive real things and cosmically proportioned fictional ones, suggests that these works are related to occult diagrams. Moreno's relation to this genre, however, is complicated; his labored surfaces can suggest a history of faithfully patinated affections, or signify entropy, aversion, and exhaustion. The exquisitely crafted articulation and distress of the surfaces testifies to the artist's sustained preoccupation with those objects—each having been worked and reworked over time.

In two works, Moreno uses a mirror as a support. Here, too, obstacles that disturb the object's transparency give the act of peering-in a symbolic value. The act of looking-out was often portrayed in the romantic tradition by using an image of the horizon. The extended horizontal edge that marks the limit of vision is outside physical reach, yet when painted, becomes available to touch. The scale of our relation to space is given bodily proportion. In *The Sun Is Old*, Moreno renders the earth low and brown. Ground and sky are conscripted to support a more symbolic dichotomy of matter and spirit; the horizon, like gravity, haunts our perception of the pictorial space. The stable horizon anchors our perception of things while receding endlessly at our advance.

Carl Ostendarp uses the horizon in ways that avoid the symbolizing dichotomies favored by Moreno. Indeed, Ostendarp's work makes a virtue of its dopey muteness. The impeccable timing and sly second-handedness of his imagery is often appreciated as a commentary on contemporary painting, while his irreverent tone usually discourages interpretations along personal lines. This exhibition continues the same duh-reductivism, but now gives greater emphasis to painting as a signifying practice. In *A Kick in Time* (all works, 1994), the horizon intersects the hook of a large periwinkle question mark.

The image is a caricature of hermeneutic solicitation: It asks us, with smiley innocence, to consider the subject of the work to be merely a question. The meandering edge between pink sky and washy, off-white ground takes the position of a blank sentence punctuated by the oversized question mark. Likewise, in *Untitled* the stem of an exclamation point sits on the horizon, separated from its anchoring dot below.

Like Lundsager, Ostendarp makes much of paradoxical wetness. One untitled image of a flat, carefully delineated, turquoise cartoon splatter sits with mock exuberance on a washy violet ground. Ostendarp's signature pastel colors happily derail his clean-cut neoformalist project. The colors have such a perfect off-pitch sweetness that their sense of place is never far from the nursery. His work encourages us to ask whether abstraction's traditional aspiration to claim a space outside language is better thought of as an object of ridicule. Perhaps we can best appreciate the depth of that aspiration when it is being burlesqued.

Abstract painting has suffered a fall from Eden. In describing how the nineteenth century viewed the eighteenth century, art historian Jean Starobinski also describes a bit of our fascination with early abstract painting: "images of a paradise already tormented by melancholy at the prospect of its own destruction, mortally wounded by a fault implicit in its pleasure." Lundsager, Moreno, and Ostendarp may each have cultivated a different image of paradise, but, through their respective methods and attitudes, their works also contain a sense of the fault built into the utopian aspirations of abstract painting.

David Humphrey is a painter who shows at McKee Gallery. His New York Fax appears regularly in *Art issues*.