

# SUPERFICE

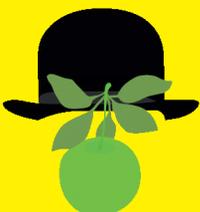
Chris Hanlon

Daniel Karrer

Selma Parlour

An [appleandhat.com](http://appleandhat.com) exhibition for  
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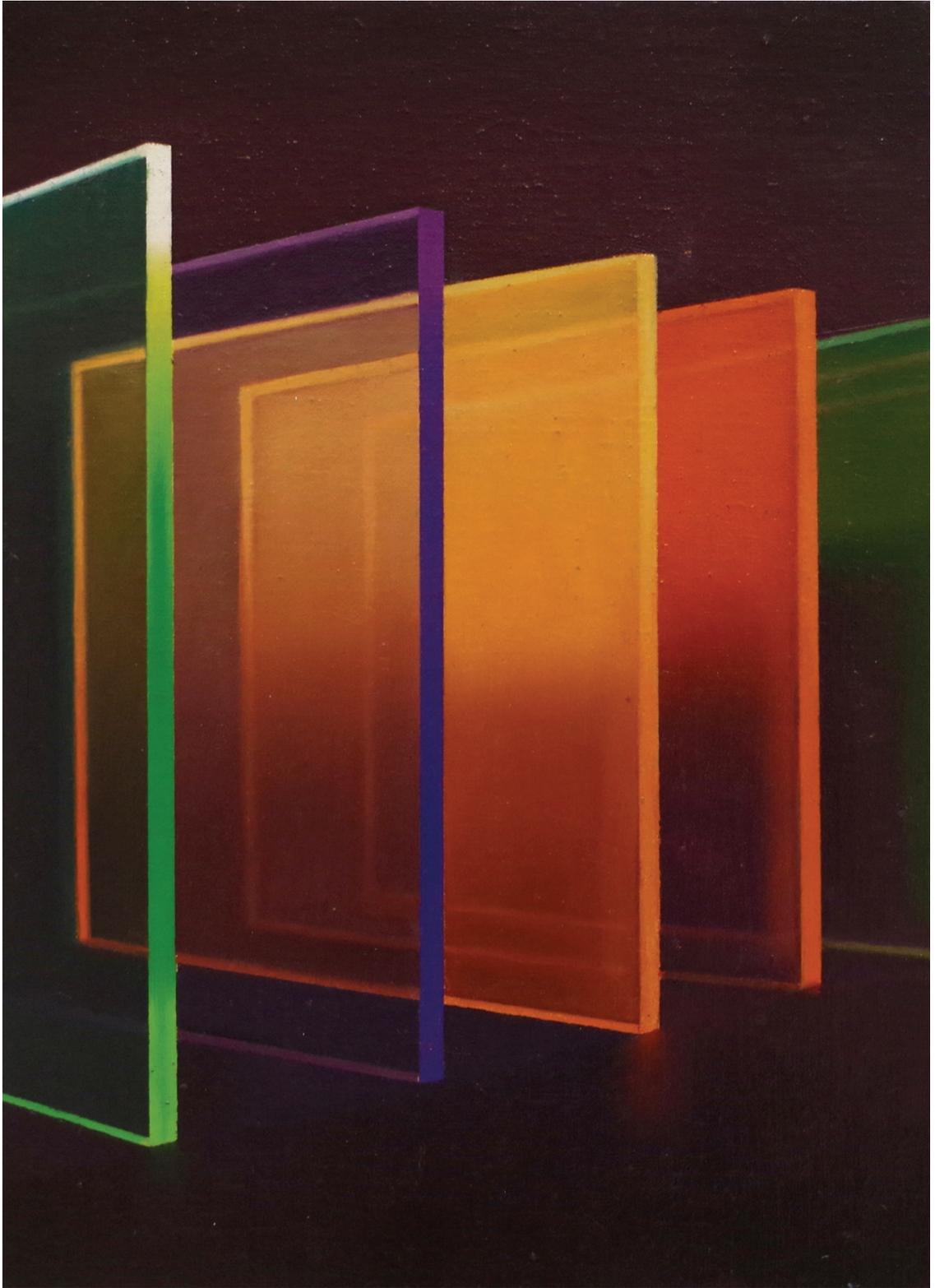


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# HANLON

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Chris Hanlon: Spectrum, 2021, oil on linen on wood, 40cm x 30cm  
© & courtesy the artist/Domobaal

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I've always been interested in abstraction within figuration, in a sense on a formal level I see no difference really, it's all about form, tone, composition within the confines of the canvas. In fact, when I'm making a lot of my work I paint them upside down or on the side in order to tease out this emphasis on abstraction and to see the shapes within the negative space. But I always start with an image because I like my work to relate to lived experience and also perhaps to offer some sort of a touchstone. I like hinting at wider concerns such as notions of hierarchies of subject matter – that if one thing matters then everything does regardless of its origin.

The idea [in 'Superfice'] of painterly resistance, for me, also relates to the exhibition's focus on surface and illusion, because I always paint using the same release of energy, or pace, across the whole surface in order to achieve a muted neutral register. I like that the eye is not drawn to one area, then jarringly to another and so on but, instead, the whole image is scanned almost lethargically and uninterruptedly. It's a quality I admire in works by artists like Zurbarán, Morandi, Vija Celmins and even Magritte.

I often like to frame or crop the imagery in a way that quite self-consciously echoes certain aspects of abstract or formalist painting, allowing me to deal with flat planes of colour, subtle tonal shifts, gradations, etc, while retaining a somewhat believable illusionistic space. This ostensibly allows me to have one foot in and one foot out of abstraction, creating an openness in my practice that permits me to explore a wide range of imagery reflecting on concerns outside of painting.

The shallow depth of field/shadow found in a lot of my work often correlates to, or is the spatial equivalent of, the physical depth of the canvas support itself, which I think re-enforces its 'objectness' as opposed to a window or portal 'through' as it were. I find a certain satisfaction in this interrelation that chimes with a certain sense of all-overness and visual 'rightness' I admire in elements of geometric abstraction and minimalism.

You could say abstraction, particularly geometric or hard-edged abstraction, is basically forms without shadow, but I'm as interested in the reverse and often play with shadows as compositional forms or structures in their own right. The shadows and forms are interdependent for me.

A lot of my recent images, and particularly those featured in 'Superfice', come from online industrial or commercial companies like AliExpress or Alibaba, which feels like a slightly perverse source. I think I'm drawn to advertising's standardised, matter-of-fact presentation of objects, the deliberate use of lighting, featureless backgrounds, and so on, which create that sterile quality used to emphasise the specific characteristics of the products on view.

In themselves, I hate these images, they are cold and calculated (shallow by depth and shallow by nature) designed to sell things, but I enjoy that tension and the challenge of plucking them out of that context and admitting them into the context of painting. For me, they become a potentially illuminating stand-in for certain attitudes and conditions indicative of our time, both art historically (no centre, any subject matter is fair game, everything refers to something else), but also culturally or politically (commerce, online selling, consumerism, etc).

By translating these sterile digitalised images onto linen with oil paint – already unlikely bedfellows – there is a transformation of the material thingness at play. Through the inherent lushness and hand-made facture of oil painting that coldness gets warmed up a little, and the implication and meaning is shifted, particularly when in close proximity to other images.

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# KARRER

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Daniel Karrer: Untitled, 2019, oil reverse-glass painting, 24cm x 18cm  
© & courtesy the artist/Tony Wuethrich Galerie

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The definition of the exhibition title “Superfice” (its relationship to the surface and external appearance) has a lot to do with my work and painting in general. I am concerned with this appearance of the material – oil paint – as a skin, the surface of an object that has no real body, no mass. It is empty and superficial like a digital product that is only composed of pixels arranged next to each other.

If one looks closely, the colour exposes and reveals itself in its various states (consistency, thinness, thickness, toughness, transparency, opacity, softness, hardness). At the same time, it triggers associations with a feeling of other materials.

As soon as the colour is recognised as the material it is (oil paint), the viewer is brought back to the flat picture plane. The eye oscillates in these shallows between illusion and colour that is adhered to the glass pane.

As you have probably noticed, there are paintings that are more abstract and those that are more representational. I am always looking for the balancing act. Some works show a thing that is on the verge of being between abstract and figurative, some are reminiscent of landscapes, others more figurative.

Since 2016, I paint, pretty much solely, using the technique of reverse painting on glass. Mostly in oil, sometimes also using acrylic behind glass. From the beginning, this technique has been an inspiration for many of my painterly inventions. The range of marks that can be made and traces left on the glass is very wide. I can paint the surface almost industrially perfect, or I can also let the ductus of the brush become visible – depending on the consistency of the paint or the pressure of the brush.

It is a bit of a contradiction to lock the paint, which is the sensual part of painting, behind a pane of glass. But, at the same time, the colour has a heightened presence. An increased luminosity and sharpness. I can cut out the shapes with a spatula, which gives these sharp edges.

It is difficult for me to say what motifs I choose and why. I select ones in each case that I feel are suitable for the intention behind the work and that will convey a specific visual ‘feeling’. The motif is actually only a pretext, but there is often something hidden, not quite visible, veiled or shining through behind a dark tint throughout my work. Or then, in contrast, the representation of a “something” that is quite theatrically, sharply lit and clearly displayed on a stage, but it remains uncertain exactly what it is.

This probably has to do with a sense of doubt. Everything is simply not always so clear, and my attitude is maybe also nourished by the fact that I am a synaesthete. For example, letters, names, days of the week, months or numbers are clearly connected to a colour for me. This is an invisible reality that only exists for me personally. I think this feeling of ambiguity runs throughout my work.

In the studio, I’m currently experimenting with acrylic paint. I want to lose a bit of control again and am working a bit more with chance. The acrylic paint doesn’t stick very well to glass and flakes off easily when it gets wet again. I am learning to work with this imposed dissolution of the painting, by actively peeling and scraping the paint off. The effect is a little different, not so clean as in past works. I think it’s a beginning ... on the other hand, I also like making very simple, reduced paintings. Right now, I’m playing with what direction the work should take ... or maybe, as usual, I will try to do everything at the same time.

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# PARLOUR

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Selma Parlour: Have At It, 2020, oil on linen, 76cm x 61cm  
© & courtesy the artist/Pi Artworks London

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I'm preoccupied with preordained parameters, chiefly the convention of a bare rectangular two-dimensional prepared field hung on a wall at an approximate eye level. Abstraction, so the viewer cannot cognitively convert any illusion; effectively my paintings are diagrams: space represented, yet curtailed. My surfaces are immaculate and haptic to invite the viewer's scrutiny.

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**Selma Parlour: Smack Dab XV, 2020, oil on linen, 41cm x 30cm**  
© & courtesy the artist/Pi Artworks London

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Abstract painting is synonymous with a truncated conception of space, the autonomy of my work is that this is taken to the extreme, so image and surface are a hairs-width apart. This is achieved through transparent colour that is 'backlit' (by the white primer beneath) to emulate how we receive images on screens, and by the preparation of my surfaces where soft flaws in the linen are perceptible as ghosts rather than textures. These are oil paintings but there are no ridges of paint or brush strokes in evidence, instead they look as though they've been drawn or printed, or as if the pigment is embedded, which in a way it is.

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# Superfice (from the Latin superficies)

- 1 : a surface of a body or a region of space**
- 2 : the external aspects or appearance of a thing**

The most asked question in the gallery so far has been about my decision to put the three artists in Superfice – Chris Hanlon, Daniel Karrer and Selma Parlour – together. The main gist of my answer is the fact that I'm familiar with what they do, mostly for having written on their works. The exhibition has been almost two years in discussions, due to Covid. I couldn't have made it, given the temporary impossibility of studio visits, without having had significant contact with each practice. The texts in this publication, generously provided by the artists, reveal many facets about their processes, the work and the experience of having it shown in a group show context.

It was visiting Parlour's London solo exhibition, 'Activities for the Abyss', at Pi Artworks in 2019 that gifted me the germ of the exhibition idea (gift + germ are perhaps odd friends, if both of relevance to her carefully and precisely constructed compositions). Parlour's paintings are formally striking, siren-like in their delivery of a compositional ruse, to pull one to the surface and examine it. On the one hand, this serves to disavow us of certain pictorial preconceptions we may have had about her processes – she has the technical ability to make paint appear as if printed, or otherwise produced than by hand. On the other, to ask questions about the nature of the archi-spatial game she appears to have set up.

I had been looking for an opportunity to show Swiss artist Karrer's works in the UK since writing about his work a few years ago. His oil reverse-glass paintings are visceral and distinctly unfussy in manufacture but, like Parlour's, they also alert us seductively to the vagaries of the screen and how we receive and process this imagery. He seemed like a natural fit for the project. What's been startling when handling these works, is the impact of being able to inspect the reverse side, discover all manner of painterly visual dynamics in play. The shiny slickness implied at distance is actually constructed via a weft of applied marks and scratchings that reconnect us with the history of painting.

Similarly, Hanlon is also interested in the image economy, the relevance of painting to discussion around it, and his mastery of the medium has to be experienced in the flesh. For all the skill in evidence, it's his ability to hone in on the material qualities and narrative aspects of the pre-existing images he works from that determines visual 'success'. Painting onto linen adhered to board he is able to work the surface in a different way than if it had been stretched onto a frame. Each image appears to also function as frank and sometimes testy love to letter to the act of making it. Braille-like bobbles and tiny specks of light from the ground underneath make them surprisingly thingly as two-dimensional interpretations.

I enjoy the odd sense of tension these works foster – a mix of curiousness at what we are looking at and frustration that for all the implied possibility of sites, objects and spaces the gaze is essentially kept within a very shallow depth of field. Frame-by-frame in the gallery, they give one a sense of the cursor-hover, partial glimpses of possible real-life moments that can appear as our eyes pass over their surfaces.