



Surface Tension

El Anatsui, Mark Bradford, Kadar Brock, Cecily Brown, Sarah Crowner,
Sam Gilliam, Sterling Ruby, Sean Scully, Ryan Sullivan, Lesley Vance,
Rebecca Ward, Garth Weiser

Exhibition Dates: September 17 – December 12, 2015

Opening Reception: Thursday, September 17, 6-8PM

NEW YORK, NY – **The FLAG Art Foundation** presents *Surface Tension* from **September 17 – December 12, 2015**, on FLAG's 9th floor gallery. *Surface Tension* focuses on a selection of contemporary artists whose approach to abstraction incorporates a range of materials, processes, and techniques – such as sanding, stitching, dying, and layering – to draw attention to the dynamic potential of a painting's surface.

Sam Gilliam, associated with the influential Washington Color School of the 1950s and 1960s, contorts, folds, drapes, and dyes raw canvas to profound effect. Gilliam's *Out*, 1969, showcases the 82 year old artist's early experiments with poured paint on unprimed canvases, resulting in a vibrant composition of saturated colors. This particular work is beveled at the edges, an effort on Gilliam's part to make the painting appear more object-like.¹ The materiality of canvas plays a central role in **Sarah Crowner's** *Untitled (Leaves)*, 2015, a diptych of sewn, painted panels that plays with repetition of color and form. Created for the exhibition, **Rebecca Ward's** patchwork paintings *M (red herring)*, 2015, and *allegator*, 2015, are made of cotton batting and sheep-skin, resulting in textured and tactile surfaces that shift the rigidity of a systematic abstract works. **El Anatsui** combines the visual language of painting and sculpture in his draped wall-work *Telesma*, 2014, which intricately weaves together found objects from across West Africa – discarded liquor bottle caps, wrappers, bits of metal and wood – to reflect his interest in consumption and reuse, and address the region's colonial legacy.

Surface Tension also highlights artists who explore the materiality of paint on canvas, transforming a means of representation into a vehicle for building texture and depth. **Kadar Brock's** *deredemirtaxi(tolb)*, 2015, was constructed, or more accurately worn down, through a labor-intensive (and often repeated) process of underpainting, priming, and power-sanding, producing a work whose tattered and marbled composition serves as evidence to its making. **Ryan Sullivan's** monumental drip paintings *March 8, 2014-April 15, 2014*, 2014, and *Untitled*, 2014, build layer upon layer of paints (oil, enamel, lacquer, latex and synthetic polymer paint) to create a three-dimensional relief surfaces. In a similar vein, **Garth Weiser's** *FYI, I am not the DJ Story from Poland or Venezuela. I am the DJ Story who was born in Jamaica and is currently holding it down in Asheville, NC*, 2013, employs what the artist refers to as "interference patterns," which generate distinctive textures, dimensionality, and implied space. **Mark Bradford's** large-scale canvas *The Rabbit Didn't Dare*, 2013, combines painting and collage to form grid-patterned abstractions, recalling the artist's history of mapping the "psycho geography of the city he calls home [Los Angeles]."²

¹ Oral history interview with Sam Gilliam, 1989 Nov. 4-11. The Smithsonian Archive of American Art, Washington, D.C.: "...but there was a way of making these work in a synthesis that was a part of other things like the thick stretcher that is on the side, the beveled thick stretcher that made the painting an object at the same time and also made it more so of a volume."

² Essay accompanying *Mark Bradford: Scorched Earth*, on view at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA, from June 20 – September 27, 2015

Inspired by Los Angeles gang culture and the use graffiti as a means of ‘tagging’ territories, **Sterling Ruby’s** mark-making presents a timely alternative to classic painterly techniques. Ruby’s atmospheric spray painting *SP301*, 2014, organizes the canvas in bands of pink, acidic green, and black, varying in shading and intensity as a product of using readily available aerosol paints. **Sean Scully’s** *Landline Deep Blue Sea*, 2015, furthers the artist’s investigation of gestural abstraction, and is composed of overlapping blue stripes that are rendered to emphasize sinuous brushstrokes and impart tactile order to the canvas. **Lesley Vance’s** *Untitled*, 2015, investigates spatial ambiguity through wide, suspended brushstrokes in contrasting shades of violet and yellow. As Vance states “the composition [painted from a still life] begins to evolve and I am no longer looking at the source material. From there the surface becomes a malleable space as the objects dissolve into pure form...”³ Similar to Vance, the source material in **Cecily Brown’s** work becomes obscured and abstracted in the process of painting. Brown’s *Is it nice in your snowstorm?*, 2014, is part of the artist’s recent series of intimately-scaled paintings, wherein rich staccato brushwork creates movement and depth, hinting at landscape.

Ultimately, the surface of a painting is a site for experimentation. The artists included in *Surface Tension* push the boundaries and possibilities of their primary materials, creating works that allow for chance and offer new formal strategies. As Ryan Sullivan states "It's not so theoretical. It's not preordained. I want to take a lot of time to let stuff happen, basically. The whole point of having these layers is to create this object that has a physical potential of its own..."⁴

About:

The FLAG Art Foundation is a non-profit contemporary arts institution, founded by art patron Glenn Fuhrman in 2008. Its objective is to encourage the appreciation of contemporary art among a diverse audience. FLAG organizes four to six exhibitions a year, each with a different curator, as well as producing public programs and catalogues. Past curators have included Chuck Close, Lisa Dennison, Eric Fischl, Louis Grachos, Prabal Gurung, Jim Hodges, Shaquille O’Neal, Linda Yablonsky, among others. To date, FLAG has hosted over 35 curated exhibitions, providing a platform for over 350 international established and emerging artists.

FLAG provides a unique educational environment in which visitors can view, contemplate, and engage in active dialogue with the artworks. FLAG is also a resource that facilitates loans of contemporary artworks to museums around the world. An extensive database of available works is maintained and made available to curators.

We are on the 9th and 10th floors of the Chelsea Arts Tower, located in the heart of New York’s art district on 25th Street between 10th and 11th Avenues. Its state-of-the-art exhibition space was designed by noted architect Richard Gluckman.

Join the conversation online and follow FLAG’s Instagram (@flagartfoundation) and Twitter (@FLAGartNYC), and use the #SurfaceTension hashtag when posting.

³Fried, Laura, “Brand New: Lesley Vance,” *Flash Art*, May-June 2010

⁴ Bollen, Christopher, “The New Abstract: Ryan Sullivan,” *Interview Magazine*, December/January 2014