

MARIANNE BOESKY GALLERY

STEPHANIE THEODORE GALLERY

580 Broadway, Suite 1105 · New York, NY 10012



Suzanne McClelland, *Now*, 1991, Clay, acrylic, enamel, gesso on canvas, 48 x 48 inches
Photo credit: Keith Goldstein

SUZANNE MCCLELLAND

BY FAYE HIRSCH

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Suzanne McClelland snares word in performative action. Now, forever, never, always: words that hold me in thrall. Words that when spoken gain power and momentum, the coercion of a pact— "order-words," as they are called by Deleuze and Guattari. This exhibit consists almost entirely of adverbs that, as the substance of indirect discourse, set emotional conditions. Where in collage words have already completed a trip, in McClelland's paintings they are still in transit. Now they are exposed in a painting, where their drama, once merely intuited, can be manifested. What becomes immediately apparent is that they are not one thing, but many; not static, but inexhaustibly predisposed to transformation.

"Now," you say to me. The "W" gets big, turns black, grows a skin. It threatens the front plane, it wrecks the curve of an "O." "Ow!" No longer writing, no longer a letter, the "W" has transmogrified into a body that radiates the persuasive undertow of language. Bullying is bound to occur, erotic force erupting into corporeal sight. The "n" clings to an island of floating acrylic medium; "o" vaporizes into the background. In one "forever," the "for," shabbily disguised in mirror-reversal, takes refuge in a painterly wedge that crushes "ever" beneath its weight. Elsewhere, a blank expanse of rabbit-glue blasts "ever" into the periphery, where the fuselage of its erstwhile singularity bursts into dazzling fragments.

For a word whose content is determined by expression, relations are key. In McClelland's work, words chaperone nonletter marks and vice-versa. I try to read the marks, mistake the letters for drawings. Cumulus outlines, or sentimental tracings of "forever?" The adverb becomes a noun, the letter a form, reifying a veiled seduction; but new mysteries proliferate amongst non-representational marks. One panel's "never" washes in a wave of red that thereby registers an expressive state. This in addition to the ubiquitous alphabetic scrambling that as the tool of undermined clarity always illuminates a shifting emotional field. "Always, waysal, ayslaw..." The more I scrutinize the word, the more prone it is to become something— a game, a drawing, a clay relief— and the more likely new order-words will make themselves felt in the overall pictorial domain.



Suzanne McClelland, *Forever*, 1991, Clay, acrylic, charcoal, dry pigment, oil, gesso on canvas, 48 x 48 inches
Photo credit: Keith Goldstein

The "empty" spaces in McClelland's work act as force field, converging and disrupting. In the wood panels, they refuse to settle as ground, their grains swimming into strokes of grave immanence. Elsewhere they are pockmarked with transparent medium, scratched, mottled. Never inert, they intensify the work's characteristic propulsion and render absurd the notion of a tabula rasa. While there are numerous tender gestures— melting "f" of forever or the repetitive, childlike script of "always"— no amount of sympathy relieves the dangerous inevitability of collision and mutation. Unlike the rarified script of Cy Twombly, which they most resemble, these words are grounded in a physicality that offers plenty of concrete possibilities in the acknowledged absence of absolutes. Here and now, "here" flapping between wings, temporal and audible; "now" ruminating in domesticated quarters, "n" startlingly earlike atop a big "o."