

# MODERNPAINTERS

## REVIEWS

### NEW YORK

#### PAUL COWAN

CLIFTON BENEVENTO // SEPTEMBER 9 - NOVEMBER 3, 2012

Steadman, Ryan E.. "Paul Cowan, Clifton Benevento". Modern Painters. January 2013. p. 69.

The idea of paint on canvas as fine art is so pervasive in our culture that it has become the task of many contemporary artists to comically push and prod at the boundaries of that concept. Cowan uses his finely tuned skills and his ideas of consumer society in a humorous yet oddly ethereal exhibition of painting-related works.

For his "sign paintings", the works that most closely resemble traditional paintings, Cowan hired Chicago-based sign painters to paint a various abstract gestures on stretched canvases. Much like an art director, he creates these compositions through the hands of others; the result is a series of commodified Miró-esque marks (normally used to accentuate catchwords or phrases) that emanate an everyday familiarity.

In his monochromatic wall paintings, oil-based household paints are mixed with scented oils, creating a multisensory experience in which impermanent color and smell commingle as the art object. Here Cowan again smartly reduces the painting process to a few aesthetic selections that can be store-bought, while simultaneously bringing what we think of as a painting into new realms of time and perception.

Cowan's "steel partitions," which are actually different types of urinal dividers, are his most oblique metaphors for paintings. Protruding from the walls and floor of the gallery, these objects facetiously mimic a painting's two-dimensional window view, despite the fact that they are usually used for concealment. The soft, reflective metal picks up fingerprints from the installation process (again, oil marks) as well as nicks and scratches, creating subtle, chance compositions that are indebted to their presentation.

Americans excel at purchasing, and Cowan understands this. What's noteworthy is how he is able to magically transform these banal decisions into a variety of transcendent meditations on the nature of painting, art, and aesthetics.

- Ryan E. Steadman