

Ryan Sullivan

11 September – 02 November 2013

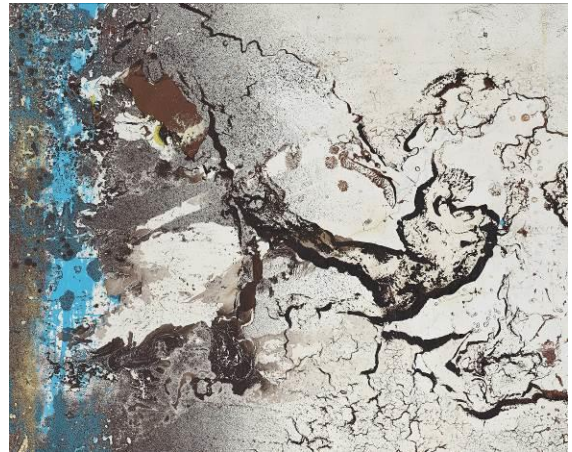
62 Kingly St London W1

Tuesday – Saturday, 11 – 6pm

In his first exhibition at Sadie Coles HQ, Ryan Sullivan presents a series of new large-scale paintings. The exhibition marks the inauguration of Sadie Coles HQ's new gallery on Kingly Street.

Sullivan's singular painting style arises from an open-ended process that is focused on the physical properties of his media. Each canvas bears witness to its making – asserting the dynamic movements and mutations of its raw materials. In Sullivan's studio, the canvases sit parallel to the floor. As he progressively tilts them (a crucial intervention), their contents shift and spill. A subtle interplay between viscosity and gravity therefore drives the progression of each work.

He adds layers of spray paint to an unstable base layer, accentuating the lines and rifts that haphazardly develop. Material movement becomes the agent of composition – reinforcing the idea of painting as a temporal entity, and reminding us that 'painting' denotes both a process and an outcome.



The dominant medium throughout this new series is spray paint. Invented in 1949, spray paint is arguably a hallmark of automated mass production. Flooding the works with a stark luminescence, it removes the artist's hand from the act of painting. As a readymade, industrially-produced medium, spray paint underscores the idea of each canvas signifying an event beyond Sullivan's individual calculation. Its distinctive physical qualities make it ideal for capturing the fleeting movements of the underlying paint. It is immiscible in its liquid state, and sits as a fine slick on the wet paint beneath, creating an alternately opaque and translucent carapace.

In these latest works, Sullivan has amplified the automatic quality of spray paint through a new procedure. He literally explodes a can by puncturing it with a drawing pin, allowing the contents to discharge over the course of thirty or forty seconds. Paint disperses across the surface of a painting in a fashion that is analogous to slanting light. Premeditated yet volatile, the action embodies the paradox of a 'controlled explosion'. Sullivan likens the rapid discharge to shining a "bright light against a textured surface". Through its replication of the movement of light, the action achieves a photorealist representation of light and shadow. There is, in this way, a proximity between material and 'image' that links these latest paintings closely with those of twentieth-century painters who conflated 'flat' abstraction with illusionality. An immaterial, photographic quality arises that is at dramatic odds with – yet inseparable from – the paintings' physical make-up.

Sullivan's works thus achieve a beguiling illusionality by dint of a process that is studiously materialist. As he has noted: "Part of the experience of the painting is reconciling the disconnect between the physical reality of the paintings and the photographic quality." (Ironically, that disjunctive quality is impossible to capture in photographs). And yet the "physical reality" is ever clear from the paintings' spilled-over edges. Evidencing the downward pull of gravity on the materials, these drips provide an insight into the myriad colours and iterations that each canvas has undergone. Countering the impression of ambiguous depth or scale, they moreover flatly re-assert the actual depth and scale of each work.

As with Warhol's iconic oxidation or 'piss' paintings, each of Sullivan's paintings is simultaneously a process, an image and an abstraction. Depersonalised yet expressive, superficial yet illusional, the prevailing medium of spray paint embodies the contradictions – and the volatile physics – of these new works.

Ryan Sullivan (b. 1983) lives and works in New York. He studied at the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence (RI). In early 2013, he was artist in residence at the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, Captiva (FL), and later this year will be artist in residence at the Chinati Foundation, Marfa (TX). In the summer of 2013, he exhibited a group of new works at Hydra's Workshop, Hydra, Greece. In 2012, he had a solo exhibition at Maccarone, New York. Current and recent group exhibitions in 2013 include *Empire State*, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome, Italy; and *Nothing Turned Itself Inside Out*, White Flag Projects, St. Louis (MI).

For further information please contact the gallery at +44 (0)20 7493 8611 or press@sadiecoles.com

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