

# CULTURED

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## JORDAN KASEY BRANCHES INTO THE ARCHITECTURAL

EM GALLAGHER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AUBREY MAYER



JORDAN KASEY IN HER BROOKLYN STUDIO, 2018.

Jordan Kasey's colorfully vivid, gigantically-scaled oil paintings are of the earth, quite literally. Sitting in middle of the floor of Kasey's Bushwick studio gives the distinct feeling of being in a canyon of the painter's own creation, as her work surrounds us on all sides, easily careening to the reaches of the

ceiling. It's fitting that the Chicago-raised artist's breakthrough came not via portraits of people, per se. "Going way back, I was just painting rocks, rock formations and landscapes that would take the place of a figure as a portrait," the painter says.



MIRROR, 2018.

These days, Kasey's canvases have expanded in subject matter, incorporating figures, or "blob people" as the artist jokingly calls them. "I like the paintings to look how they feel, rather than be anatomically correct people," she says. That emotional weight of Kasey's work is palpable, like in *Hot Day*, 2017, where an anonymous figure wilts on a dock overlooking the water, their generous body possessed by light. It plays into Kasey's desire to activate her canvases by timeless and universal elements as simple as water meeting the sky. "I mean, we're all drawn to the horizon," Kasey says. "It's this magical blue line. I'm interested in the idea of 'here's our reality,' and then 'here's the big blue churning mystery.' I think my work is a lot about that line, even if there's not overt water or beach present."



*THE COUCH, 2018.*

Kasey is in the final throes of preparing for a solo show with her gallery, Nicelle Beauchene, this winter, which the artist describes as taking a greater emphasis on architectural elements. Rocks have resurfaced again too, with Kasey showing charcoal drawings at Beauchene's apartment project space simultaneously with the painting show. "I've been doing these drawings of ancient sculptures carved out of stone, which I started doing just for fun. Charcoal is really relaxing after pulling all this," the artists arms gesture wildly around the studio, "out of my head."



# The New York Times

## Art & Design

### What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

FEB. 14, 2018



Installation view of “The Mark Inside” at the Signal Gallery, featuring Jordan Kasey’s “A Hot Day,” 2017; Kristin Walsh’s “Conveyors 2-5” 2016-2017; and Ms. Kasey’s “Waterslide,” 2018. Credit Signal Gallery

#### *‘The Mark Inside’*

*Through Feb. 18. Signal, 260 Johnson Avenue, Brooklyn; 347-746-8457, [ssiiggnnaall.com](http://ssiiggnnaall.com).*

The oversized oils that Jordan Kasey contributes to this cunning three-person show, painted in a palette of primordial reds, yellows, and blues, depict blocky human figures that could double as landscapes. Bennet Schlesinger prints his fragmentary photos of Angeleno nighthawk scenes on tiny scraps of fleece, overlays them with wire mesh, and surrounds them with half-melted black epoxy frames. The Alice in Wonderland disparity of scale between three works by Ms. Kasey and three by Mr. Schlesinger provides an aptly disarming background for Kristin Walsh’s group of four sculptures titled “Conveyors 2-5.”

Made from hand-hammered aluminum in shapes that seem plucked from a recently abandoned factory, the four sculptures bring to mind Robert Grosvenor, the easily overlooked beauty of 20th-century material culture, and a kind of 1920s industrial optimism. That is, they do before you notice the dancing little objects — a penny, a tooth, a blank computer key, all powered by magnets and hidden circuitry — with which Ms. Walsh has adorned them.

# Studio Visit: Jordan Kasey



“My work isn’t about who the people are, it’s about how it feels to encounter this being, or how it feels to be them.” Jordan Kasey's bold paintings depict figures that hold both heat and heaviness while remaining anonymous. Words by Ariela Gittlen

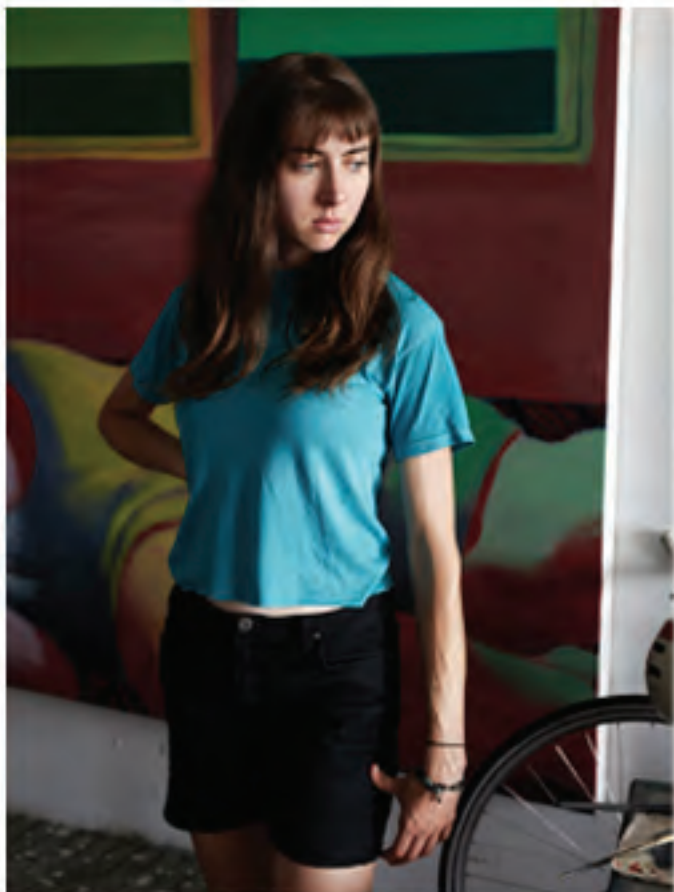
I visited Brooklyn-based painter Jordan Kasey on an unexpectedly blistering autumn day. Naturally there was no air conditioning in Kasey’s Bushwick studio, and the figures in her big, bold canvases seemed to feel the heat just as acutely, their formidable bodies appearing to droop and perspire. As Kasey notes, her figures are “extra-affected by gravity.” Lately her work has been featured in solo exhibitions at Nicelle Beauchene (New York) and Signal Gallery (Brooklyn) and in group shows at MoMA PS1 and White Cube. Until recently, Kasey has avoided any of the markers of identity that would have suggested the people in her paintings inhabit a particular time or place. As a result they seem to exist, sedately, in a timeless present. During my visit we sat on the floor and talk about minerals,

travel, and the effect of heat on her work.

**Before 2016, the bodies in your paintings were fragmented, everything seemed to be falling apart. Yet more recently the figures appear much more complete. Has your approach to painting the body changed?**

In earlier work I would avoid making the figure look too human. I also avoided putting in too many contextual clues. I remember feeling really triumphant when I finally put a chair in a painting. Those paintings would just be mostly water, sky, rocks, and blob-like people. I wanted the figures to be anonymous because their gender, race, and even the time period, were all things I didn’t want to pin down. My work isn’t about who the people are, it’s about

how it feels to encounter this being, or how it feels to be them. In newer work I've started to render a greater variety of things and to give the figures more personality, while still keeping them somewhat austere and removed from the viewer. I began to enjoy thinking, "Okay this is a woman and her hair is flying around." Before I was scared, not only to make the figure a woman, but to paint her hair, because it seemed too difficult. Part of what I'd been avoiding were textures and movements that seemed too technically challenging.



**Why were you anxious about painting figures who had an identity?**

I think if the figure is too individualized it can make the work seem political or narrative in a way that I want to avoid. I always feel relieved when I make a successfully non-gendered face. Painting people with unrealistic skin tones is kind of a good solution, but when a doctor visited my studio she said those figures reminded her of a cadaver from medical school.

**The paintings are about interior states and yet your figures aren't all that expressive.**

I want the emotion to come more from light, colour and what's happening in the slivers of space that aren't occupied by the figure. I realized that these reclining figures emerged in the summer, when it was really hot and all I wanted to do was lie on the floor.

**There's a feeling of languid summer heat in so many of your paintings. Was that always the climate in your studio when you painted them?**

Yes, for some of them. You can feel the paralyzing heat and the physical challenge of working on a large scale when it's so hot. But I also just like the figures to have a heaviness to them, like they're extra affected by gravity. I want them to look permanent, monumental, or sculptural in a way that gives them a feeling of stillness.

**You mentioned in an interview that you've spent a lot of time sketching minerals and rocks. That's pretty earthy. Do you use those studies as reference for elements in your big paintings?**

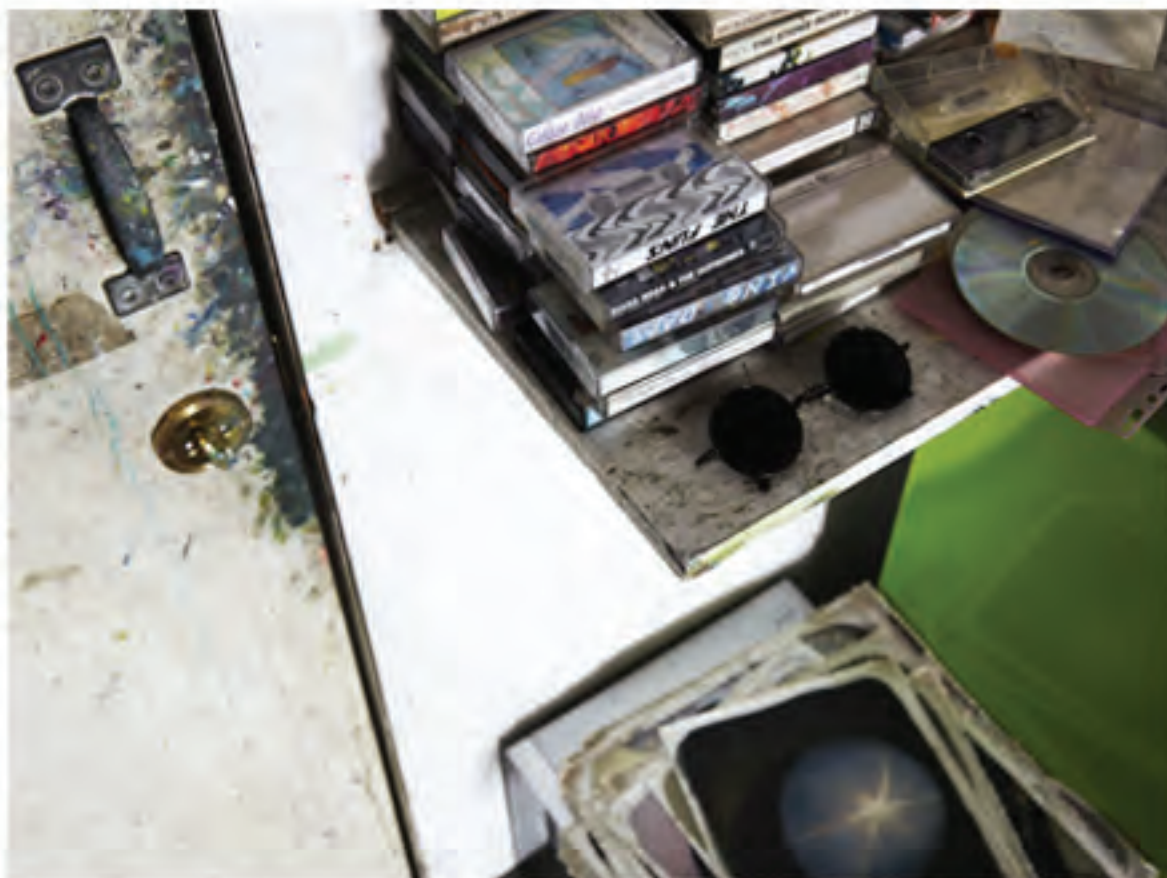
What I've taken from doing these studies is a way to paint different textures, the way light hits things and thinking about the subtle variations of color within the greys. It's been helpful by bringing



more variation and texture to the paintings. When you're working from imagination it's really easy to get caught in certain habits and the results can start to get too stylized, or every surface looks like it is made from the same material.

### **What inspired you to paint rocks in the first place?**

I don't remember the moment that it came to me. I've always liked rocks. When I lived in Baltimore I'd go to the Smithsonian which has a really extensive collection of gems and minerals. Rocks are something I think about especially in relation to the figure, although more so in the past with the blob-like people; an approach I was just starting to leave behind.



### **What parts of your paintings do you work out in advance and what parts emerge while you're making them?**

I'll do quick sketches before I start something, but most paintings emerge while I'm making them. I know what the feeling of the painting will be before I have a concrete image.

### **Do the results ever surprise you?**

The painting doesn't really feel finished until I've surprised myself somehow. If I just executed my original idea it ends up looking like an imitation Jordan Kasey painting. Or if I already knew I could do it then I'm bored by it. If I make something that I already knew existed before I started it, why bother finishing? I've also been surprised by how badly some of my ideas turn out, but that surprise doesn't usually take that long. The good surprises happen often enough that I do finish paintings, eventually.

**It sounds like being surprised is sort of the point, not just a side-effect of the process.**

It's the best feeling when I'm in awe of a painting as if I didn't even make it. At a certain point listening to where the painting wants to go becomes more important than putting my own ideas on it.

**You just got back from the Cuevas Tilleard artist residency on Lamu Island, Kenya. What was it like to make work outside your studio?**

I wanted to take a break from what I usually do and make work under a different set of constraints. I haven't used charcoal since college, or done a lot of observational work in a long time. During the residency we were living in a crazy giant castle on the water. It was nice just to wander around the

house and decide, "I'll sit here and draw this interesting space for a while and then I'll move to the weird tower on the roof and draw there." It felt a little dream-like.

I've never done a residency before and I've always thought of travel more as a time to take things in than to make stuff. It's nice to get away from the pressure to constantly be productive; to feel out of place or excited; to do something cool or get physically and emotionally exhausted from being in a new environment. Those experiences are productive for my art too because they become part of who I am.

**My eye is always drawn to the hands in your paintings because they're so expressive.**

I'm interested in hands as holding a lot of expression. They're the one part of the figure,

besides feet, that I sketch from my own body. You can get away with a lot when you're rendering a figure as long as the hands feel real or the feet feel grounded. The hands in the figure I'm painting now are probably going to be wiggly because it's actually supposed to be a sculpture [of a] person. I'm struggling to figure out how I can paint a sculpture of a person that looks like a sculpture, and not a real person.

**How do you do it?**

I'm still trying to figure that out. I guess you put them on a little pedestal? That's one solution.





# Art in America

EXHIBITION REVIEWS

MAY 2017



Jordan Kasey:  
*Poolside*, 2017, oil  
on canvas, 77½ by  
108 inches; at Nicelle  
Beauchene.

## JORDAN KASEY

Nicelle Beauchene

In the fraught present, the endurance and perceived stability of past traditions can hold a sirenlike allure. The six excellent paintings in Jordan Kasey's first exhibition at Nicelle Beauchene (all 2017) convey a sense of surreal timelessness. The show's title, "Exoplanet," feels appropriate considering that the subjects portrayed in the paintings mimic earthlings but inhabit a neon-tinged alien world. Larger-than-life-size bodies that appear fashioned from clay push against the edges of the canvases. Built up in thick swaths of oil paint, the anonymous figures project an imposing air, largely due to the stony, carved-out quality of their features and the paintings' confident scales (the smallest work is fifty-four inches square).

Four of the six paintings portray solitary subjects engaged in everyday tasks, such as sitting down to a meal (*At the Table*) or lolling on the lawn (*Backyard at Night*). The single multi-figure piece, *Poolside*, demonstrates many of the artist's formal techniques. The claustrophobic scene is filled with burly bodies. A narrow strip of unshaded blue represents a pool and serves as the only indication of a wider space. Composed with a limited red-and-pink palette, the limbs of the huddled group of swimmers have a weighty and heavily modeled presence. The upper bodies of two figures, one of whom sits on a bright yellow bench while the other stands behind it, are cut out of the frame. Two other swimmers sit on the ground, on either side of the painting. The one on the right has her back to us, while the one on the left faces the viewer, reaching out to absent-mindedly graze the gray-tiled ground—a subtle, inscrutable gesture that serves as the painting's focal point, the only hint of movement in a scene of sculptural stillness. Kasey adroitly contrasts intimacy with alienation throughout the paintings. This crowded example seems to bring the figures very close to us, without ever letting us in.

*Practicing Piano* depicts a gray figure—bent over, lips nearly kissing the keyboard—passionately playing the instrument. The

painting is almost overwhelmingly personal. Yet everything about the figure remains ambiguous. Kasey's oneiric realism excludes signifiers for gender, race, and class, and any glimpses of individual identity. The inky black palette she used to render a figure sitting on the fluorescent green grass in *Backyard at Night* seems to impart little about race, but instead underscores the nondescript nocturnal scene's melancholic or reflective mood.

Kasey, who was born in 1985 and lives in New York, engages classical history in her work; the best formal historical parallel may be found in Picasso's interwar Classicist Period. The squad in *Poolside* could be descendants of the Pygmalion-esque women who inhabit Picasso's *The Source* and *Two Bathers* (both 1921). Picasso's classicizing aesthetic was part of a broader "return to order" in the wake of World War I, when many artists abandoned the extremes of the avant-garde in favor of seemingly timeless, traditional forms. In the 1920s, this shift provided the foundations for Surrealism, a revolt against rationalism and societal rules. Kasey's static, alien view of the present, where scenes of intimacy are opaque and unsettling, is a welcome complication of returning and order, past and present, backward and forward.

—Julia Wolkoff

Jordan Kasey *Exoplanet*

*Nicelle Beauchene, New York 10 February – 12 March*

United in their cropped views, androgynous figures and eerie lighting, Jordan Kasey's new paintings reach for a sense of unhomeliness, in the Heideggerian sense that we are strangers to our own being. They present a struggle between the removed and the experienced, the alienated and the certain, that plays out in the formal realm of competing textures and colours.

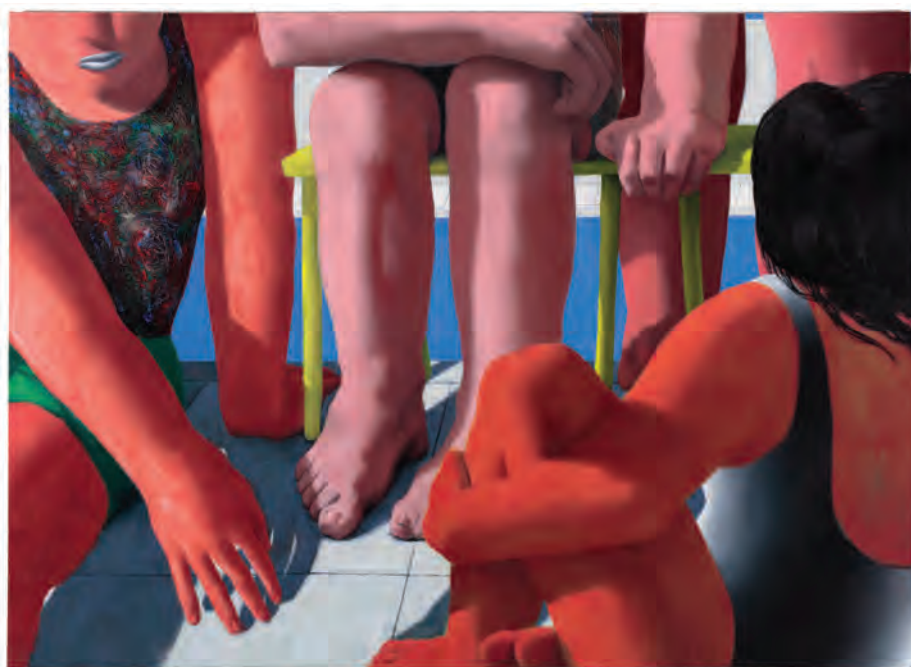
In *Practicing Piano* (all works 2017), a sense of *horror vacui* reigns as a haunting human spectre hunches over ivory and charcoal keys. The piano's glossy red lacquer reflects apparitions of serpentine fingers, which only serve to heighten the figure's phantasmic presence. The composition is tight, purposefully leaving viewers without space and without context. Who is this yellow-eyed entity with mauve lips who crowds our own space with such empty presence? Greyscale skin, softly swirling with Kasey's deft brushstrokes, lures us into what should be a familiar scene of leisure and song. But the gaze of a lone yellow eye, the way the

impasto jeans meet the rendered keys at an acute angle and the stark shadows all usher us into the uncanny.

Kasey's paintings often avoid fully fleshed-out faces. *Upside Down Face* manages to demonstrate virtuosic paint handling while communicating only basic visual information. What little there is on this canvas – soft, sickle-cell lips; a scalene nose; Play-Doh eyebrows – accumulates into an inverted portrait of no one. Multiple lighting sources collide, leaving a deep shadow on the far side of the nose, cut with a feathered highlight. Shades of salmon, lemon and steel radiate on the face, which is sectioned into discrete thirds. Coupled with intense cropping that allows only centimetres of background colour to peek through at the corner, *Upside Down Face* is irresistible in its visual absorption.

There are two scenes of summertime leisure in Kasey's show, *Backyard at Night* and *Poolside*. In the former, a grisaille figure (stylised and stocky) lounges in bathing trunks while

fingering a blade of emerald grass. Tightly rendered, the figure's left arm cuts down the centre of the canvas and is painted in a style corresponding to a chair in the composition's bottom-right corner. Likewise, the figure's more painterly right arm matches another chair in the back left. Kasey's style of many styles produces an uncanny visual logic that encourages a sense of unease. No stability lurks within this painting that could placate uncertainties about Kasey's environments. More upbeat than the brooding noir of *Backyard at Night*, *Poolside* shows a greater degree of stylistic uniformity, except for the thick, confettied bathing suit of one of Kasey's four bathers, all of whose faces are either turned away from us or cropped out. We are left wondering: who are these people and what do they really look like? What world is this that is almost, but so clearly not, our own? Kasey updates unhomeliness for the present, when we are strangers to our own being as much as each other's. *Owen Duffy*



*Poolside*, 2017, oil on canvas, 197 × 274 cm.  
Courtesy the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York

ARTSY

# The 12 Young Painters You Need to Know at NADA New York

ARTSY EDITORIAL  
BY MOLLY GOTTSCHALK  
MAY 6TH, 2016 10:53 PM

The fifth edition of NADA New York opened yesterday, and as ever, it was teeming with collectors and artists eager to set their sights on the fair's 108 booths. The largest edition to date, this year sees exhibitors from 18 countries and 44 cities, including 51 first-time exhibitors. It also features an especially strong selection of painting, with works by a fresh generation of young painters—including these 12 you need to know.

## Jordan Kasey

**B. 1985, CHICAGO. LIVES AND WORKS IN BROOKLYN**

**ON VIEW AT NICELLE BEAUCHENE GALLERY**



Installation view of works by Jordan Kasey at Nicelle Beauchene's booth at NADA New York, 2016. Photo by Object Studies for Artsy.

Ahead of her first solo show at Brooklyn gallery Signal later this month, you'll find two of Kasey's voluptuous, Botero-like figures and dreamy, surrealist landscapes in Nicelle Beauchene's booth: a fleshy, reclining figure, *Person Lying on a Salty Beach* (2015; \$10,000), that hangs in the booth's interior and *fake plant at a restaurant* (2015; \$8,500), a mysterious tableaux where a bellybutton, a pierced ear, and the tips of fingers curiously peek between leaves, which calls fairgoers into her painted world.



## **17 ARTISTS (+2) TO WATCH IN 2017**

Twenty-thousand years after man first huddled in a dimly lit cave and consciously placed marks upon a wall in an attempt to better understand, and perhaps change, the world, contemporary artists continue to make marks on two-dimensional surfaces with much the same intent. No matter how many times painting has “died” over the years, it keeps coming back to take another shot - reanimated, reinvigorated and ready to deliver the goods. And why not? People still respond and attend to the oldest of mediums with a reverence that no other artifact of cultural production can elicit.

In 2016, artists continued to make paintings, while galleries and cultural institutions dedicated the majority of their exhibition space to their display. During art fair week in Miami in early December, which was marred by low attendance due to post-election malaise and the specter of Zika, there was more painting on view than ever. Photography and other media were scarce. As was evident last year, much of the painting of display was representational with the preponderance of figurative subject matter being notable. Even at the younger fairs such as NADA, there was an almost complete absence of the type of bland, process-based abstraction that had been everywhere for the last five years. Ever aware of the latest trends, smart dealers of all levels have scrambled to bring image based painting into their programs.

I am happy to see that many of the artists that I selected for last year’s list had stellar years. Brian Belott seemed to be everywhere having been taken on by both Gavin Brown and Moran Bondaroff in 2016. Emerging artists Loie Hollowell and Laeh Glenn both became collector darlings in 2016, and mature artist Nancy Shaver had a very strong outing at Derek Eller that received positive critical attention. – *Steven Zevitas, Editor/Publisher*

### **JORDAN KASEY**



Art dealers are constantly besieged by artists wanting to present their work to them. It is a difficult balancing act. After all, there is only so much time in the day, but you never want to miss something extraordinary. Over the years, I have learned to trust the opinions of the artists I work with closely more than anyone else. Eric Yahnker, whom I work with in Los Angeles, told me about Jordan Kasey a couple of years ago and urged me to have a look. Kasey is very much a part of a new generation of painters who are breathing new life into figurative painting. Working large scale, she, like Ridley Howard, is a master of giving the viewer the essential parts of what is presumably a larger whole. For a young artist, her command over her chosen medium is impressive. Look for a solo show with New York's Nicelle Beauchene in 2017.

# HYPERALLERGIC

GALLERIES

## Rapt by Strangely Lit and Shadowed Paintings

Jordan Kasey's painted figures, lit with mysterious, colored light, have the monumentality of Picasso's Neo-classical period and are as ponderous as whales gliding through the ocean.

Dennis Kardon March 6, 2017

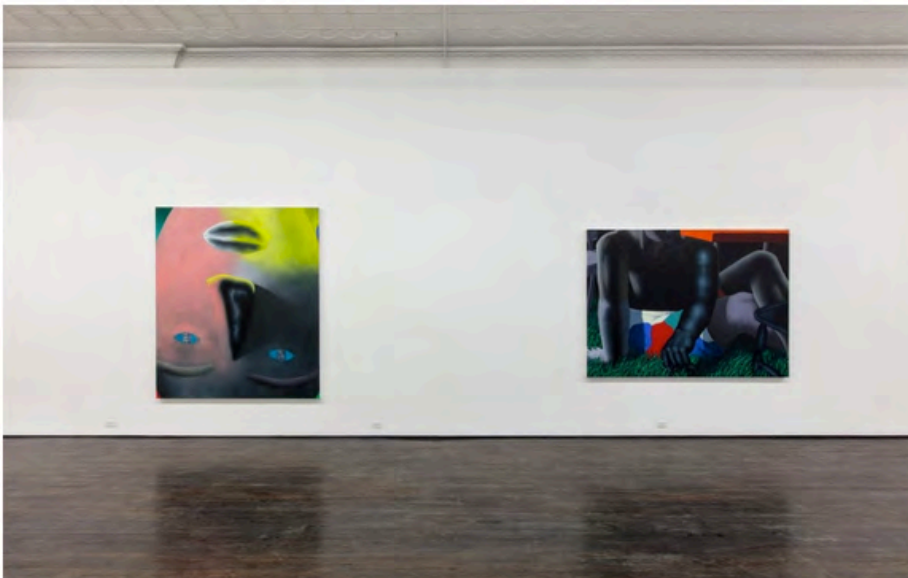


Jordan Kasey, "Practicing Piano" (2017), oil on canvas, 60 x 60 inches (all images courtesy Nicelle Beauchene gallery and the artist unless otherwise noted)

The celestial body of [Jordan Kasey](#)'s exhibition, *Exoplanet*, refers to a planet that exists outside our solar system. Kasey's compellingly odd paintings at Nicelle Beauchene gallery obviously originate from a realm outside the familiar body of artworks currently orbiting among the downtown galleries.

Kasey is a paradoxical painter. The five large canvases commanding the gallery space are simultaneously overwhelming and confidential, representational but formally abstract. Though lacking juicy expressionistic brushwork, the works vibrate with quietly restrained emotion. Her thick figures, lit with mysterious, colored light, have the monumentality of Picasso's Neo-classical period, without the earth tones, and are as ponderous as whales gliding through the ocean.

The force that drives the engine of Kasey's work is her eschewal of the flat-earth ideology (collaged, cartoony or photo-derived, super-flat figuration) of many of her contemporaries. Although sharing

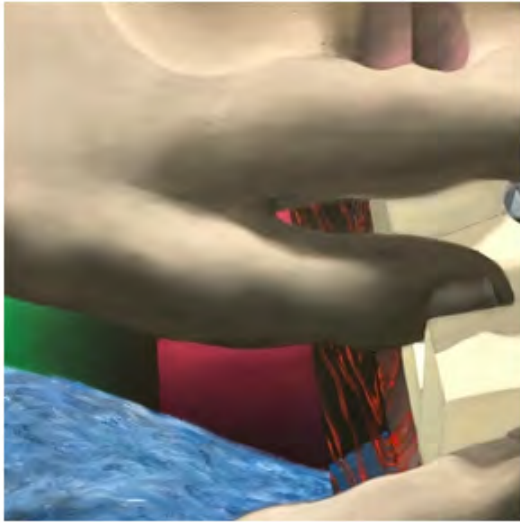


Installation view of Jordan Kasey: *Exoplanet* at Nicelle Beauchene



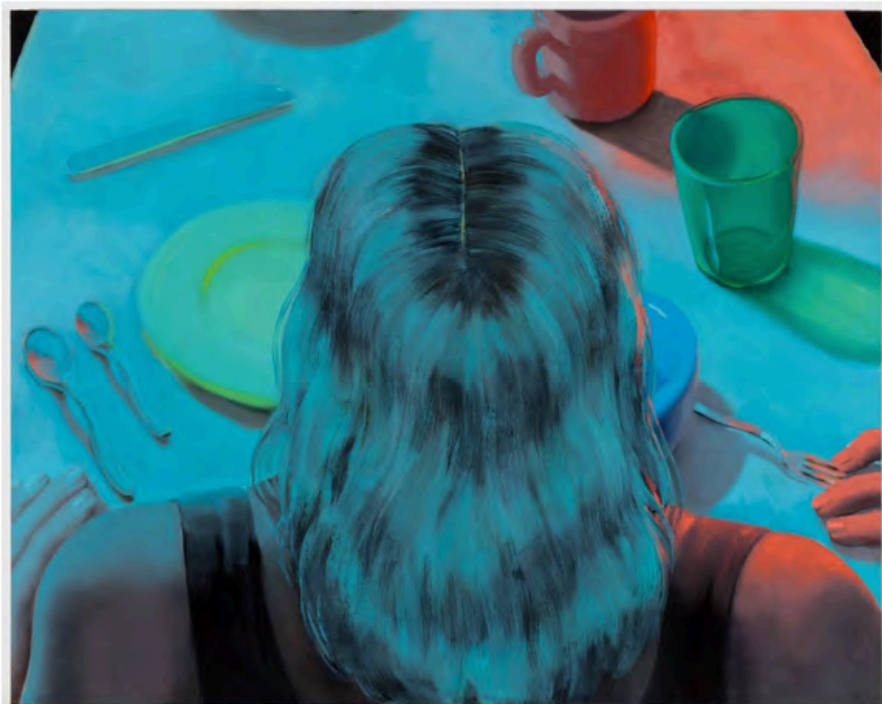
formal explorations with older painters like Dana Schutz and Nicole Eisenman, Kasey has developed an idea of space and light that owes its complexity to traditional shading, shadow, and tonal control, but is nevertheless obviously artificial in its eccentric color, cinematic scale, and close-up framing. The result is an ambiguity and intimacy that feels totally contemporary.

Her experimentation has resulted in explosive yet compressed compositions, as in “Practicing Piano,” with its fractured shards of gray fingers, mauve lips, piano keys, shadows, a blue patch of clothing, and glossily reflective mahogany, all topped by an absurd yellow jewel of an eye like the star atop a Christmas tree. But then there is also the weirdly luminous and dreamy face with Ms. Potatohead features in “Upside-down Head.” Meanwhile, the ominous “At The Table” displays a glowing blue and red array of empty dishware that surrounds the turned away head, while three strange disembodied fingers creep in on the right to caress the tines of a fork.



Jordan Kasey, “Practicing Piano” (2017) (detail) (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

In the 6½ by 9 foot “Poolside,” Kasey orchestrates the shadows and limbs of the four fragmented bathers to create a sonata of themes and variations on volumetric forms and flat negative spaces. She is most endearing when she spatters her composition with little slivers of light that are the result of intersecting shadows and forms, and arise particularly through her wonderful inventions of fingers. There is both innocence to the casually crowded, orange and pink array of exposed arms and legs on a hot summer day, and unease in the way our eyes are forced to move through these contained pillars of sunburnt flesh. Framed by two monumental seated figures on the right and left as well as a horizontal arm at the top, “Poolside” allows viewers into its constrained space through the sunlit patch of gray tiles at the bottom. But then Kasey takes our attention for a little whirl with a rapid succession of fingers and shadows and toes.



Jordan Kasey, “At the Table” (2017), oil on canvas, 57 x 71 inches

Each painting, described by a deadpan title, enacts a deceptively simple tableau, which Kasey then subverts through the complex ways her forms break up light and color. Rather than go for more nuanced color, she is unafraid to use simple black for objects, shaded flesh, and shadows, and her strange

color is either local, such as the bright cobalt of pool water and lime green of deck chair, or a projected colored light illuminating a tablecloth or head.

But the quality that really elevates this work is the unplanned nature of Kasey's approach. Because she understands the way viewing distance changes the perspective and forms of a large painting, the scale she achieves cannot be simply enlarged from sketches. Her surfaces are thick from adjustments. The psychological effect of these paintings hinges on the complex physical relation of viewer to imaginary space and painted form, a relationship that can only be achieved through Kasey's spontaneous interplay of body to paint, and touch to canvas.



Jordan Kasey, "Poolside" (2017), oil on canvas, 77½ x 108 inches

Constantly testing the limits of both her abilities and imagination, she manages to create paintings that are simultaneously contemplative and riveting and yet avoid becoming formulaic. All five paintings here were completed this year, revealing an ambition to stake out a varied range while still finding coherence. While there is a maturity to the pictorial complexity of her vision, Kasey exhibits a sense of invention and play that incites curiosity and excited anticipation of what she may paint next.

Jordan Kasey: *Exoplanet continues* at Nicelle Beauchene (327 Broome St, Lower East Side, Manhattan) through March 12.