



Diehl, Travis, "Critic's Pick," *Artforum*, February 6, 2014.

ARTFORUM

Los Angeles

Henry Codax

MICHAEL THIBAUT 3311 West Washington Blvd January 24–March 9



View of "Henry Codax," 2014.

Henry Codax, a dandy modernist holdout, first appeared in 2004 as a character in Bernadette Corporation's collectively authored novel, *Reena Spaulings*. Some small amusement, then, when in 2011 Codax began exhibiting his monochromes in New York. With a veil of secrecy protecting the identity of the artist(s) responsible, the original wave of Codax paintings played on art-identity and art-product—a barbed attempt to strip

art of its value (though his paintings sell just fine). But now, a few years after the initial Codax moment, ten years after BC's book, a continent away from its seminal context, and possibly even made by painters unrelated to earlier Codax efforts, "Henry Codax" at Michael Thibault is less of a subjective ploy than a well-timed leap into cynicism.

Nine tightly hung, untitled paintings (all works 2014)—seven-by-three-and-a-half-foot slabs of cherry red, plum, cream, smoke, and so on—break the white walls into awkward gaps and crowd the doorways. The colors here lack monochrome magic—depth, surprise, pedigree, painterly marks—and supply the sprayed-on acrylic all the crushing pleasure of rolled-on latex house paint. In such an agitated atmosphere, transcendence isn't up for discussion. The latest Codax works aren't just lazy phenomenology, but rather an intensely hollow slap to painting's face—a glib challenge to, or a bitter dismissal of, more sincere painters.

This characterless void is part of the point, of course. Perhaps there, on the proverbial blank canvas, we might project a new subject, any subject, the subject we deserve. Yet in Los Angeles in 2014, questions of *identity*, or *subjectivity*, no longer carry the same earnest acidity. Instead, Codax's deskilled monochromes, fiction folded into fact, history as throwaway, offer us their soul-sucking effect, a meditation on the depths of empty cool, and—in a kind of sexless art wasteland—the chance to remember who, if anyone, we are.

— *Travis Diehl*