

## MODERN PAINTERS

By Bill Clarke  
September 2009

### REVIEWS

#### ZÜRICH



**TRIS VONNA-MICHELL**  
Kunsthal Zürich

**FROM LEFT:**  
Tris Vonna-Michell, *Studio A*, 2008. Installation view, 5th Berlin Biennial for Contemporary Art, KÖP Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, Apr. 5–June 15, 2008.

Dan Colen, *Scrambled or Fried?*, 2008. Chewing gum and chewing-gum wrapper in artist's frame, 30 x 24 in.

Douglas Coupland, *Metrolite with Anime*, 2009. Mixed media, 36 x 36 in.

"Auto-Tracking-Auto-Tracking," Tris Vonna-Michell's second solo presentation at Kunsthal Zürich, parses together images and audio samples from the artist's previous artworks, all derived from his 2007 stay in Detroit. The repetition of the exhibition's title alludes to Motor City and immediately announces a play of re-presentation within this installation. In the first gallery, a looped record player has been placed at the center of the minimalist space. Written on the record is the statement NO MORE RACING IN CIRCLES—JUST PACING WITHIN LINES OF A RECTANGLE. This visual paradigm references the immediate situation of the record (a circle) on a player (a rectangle) and establishes a metaphorical leitmotif for the exhibition. In the second gallery, slide projectors visually echo this statement, as they too contain a circular lens, which projects a rectangular image—abstracted black-and-white shots of the Detroit cityscape that at times also hauntingly return to the statement. The imagery converges and diverges with the artist's soundtrack—a mesmerizing, quickly spoken prose peppered with references to the present site of the Kunsthal, the recent past (the site of the artist's freshman exhibition at Kunsthal Zürich, "Auto-Tracking"), and the more distant past of the artist's time in Detroit. Vonna-Michell's self-aware narrative interweaves these tenses of time, creating imbrications of oral and visual cues that produce both conviction and delusion. By looping the images and the audio, dystopian themes of science fiction, delusion, and pastiche are thrown into an infinite space. Yet, as viewers easily lose themselves within these labyrinthine intentions, it is questionable whether or not the work devolves into a solipsistic conceit or expands to loftier ends.

—Piper Marshall

► **UPCOMING SHOW:**  
Tensta Konsthal, Oct. 10–Dec. 18, [tenstakonsthal.se](http://tenstakonsthal.se)

#### NEW YORK



**GROUP SHOW**  
David Nolan Gallery

"Slough"—a swamp, a marsh, despair, the act of shedding, an infamous English town; pronounced *sluff*, *slew*, *slow*—is the title and tenor of painter Steve DiBenedetto's curatorial undertaking at the David Nolan Gallery, and, curiously, the show is faithful to the word.

Sitting in the gallery window, Keith Edmier's *Cycas Apotropaica* (2009) is a primordial welcome to the depths of "Slough." The cycas tree is Edmier's first living work (his plant works, usually cast in a man-made material, are meditations on natural forms entangled with human interactions and interpretations). Inside, hodgepodge and happenstance come together, the gallery a breeding ground for castoffs, residual materials, layering, and encrustation. A provocateur in all mediums, Dieter Roth is represented by *Shlecht Erkennbares Blumen Still-Leben* (1977–79), an energetic assembly of graphite and cardboard bits and bobs, which stick out from within its edges. A signature Dan Colen work, made of chewing gum and its residue, is whispery and delicate in application. Andy Warhol's amorphous rust orange "Piss" paintings (1978)—urine and gesso on canvas—are predecessors to Colen's work, and, appropriately, two examples from the Warhol series are placed beside it. Philip Taaffe's marbled works on paper *Slough I* and *Slough IV* (2003) are in a state of both becoming and degenerating, recalling lava or melting ice cream. And Fabian Marcaccio's gurgling pair of sculptures, *This just out paintant* (2008–09), disgorge their innards—pigmented inks, alkylid paints, and silicone gels—into midair. But Michelle Segre's official *Untitled* (2009) formation—constructed of papier-mâché, metal, beeswax, acrylic, and oil—turns this swamp into a vivacious wetland. The sponge-like, bright-hued organism is the new birth growing within the gloriously mucky environment. Alexander Ross, Joe Bradley, Jessica Craig-Martin, Carroll Dunham, Frank Stella, Jon Kessler, Larry Poons, and Cheryl Donegan, among others, also take part in this Chelsea slough. —Marina Cashdan

#### TORONTO



**DOUGLAS COUPLAND**  
Clark + Faria

Outside of Canada, Douglas Coupland is best-known as the author of several novels, including *Generation X* and *Microserfs*, that embody the slacker zeitgeist of the 1990s. Coupland's primary interest, however, has always been visual art. (He graduated from Vancouver's Emily Carr University of Art and Design in 1984.) Although he continues to write, Coupland has become increasingly recognized as a painter, photographer, and sculptor. This exhibition references forms of 1960s American art. Tabletop-scaled sculptures made from stacks of children's building blocks recall the early assemblages of Robert Indiana, but the words they spell, including "queer," "pornography," "alienated," and "anarchy," reflect contemporary and decidedly adult themes. Wall-mounted sculptures consisting of colorful rows of Laurrentian pencil crayons—a staple of Canadian children's toy chests since 1951—encased in long plexi-glass boxes suggest the paintings of Gene Davis and Morris Louis. Andy Warhol's legacy, however, looms largest. Straightforward silk screens of Bill Gates elicit a chuckle, but Coupland's co-opting of Warhol's acid-hued "Marilyn" prints from 1967 results in playful eye candy with a message. By covering mass-produced Marilyn posters with beer-bottle labels, logos of clothing lines popular with young men, and stickers of Japanese anime characters, Coupland suggests that, in today's trend-conscious, youth-obsessed world, even those artists as market-savvy as Warhol are at risk of being eclipsed.

—Bill Clarke