

Megan Craig in New York



PHOTO GALLERY
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NEW YORK—For several years early in this decade, the young New York- and New Haven-based painter **Megan Craig** worked mostly from architecture, creating casually abstracted, people-less cityscapes as seen from far-off vantage points. Echoes of these early explorations, with their stacks of horizontal planes and upright rectilinear forms, can be seen in *All Lit Up* (2006), one of the earliest paintings in Craig's new show at [Sundaram Tagore Gallery](#), titled "Lines of Flight" and on view through January 10. But for the most part, while space remains a primary concern for the artist, she has come to approach it in more indirect ways.

In a 2007 series of works based on fragments of **Vuillard** paintings, the shapes of the city are transposed onto still lifes and domestic interiors. Elsewhere, in paintings like *Wall* (2007), right angles have given way to curves, and urban forms to more organic ones. Finally, in works like *Big Time* and *Surprise Party* (both 2008), the concept of space itself is abstracted. If once Craig was a painter of buildings, bridges, rooftops, and streets, here she depicts openings and closings, cramped space and welcoming space. Instead of permanent structures, her focus is on something akin to visceral states.

This loosening of subject matter is just one way in which this new work represents a departure, and an opening up, for the artist. "My newest work is more visceral. I'm painting but not cleaning, no longer covering my tracks," Craig told ARTINFO recently, speaking about her bolder, looser brushwork, especially evident in *Surprise Party*.

And then there are her colors. The artist, who is also a professor of philosophy at SUNY Stony Brook, recently taught a course on **Wittgenstein's** *Remarks on Color*, and she says that her newest work represents the first time her teaching and painting have overlapped. "Color is often described as a secondary quality," she says, momentarily lapsing into philosophy-speak. "But that seems wrong. As a painter, I think about color foremost."

In this recalibrated metaphysics, color is central to the nature of reality rather than an aspect of our perception of it. Patches of color, and often surprising ones (you'll find giant swaths of yellow and pink and peaches both bold and subdued), shape her compositions, generating warmth and coolness and creating areas of sharpness and softness. More and more in Craig's work, color is not an afterthought but the thought itself.

"Mixing colors seems to be the essence of painting. They all act differently, dry differently. That's what I find exciting and unresolved about painting."

Here are Craig's picks for the weekend in New York.

1. **Josephine Halvorson** at [Sikkema Jenkins & Co.](#), through January 10

"This was a surprise discovery while trudging through the snow on West 22nd street. I was drawn in by the bright orange embers in *Hot Coals*. Halvorson has nine modest-size paintings hanging in the intimate west gallery. Oil on linen and the size of a briefcase, each one depicts mundane objects: crumbs, a dirty window, a stack of photo albums. The paintings have an honest, loving touch, and as I acclimated to Halvorson's palette of muted mauves, gray, olive, and egg white, I realized that these are all paintings of traces — remains of a day. The ashy filth of *Fireplace Farm*, the expressionist splatters of *Dirty Window*, and the bizarre, vaguely menacing machines in *Meter* reference Rembrandt, de Kooning, and Guston. It's a painter's show — not pretty but haunting and beautifully strange."

2. **Dana Hoey: Experiments in Primitive Living** at [Friedrich Pretzel Gallery](#), through January 24

"There seems to be a lot of cataclysmic, end-of-the-world art right now. Hoey's show of photographs envisions multiple catastrophes: a world consumed by ash, ice, heat, and flood. Her photographs range in scale and scope from the epic, parched fields of *Ayler* — a stunning mountain of golden grass that looks like the humped back of a prehistoric animal — to the close-range repeating pattern of north-pointing arrows in *Compasses*. The show made me think about time travel, the Weather Channel, science fiction, September 11th, old age, loneliness, and nature's incomprehensible resilience. What's so weird and wonderful about these photographs is how inhabitable and human they feel. Hoey's frozen, ash-covered worlds are still warm and inviting — in part because of her genius for doling out color in just the right temperature and dose. Bugs, bodies, mushrooms, gadgets, an Amaryllis wilting amid gray weeds: every one of Hoey's disasters kindles a quiet heroism and a visceral reminder of the elemental."

3. **Daniel Rich: Downburst** at [Perry Rubenstein](#), through January 17

"Rich's first solo show is hugely impressive. For one thing, he has managed to make political paintings that are timely and timeless at once. His slick, enamel-on-wood images of architecture in the Middle East look like a grown-up's Lego kit (build your own Baghdad or Dubai). The paintings are meticulously crafted, and yet they retain a sense of touch that belies the anonymous video-gaming, surveillance aesthetic Rich plays on. A black cord snakes lazily over the wall of a gray pit in *Hussein's Palace*, teal paint peels away from the defaced image of Saddam Hussein in *Saddam*, a flash of red creeps into the infinite grays of *East Jerusalem*. The paintings have the focus of Mondrian's grids and the sorts of details — miniature trees, light posts, window frames — you find only in model train sets. The vacant spaces he depicts have a Hopper-like desolation made more poignant and disturbing by the recognition that his subjects are drawn from newspapers, television, and the Internet. Rich's show is a serious meditation on the ethics and politics of building and bombing, but it's also a joy to see."

4. **Nathalie Djurberg** at [Zach Feuer Gallery](#), through January 24

"I love this show. It is truly bizarre. The holidays are probably the best time to sit down to Djurberg's initially charming and ultimately disturbing video *I Found Myself Alone*. Her claymation is endlessly appealing, and Hans Berg's music hits exactly the right balance between the sugar plum fairy and the twilight zone. The star of the show is a black licorice ballerina with pins through her shoes, pirouetting through plates of marshmallows and an endless array of gooey cookies and sweets. She has blood-red lips that peel apart into an unnerving grin, revealing two rows of sharp, tiny clay teeth. As she goes from graceful to clumsy, knocking everything over, smearing black chocolate over the whole table, I felt I was seeing a metaphor for what it feels like to be an artist — to start out poised, with everything in place, a clean white surface, only to find oneself at the end entangled in chaos, making a mess. There are also racial and political readings of this video, and as I watched it the second time I felt like there might be endless things to see and say about it. It is smart, sweet, and surprising: the anti-Nutcracker for anyone who likes a tea party with an edge."

5. **Andrew Forge/Fairfield Porter: Works on Paper** at [Betty Cuninghame Gallery](#), through January 31

"I had to pick this show, because I learned to draw from Andrew Forge. He was an incredible teacher, and I see his generosity in every dot of his work. Porter's pencil-and-ink sketches and Forge's watercolor dots and dashes are quiet and reflective. It takes some time to look at all of them, and it's a challenge to look without trying to read them — but it's well worth the effort. After you linger here for a while, you can walk up one block to Trenton Doyle Hancock's "Fear" at [James Cohan Gallery](#). Here are Forge's dots writ large in a Pac Man-infused, exuberant spectacle — an instant remedy for any winter blues."

6. **Andy Goldsworthy: Storm King Wall** at [Storm King Art Center](#), ongoing

"The time to see this is in the winter, when no one is around, and you can appreciate the gray, gold, purple, and white of upstate winter. Goldsworthy's wall capped with a few inches of fresh snow and winding through a choir of naked trees is one of the most beautiful things around."