

## Brendan Fowler and Matthew Chambers

5.6.2014 – 26.7.2014

With a hint of a smile, a man and a drum machine mull aloud before an audience. Occasionally the man approaches the machine, stops or delays the beat, adds a digitized piano melody to it. Sometimes there's a stage, a band perhaps, while on other occasions the entire soundtrack is sample-driven. The basic unit for the work of **Brendan Fowler** (b. 1978; lives and works in Los Angeles) is manifested in the way he himself is present. Having determined by his own voice that 'rules can be broken,' Fowler fabricates extensions to various channels of subversion, and it is into that statement the entirety of his work converges.<sup>1</sup>

Fowler's gradual transition from the indie music scene<sup>2</sup> to the art world reveals various experiments in breaking the rules of the newfound realm whose properties he seeks to tame. The first images associated with Fowler's activity as a visual artist are posters exhibited in 2008, announcing fictive performances with two rival bands from the local scene, over which he scrawled 'Cancelled' in thick enamel paint. The superfluity of concrete details, for an audience not versed in the discourse (since the works were exhibited at an art gallery), as well as the recognition of negation as a grantor of validity and presence (and to some extent in the spirit of Derrida's concept of 'under erasure'<sup>3</sup>), heralds practices of sabotage that will continue to accompany Fowler's work over the coming years.

In the exhibition at Hezi Cohen Gallery, Fowler presents works from the recent 'New Camera' series. Seen from afar, the images look like segments of photographs gone wrong. The date stamp in the margin of the works, in clear, legible digits in bold orange, confirms to us that this is a photograph, identifies its source (a camera, not a smartphone), and anchors the image to a specific point in time. The densely arrayed rows of threads, into which the image resolves itself on closer inspection, disclose the

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example: Brendan Fowler, Performance at the MoMA, NY, September 16th, 2013.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KBqSeK7zZIs>

<sup>2</sup> A signifying act from this period of Fowler's activity is the track 'The Song is the Single' from his third album 'Summary' (2007), in which he declares 'the song is the single, and the single sucks':

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Abp4eefCs5Q>

<sup>3</sup> See: Robert Hobbs, "Brendan Fowler: Re-forming the Parergon." in Brendan Fowler with Joel Mesler and Carol Cohen (Spring 2011). New York: Untitled, 2011.

[http://www.roberthobbs.net/essay\\_files/brendan\\_fowler\\_re-forming\\_the\\_parergon.pdf](http://www.roberthobbs.net/essay_files/brendan_fowler_re-forming_the_parergon.pdf)

## HEZI COHEN GALLERY

work's means of production – an industrial embroidery machine. The shock of the encounter with the works stems in large part from their scale. Generally used for the mass production of logos and symbols, manufactured to decorate different articles of clothing, especially uniforms, the mechanical embroidery becomes under Fowler's directions a mechanism for the detailed production of an all-encompassing picture. Yet, Fowler undermines against the picture's completeness at two levels: actively, before production, when he edits the images in Photoshop, and later on, more passively and randomly, through the production flaws of the industrial machine.

### ***And what if purple?***

In 2009 Fowler has begun creating shattered arrays of piled images in wood and fiberglass frames. Fowler diligently catalogues these stacked images, most of which are deliberately trivial and accidental, in the works' titles, with excessive detail as is his wont: 'Printer Box and Ladder,' 'Joel's Phone on Mei Ling Wei Table,' 'Flowers in Terry/Cindy's Garden 1,' and the like. If Fowler's rock posters are mock-readymades that have found their way into the gallery, the following frame pieces sustain an explosion from the criteria of art – image, frame, being exhibited in a gallery or museum – outwards: in essence the sequence of images that Fowler's work creates retains the same agglomeration in which they subsisted inside the smartphone, but with the additional weight of both material presence and presentation in an artistic context.

The work '*To Be Titled*' (2013), presented at the exhibition, offers an additional layer of the destruction with which Fowler's frame works are imbued. Usually, shipping these works involves a 'damages' report by the transport company regarding broken frames, though the breakage, and moreover the gluing together, are very much unlikely to occur accidentally. However, covering the entire work in opaque purple is an act even more absurd to assess as 'damage.' Of these image-dependent works all that is now left is a sculptural construction, to which the covering in a dark color grants a mirror effect.<sup>4</sup> As we should expect, Fowler makes clear the extreme arbitrariness of his experiment: the shade of purple was chosen to match the color of a favorite smoothie.

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<sup>4</sup> It bears mentioning that mirrors have been a recurrent photography subject in Fowler's works, including in this series.

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54 Wolfson St. Tel Aviv 66042      T. +972.3.639.87.88  
hezicohengallery.com      info@hezicohengallery.com

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Against the shattering in purple in Fowler's work, stands out the serene arrangement in the monochrome works by **Matthew Chambers** (b. 1982; lives and works in Los Angeles). Piece by piece, Chambers diligently constructs abstract arrays of canvas strips, underlain by a geometrical logic.

The uniform size of Chambers' works denotes a correlation among them in other senses as well, primarily regarding the way we look at them. In the current exhibition this challenge is manifest more than anything else in the ostensible discrepancy between the abstract monochrome works and the figurative diptych '*The Only Thing I Do Energetically Is What I Want to Do*' (2013).

For years, Chambers' abstract works were an inseparable part of a feverish practice of figurative painting. On a daily basis, Chambers would dredge up images he had seen in magazines and newspapers, books and fliers that had been left in his mailbox, and intuitively recreate them on the canvas, from memory alone. He didn't need his eyeglasses either while painting. In a work routine involving dozens of canvases in parallel, the abstract works showed up as the destination for the paintings in which Chambers identified an overburdening: he would cut these up into strips and begin a course of assembly according to a geometrical pattern. The painting of the entire piece in a uniform color appeared later.

In the past two years Chambers began to experiment more and more with the geometrical arrays, and gradually the abstract works have become an independent body of work, no longer dependent on the destruction of his figurative paintings. Out of the sequence of works in the exhibition, we witness two different modes of confronting the canvas: one seeks to contend with the unceasing flow of vacuous images from the outside world, while the other turns assiduously to realms of mathematical order and logic. Both of them amount to the divided figure of Chambers in the diptych, his back to us and his face towards that thing 'that he really wants to do.'

Oren Hadar

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**Brendan Fowler** (b. 1978), lives and works in Los Angeles. In the past year his work has been exhibited, among the rest, at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York; Gemeentemuseum, the Hague, Netherlands; Untitled, New York; Marlborough Chelsea, New York; and at the Control Room, Los Angeles. In addition to many solo gallery shows, Fowler has recently exhibited his 'New Camera' works in a solo show at the LA><ART, Los Angeles. Other shows where Fowler has exhibited in the recent years include Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris (2012); Aspen Art Museum, Colorado (2011); and the New Museum, New York (2010). Fowler's work is included in many major collections, including the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York; The Rubell Family Collection \ Contemporary Arts Foundation, Miami, Florida; and Susan and Michael Hort Collection, New York.

**Matthew Chambers** (b. 1982), lives and works in Los Angeles. Recent participation in exhibitions includes Untitled, New York (2013, 2010); Marlborough Madrid, Spain (2012); Rubell Family Collection \ Contemporary Arts Foundation, Miami, Florida (2011); Espacio 1414, San Juan, Puerto Rico (2011); Luce Gallery, Turin, Italy (2011); Greater LA, New York (2011). Among his upcoming shows for this year, Chambers will participate in the exhibition *Painters' Painters* at the Saatchi Gallery, London. In addition to his many solo gallery shows, Chambers has presented in the past year a solo exhibition at the Zabłudowicz Collection, London, dedicated to his works in the collection. His work is also included in Susan and Michael Hort Collection, New York; Sender Collection, New York; Il Giardino dei Lauri, Italy; and Saatchi Collection, London.

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