



ESSAY*I Park on the Street*

By Benjamin Godsill

A 1981 Jaguar XJ6 is a totally impossible car. Graceful and beautiful for sure, but – practically speaking – it is, well, just a maddening exercise in idiosyncrasy. The windshield wipers are kind of funky (i.e. they don't really work), the electrical system is Kafkaesque in its bureaucracy, and more generally nothing is (mechanically) where you would expect it to be. But, wow: the curves are divine. When it runs, the car is solid and serious, as lanky and handsomely attractive as it is eccentric. For all its faults and quirks, it needs to be said that the XJ6 is fundamentally *not* poorly made, it is simply obscurely made; each component is solid and seriously sensuous. The sum of its parts are a rare thing of grace. It is highly improbable that it works so well, but it does (on occasion, at least). Yet it is really quite impossible to ever figure out quite why or how it does what it does.

And so, too, with the paintings of Garth Weiser: it does not seem that they should or could “work”, but they do. Like a thirty-year-old British luxury car, Weiser's paintings place their ambitions mostly where they shouldn't; impracticality is inherent in both. Weiser drives an XJ6, an it feels fitting that his strange, intricate works are brought into the world by an artist who has a keen eye for the well made and elegant, but also for the fundamentally impractical. But then, it could be said that to be a painter now, after so many purported deaths of this most base of aesthetic modalities, require an eye capable of seeing import, gravitas and the need for that which seems devoid of function. Painting shouldn't really work or function, but both work and function his paintings do.

Composed of stolen and totally perverted visual cues from material culture – 1980s company logos, advertising signs, the vernacular scratches of graffiti that are erased, covered over, and otherwise obfuscated – Weiser's paintings are made sinister and abstract by a highly attenuated geometric hand. It is hard for the eye to reconcile these works or even puzzle out the how-and-why of each stage that brought them to fruition. Often, that which makes the most visual sense in each canvas has been debased; forms that appear solid never really are – having been made fluid and floating by a painterly acumen that seems borrowed from the Photoshop tool-pallet. The body of the viewer needs to physically engage with each canvas or mural; one can't just look but must bob-and-weave, glance from this side and that. We know the painting does not change based on our viewing angle, but still there is so much visual information (despite an economy of *visible* technique) that one's body seems to need to circulate spatially in order to reconcile its disparate parts. The paintings have an impact on the audience that goes beyond the phenomenological and into the aerobic.

Weiser's technique appears both physically and ideologically so simple, solid and restrained, that it seems inconceivable that the results could be quite as breathtaking as they are. There are no Schnabelesque pyrotechnics, Richteresque cosmologies, the displayed coolness of Parrino, or the cut-and-paste of Wool. Rather there are *all* of these things *all* at once, but they are sublimated into the whole. The sum of the whole is far greater than its funky constituent parts. There is a purity of craft, an application of paint-on-canvas again and again that acts both as an homage to skill and lineage and also as an understanding of how an image is read in a digitally encumbered age. Function (or the necessity of function) is removed, and only in this negation, in this freeness to engage in visually, does a purpose and machination – a function – begin to emerge.

For his mural for White Flag Projects, Weiser will employ a team of painters who will be given directed reign over the raw surface of the gallery's wall – painting figures, graphics, and almost anything else on a 60 foot span. Weiser will then regain control, painting over the tempera undercoat with wide white acrylic stripes, the water content of the latter paint reactivating the former, causing it to bleed and drip and undermine any gesture towards representation that the under-painting might have possessed. But Weiser never holds up his abstractions as a direct destruction of representation; instead, his work acknowledges the mutability of real forms and functions in our epoch. The works are simply paint applied to a surface – no magic here – but they seem to skew and alter real space in real time. The paintings are wholly analog but can exist only in a world where the possibilities of Photoshop exist. In a way, these non-representational works are not really abstractions at all, but simply an extension of the world around us.

Though the various elements that make up Weiser's work are well crafted, there is an idiosyncrasy to the manner in which they are arrayed to compose a whole. At first, we can't see the works, they simply don't make any ocular sense to us and as such they almost don't exist. Like a 30 year-old luxury automobile that has always had its share of problems, a painting by Weiser is an expression of craft seemingly at the expense of function. Function is not the point – in fact, his paintings seem to actively work against function by foregrounding form – yet elegantly function they do. There is nothing practical about an aging luxury automobile, but likewise there is nothing practical about a painting either. If you are going to have something impractical in your life, you might as well get as much use-value as is possible. You might as well park it on the street. ●

Benjamin Godsill is a Curatorial Associate at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. Most recently Godsill organized "Urban China: Informal China," a discursive project by Jiang Jun/Urban China Magazine that opened at the New Museum in February 2009 and subsequently traveled to the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. In October 2010 his exhibition "The Last Newspaper" will open at the New Museum, New York. Benjamin Godsill holds a BA from Pitzer College in Claremont, California and a Master's degree in Media Studies from the New School in New York City.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Exterior:

Untitled, 2010.

Tempera and polymer on vinyl, 156 x 156 inches.

Large wall:

Wall Painting for White Flag Projects 125" x 686", 2010.

Acrylic, tempera, and acrylic latex on wall, 125 x 686 inches.

Small wall:

I wouldn't have worn mascara if I knew I was going to be taking a trip down memory lane 2008, 2010.

Offset lithography on paper, 150 elements, approximately 5.5 x 8.85 inch each, approximately 72 x 50 inches overall. Removed from *I wouldn't have worn mascara if I knew I was going to be taking a trip down memory lane 2008*, an artists book published by Onestar Press, Paris. Edition limited to 250 numbered copies. Available for purchase at the front desk for \$50.

A silkscreen exhibition poster has been designed by the artist for White Flag Projects and produced in an edition limited to 150 copies. It is available for purchase at the front desk for \$20.

All artworks courtesy the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

Garth Weiser is best known for his highly graphic paintings that compress the vocabulary of abstraction into dense pastiches of history and technique. For his exhibition at White Flag Projects, Weiser presents three paintings of differing form, each emphasizing their discrete intentionalities and temporal relationships to their substrates and mediums. The works include *Wall Painting for White Flag Projects 125" x 686"*, a temporary mural that occupies the gallery's largest wall; a second painting rendered in water-soluble media on the exterior of the gallery; and an installation of 150 pages torn from *I wouldn't have worn mascara if I knew I was going to be taking a trip down memory lane*, an artists book reproducing Weiser's 2008 painting of the same title.

Garth Weiser has exhibited extensively, including solo shows with Casey Kaplan, New York; Altman Siegel Gallery, San Francisco; and Guild & Greyshkul, New York. His group exhibitions include "The Triumph of Painting; Abstract America," Saatchi Gallery, London; "Greater New York," PS1 MoMA, Long Island City, New York; "Gruppenausstellung," Autocenter, Berlin; and "Constellations: Paintings from the MCA Collection," Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. His work has been discussed in *The New York Times*, *Flash Art*, *The New Yorker*, *Frieze Online*, and *The Chicago Tribune*. Weiser earned his MFA from Columbia University of the Arts, New York, in 2005 and his BFA from Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York, in 2003.

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