

Frank, Peter. “Phillis Ideal at David Richard Gallery” *The Huffington Post*, 2013

Phillis Ideal paints expansively, regardless of the size of her visual field, laying out her abstractions with broadly described areas of color. The breadth of that description incorporates both painterly gesture and sharply defined contour, a combination of texture – abetted by a restrained but still succulent palette – that opens up visual possibility. The overlays of gesture, including scratch and scribble, and geometrically defined edge continue around and atop the major forms, providing that much more intricate and engaging a composition. In their confluence of the hard edge and the painterly, Ideal’s paintings evince a sophisticated grasp of American postwar painting – sophisticated enough to add to, even renew, it while remaining distinctive and up-to-date.

Tresp, Lauren. “Phillis Ideal: Overlap” *THE Magazine* May, 2013

Gallery is comprised of twenty-one abstract paintings in a surprising, unpredictable palette. The title of the show, *Overlap*, consistent with the titling of her pieces, is starkly descriptive, and also provides a useful guide with which to proceed in viewing. *Overlap* refers to Ideal’s process, in which she layers and pieces together paint and elements of collage. She often pours onto previous layers, allowing the paint to flow organically in response to the preceding episodes of mark-making. This practice of constructing an image layer by layer is combined with gestural brushwork and highly finished surface textures to result in “paintings” that reward prolonged viewing. I refer to them as “paintings” because Ideal’s practice is intimately rooted in materiality and medium. Despite their smooth, two-dimensional surfaces, the resulting artworks are more aptly referred to as sculpted objects with presence and body, rather than painted, disembodied images.

The most arresting aspect of this show is Ideal’s choice of palette. Colors vary from dull grays, olive greens, and passionate reds to crisp jolts of lime green and peachy coral. In *Conceal, Reveal* (2010), clean, sweeping strokes of cerulean blue frame a muddle of ochre and gray, bringing life and breath to colors that previously hung stale and stagnant. The title draws attention to the dual nature of a layering practice: the frame-like composition creates a window to a moment that has passed, a temperament that has since lost its will. Though *Conceal, Reveal* is more minimal in its composition compared to the more vivacious pieces in the exhibition, it epitomizes the core visual and process-based motifs that characterize the exhibition. Ideal’s layering illustrates a visual history of the painting’s evolution while simultaneously concealing it, transforming the image into something altogether new.

Off The Deep End, completed over the course of four years, is a large, sixty-one by seventy-one inch acrylic and collage on panel. Its more aggressive composition illustrates a further duality that characterizes Ideal’s work—the layering of flat expanses

of color with painterly brush strokes. Her brushwork, though exuberant and seemingly spontaneous, reads as more confident than reckless. A background of blasé olives, grays, and blues is accentuated by stark blows of black, brown, and forest green. Dissonant flashes of coral, lemony yellow, and sky blue punctuate the stillness, bringing refreshing light and levity to the whorl of gestural strokes.

In the diptych *She Said He Said* (2012), two panels share the same highlights of lime green, but otherwise clash in palette and composition. The title reflects an interest in the opacity that results in the overlapping of visual and material components. Each panel features expanses of dense, static color, obscuring the painterly strokes that preceded them. The left is dominated by a towering billow of dusty rose. The right asserts an ominous cloud of black. Hope for the seemingly incompatible compositions (or couple?), however, is given in the spontaneous strokes of lime green that unite Ideal's surprising, non sequitur forms and colors.

Formal variety occupies each painting. Where soft, sweeping brush strokes meet blocks of dense color and hard edges there is depth of composition, but also a stratigraphic layering of the artworks' evolution through moods, disjunctive thoughts, and pulsations of energy. Paint is ever-mutable under Ideal's hand. The potential for additional pours of pigment and continual overlapping of visual or material elements is tempered only by highly finished surface textures. The many contributing layers of each image are smoothed into a sumptuous, velveteen surface that breathes an air of hushed finality.

A relationship with Abstract Expressionism or Color Field painting is evident, and has been commented on in previous statements about Ideal's work. But while Abstract Expressionist painters sought out sublime, disembodied images through the purity of paint, Ideal's work is strikingly different due to the patent materiality of her process. Her method of pouring paint—of collaging elements together and allowing them to influence how the paint takes shape—limits her role as author. Instead, Ideal is something more akin to a conductor, orchestrating the formal elements of her medium until they have fulfilled their purpose. Rather than painting a painting, she constructs it, grounding and embodying her images in the process that creates them. The resulting art objects are two-dimensional images inseparable from their three-dimensional material bodies.

Phillis Ideal's paintings probe and question: at what point does paint become image? When, after layering continuously, is the act of mark-making "done"? When does the "painting" or "art" emerge? An awkwardly collaged block of neon coral among romantic, painterly swirls might be Ideal's tongue-in-cheek answer. Perhaps the inability to provide a satisfactory answer for these questions is what imbues her paintings with momentum and persistent vitality.