

Jason Stopa *Joy Labyrinth*

May 13 – June 18, 2021



Morgan Lehman is very pleased to present “Joy Labyrinth”, Jason Stopa’s first solo exhibition with the gallery.

Over the past year, I've thought about how painting can respond to crisis. In this new body of work, I've made a series of paintings that reference utopian architecture, avant-garde music and joy. "Joy Labyrinth," (2020-21) is the centerpiece of the show. I see the title as a metaphor for moving through the world in the grips of a pandemic.

-Jason Stopa, 2021

Deploying buoyant, lively color systems defined by opaque grounds and translucent glazes, Stopa’s paintings celebrate the power of color in its own right. These works exude a certain optimism, playfulness, and hope, feelings that run contrary to the pain and suffering of a pandemic-weary world. In short, they are a reprieve from what so many of us have had to deal with this past year, and highlight the capacity of art to both transform and heal.

Stopa’s latest body of work continues his longstanding interest in the possibilities of abstract pictorial language. The artist often makes visual references to the rich history of painting’s past, and yet also embeds his images with reminders of what it means to see something in the context of a contemporary culture in which the analog and the digital are so inextricably enmeshed. Schematic in layout, each painting presents a graphic arrangement of forms that recalls disparate sources including heraldic shields, architectural blueprints, and even comic strips. These arrangements read as simultaneously architectural and biomorphic, often thoroughly confusing the viewer’s sense of figure-ground relationships within the picture plane and provoking one to ask, “what am I looking at?”

Stopa counteracts the structural solidity of each painting’s composition by deploying an idiosyncratic range of painterly techniques. In premeditated but unfussy brushstrokes, the artist lays down oil colors rapidly, imbuing each painting with a sense of urgency. As viewers, we are asked to consider each work as a timestamp of its own making, and to also bring our own urgency to the act of seeing, a mode we’re all too familiar with as consumers of nonstop virtual images. Stopa also regularly includes highly intentional impasto paint passages in his works, which serve to bring attention to the painting’s surface and objecthood, declaring that the work is in fact a thing in the world and not a fleeting image on a screen.

A full-color catalog with essay by Raphael Rubinstein accompanies the exhibition.

Jason Stopa (b. 1983) is a painter and writer living in Brooklyn, NY. He received his BFA from Indiana University and his MFA from Pratt Institute. Stopa’s work has been reviewed in Artforum, Artsy, Hyperallergic, and The Brooklyn Rail. Recent group exhibitions include "Light," at Miles McEnery (NYC) and "Wayne Thiebaud Influencer: A New Generation" at the Manetti Shrem Museum (Davis, CA). Recent solo exhibitions include "Hanging Gardens" at Atelier W (Pantin, FR) in 2019 and "The Gate" at Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects (NYC) in 2018. Stopa teaches at Pratt Institute, The School of Visual Arts, and works for an academic journal at Columbia University.