

# Art in America

INTERNATIONAL • REVIEW

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**LAND ART**



OCTOBER'12 \$10.00

Holly Zausner: *Unseen*, 2007, super 16mm film, approx. 16½ minutes; at Postmasters.



character in her work. This is made clear in the film *Unseen*, which was shown in the back room. It captures the artist, lugging one of her signature large, floppy, humanoid sculptures, as she races around the city, past historic landmarks and through empty streets and the Spreepark. In each space, danger awaits—a shopwindow explodes, a tiger prowls—forcing Zausner to continue moving. Neither the artist nor her sculptural progeny can find a safe place to rest, a precarious situation that can be interpreted as a metaphor for contemporary life.

In the collages, the forward movement of the film is halted, and the stills become isolated memories that, unfortunately, mean little to the viewer.

—Brienne Walsh

## AMY FELDMAN BLACKSTON

For her first solo exhibition in New York, Brooklyn-based painter Amy Feldman installed four large canvases (all 2012) snugly within the small gallery's space. These paintings—as big as 8 feet high or wide—present a simple visual grammar that offers a counterpoint to the effusive visual cacophonies of Feldman's earlier work. In the 2012 paintings, one encounters single geometric shapes repeated in light to dark gray monotonies on a white ground. Despite being completely abstract, they are charged with a healthy dose of anthropomorphic humor.

Asserting individuality and character to rehash minimalist and conceptual vocabularies, Feldman critically situates her work in contemporary practice. In *All or Nothing*, a repeated chevron shape

riffs playfully on Frank Stella's *Delta* (1958) and "Notched V" series (mid-1960s). She takes up the kind of self-conscious humor Mary Heilmann has deployed throughout her career by similarly retaining painterly drips and mishaps in the finished work. The show's catalogue traces Feldman's practice from 2007 onward and offers a means to contextualize the exhibition vis-à-vis her earlier work. A selection of the artist's small collaged drawings, sparsely populated by sketched, cartoonish images of jewels, magazine cut-outs and a USDA food pyramid amid an array of gestural marks, hint at the roots of the large paintings' abstract forms. One suspects a critique of consumerist Western culture, of the growing abyss between dearth and excess.

The lone, bloated, bulbous donut shape that occupies the preponderance of canvas in *Owed* is painted in large looping gestures, with haphazard drips of paint splattered on what remains of the clean, gessoed surface. The lower half of the form, which seems to encroach on the viewer's space, is slightly thicker than the top, so that the upper portion of the canvas effectively recedes. One thinks all at once of a slobbering animal, an overly enthusiastic speaker's spittle and the sloppy habits of a careless, gluttonous eater.

As the artist has explained, each canvas consists of multiple layers of shapes and marks that coalesce into the final, pared down forms. This underpainting, only occasionally visible, tugs on the viewer's imagination, suggesting unknowable iterations of the image below. It is as if an invisible level of extravagance has

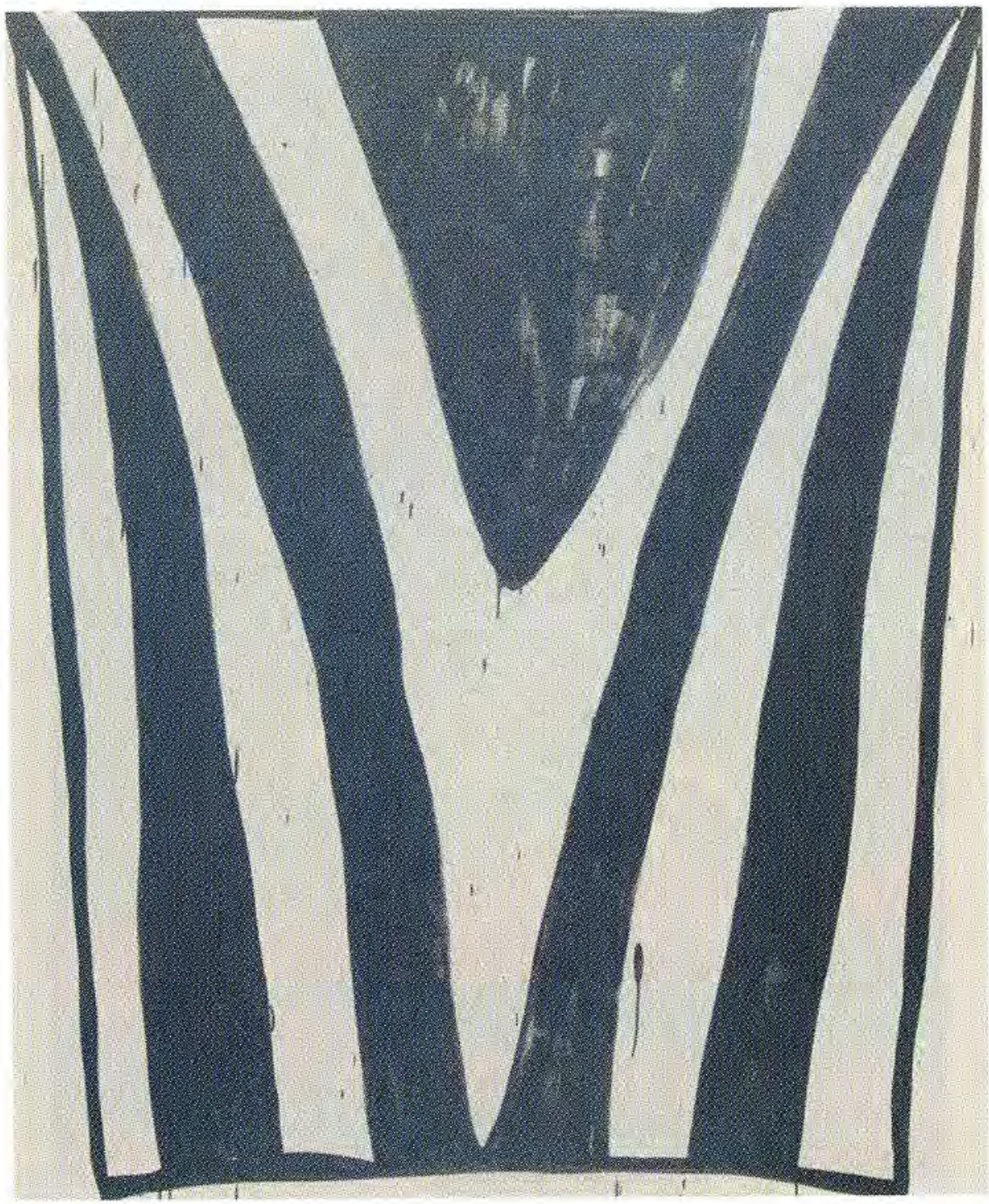
undergirded the work's seeming simplicity. Add to this Feldman's loose play of personal, cultural and historical references, and one sees the artist achieving a compelling synthesis of meaning through humble, unpretentious means.

—Amanda Parmer

## XYLOR JANE CANADA

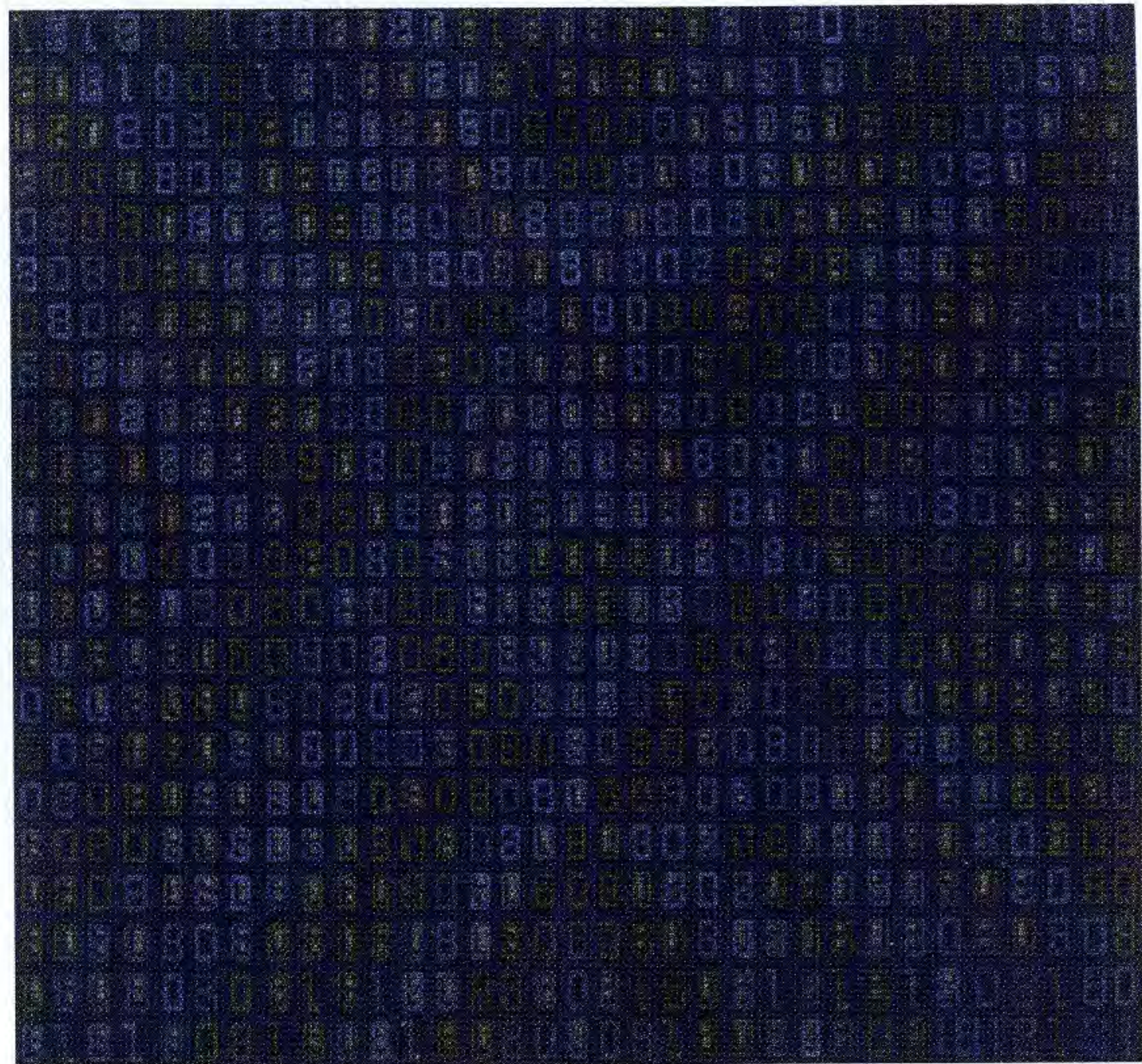
Xylor Jane gets up absurdly early each morning to begin painting, all the better (she claims) to access the unconscious forces that tend to be accessible at that hour. (The title of her show—her third at Canada—was, in fact, "3:07 A.M.") That said, her subject matter is highly quantifiable: gridded Arabic numerals, each occupying its own square and strung into long, repetitive sequences. Jane chooses numbers that are meaningful for her, even if their significance may not be clear to us. Their sequencing can be complex—tetradic primes (18180808 . . .) that read the same right side up and upside down, or Fibonacci sequences (0112358 . . .), each number the sum of the previous two—or simple, as in counting from one to 102. We might assume there isn't much room in such a systematic practice to allow for sincere feeling, but quite the opposite is true. For Jane (who is 47, and lives in Greenfield, Mass.) these numbers carry metaphysical weight, and the devotion with which she renders them is palpable.

Color is Jane's emotional key, and, not surprisingly, her use of it is both extremely controlled and utterly subjective. Rarely brushed, it is applied in single,



Amy Feldman: *All or Nothing*, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 96 by 80 inches; at Blackston.

Xylor Jane: *Nox Rex #25 (NYX for MD)*, 2012, oil, ink and graphite on panel, 31 by 29 inches; at Canada.



unmodulated dots, sometimes as tiny as a millimeter in diameter. The daubs come in geometric clusters, and within those tiny clusters the color breaks down further into discrete rows, like bands in a rainbow or light refracted through a prism. Tracking the colors up close will give you a deep respect for obsessive mark-making—and more than a little eyestrain. From afar they yield pure optical pleasure of the sort that just doesn't translate in reproduction.

In *Nox Rex #28 (Vacation)*, 2009, the numbers are barely visible dead-on; but stand at an oblique angle, and they shimmer into view like secret runes rendered in opalescent ink. In bright works like *Nox Rex #27 (Morpheus)*, 2012, numbers in a tutti-frutti palette pop out like LED lights in a movie marquee. In others, like *Nox Rex #25 (NYX for MD)*, 2012, a misty tonality takes over, bringing to mind the nocturnes of Whistler.

Jane works according to weather conditions, revisiting one painting, for instance, only on overcast days, and another when it's sunny out: hence, some works take years to produce. It puts one in mind of other sorts of reckonings—the seasons, life's passages—an experience of time that just can't be summarized on spreadsheets. How do you “account” for a life's work? Jane's answer is methodical, formal and, ultimately, beautiful. Count slowly across her best works: you'll arrive at a sum that's completely human. It's like discovering the latent optimism that lies, unremarked, in the old adage, “Our days are numbered.”

—Sarah Schmerler

## BRANDON BALLENGÉE RONALD FELDMAN

In his debut New York solo show, Brandon Ballengée, an artist and research biologist in his late 30s, compellingly fused marine science and environmental activism to produce esthetically engaging art. The SoHo gallery's two darkened rooms held sculptural arrangements of preserved specimens, digital chromogenic prints of laboratory-treated frogs and birds, and a video. A mood of bereavement ran throughout Ballengée's exhibition, titled “Collapse: The Cry of Silent Forms.”

The show referred most specifically to the ecological destruction caused by the 2010 explosion of a British Petroleum drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico. *Collapse* (2012), a quadrilateral pyramid (12 by 15 by 15 feet) of one-gallon glass jars containing over 370 species in clear preservative, was the most elaborate manifestation. Evoking a “trophic pyramid”—a representation of an ecosystem food chain—*Collapse* is sequenced from the simplest life-forms (such as purple barnacle) at the bottom to the more complex (such as a juvenile blackfish shark) at the top. The jars at the four bottom corners hold crude oil and Corexit, the toxic solvent used to break up the oil slick into subsurface globules, which hides them from view but also accelerates the oil's consumption by marine life. While the seven tiers of containers towering over the viewer counter a sense of disorder, empty jars interspersed throughout, increasing toward the top, indicate

extinct species destroyed by habitat degradation and overfishing.

These barren jars remind viewers that ancient Egyptian pyramids served as tombs. And the glistening vacant jar at the apex resembles the radiant “Eye of Providence” atop the unfinished pyramid on the dollar bill, linking the theme of death to commerce.

Ballengée also referenced mortality in his titling of other works. *Styx* (1996-2012), the name of the mythological river separating the living and the dead, is a light-box installation featuring 13 clear dishes that contain tiny treefrog skeletons with missing limbs or far too many legs. The series “Reliquaries” (2001-ongoing) consists of photos of these frog specimens, whose deadly deformations are attributed to ecological imbalances in the California wetlands where Ballengée found them. Accentuated by the removal of flesh and the addition of crimson and turquoise stain to the bones and cartilage, the amphibians' grotesquely malformed anatomy visually recalls the whimsical linearity in Paul Klee's watercolors but, even more, the twisted forms of crucified martyrs. Like the show as a whole, these images are impressive for both their ethical engagement and heartbreaking beauty.

The video *Committed* (2012) implies in its title both crimes committed and modernism's conflicts over political commitment versus autonomous formal innovation. It overlays BP marketing infomercials televised after the Gulf disaster with three bands of rolling quotations refuting the company's misleading statements. The