



"SALTON SEA (HALF GROUND)," 2012, **Kevin Appel**
ACRYLIC, SCREEN INK, OIL, AND UV CURED INK ON CANVAS OVER PANEL,
77" x 66"

PHOTO: COURTESY SUSANNE VIELMETTER

LOS ANGELES

Kevin Appel at Susanne Vielmetter

Painter Kevin Appel has evolved a particular recipe for blending architectural rendering with abstraction—mainly, using the former to create space and perspective as an underlying armature and containment for the gestural mysteries of the latter. Or maybe he is using the idea of architectural rigidity to impose order onto the potential chaos of abstract mutations. Or maybe he is depicting a realm of paradox, such as the realm of painting or the human mind, wherein contradictory impulses struggle for control and occasionally reach a détente. Experimenting with this formula could yield endlessly fresh variations, and Appel has found many of them over the years. For his most recent series, he introduces more than one new variable into the mix—using photographs he's taken himself rather than found or discovered; obscuring large parts of the compositions with monochromatic blocks; privileging singular gestural moments; and, most decisively, specific landscape imagery and narrative context. Appel undertakes a fairly elaborate method to get the range of effects that resolve into these confounding, yet accessible, paintings. There's a porcelain finish canvas treatment, a step involving printing the photographic imagery on top of that with UV inks, and finally the application of acrylic, oil and enamel paint selections chosen for their

different surface qualities. The most compelling results include *Salton Sea (half ground)*, (2012) which has something a lot like a horizon line. It appears to divide a hazy white sky from a stony foreground, but closer inspection swaps perspectives and dissolves the scene; telegraphing the artifice, a large reddish square floats above the ground parallel to the surface. *Salton Sea (room 2)* is mostly a large semi-transparent square; all the action occurs around the edges. Because of its large scale, it truly feels like a peripheral vision.

The Salton Sea, which inspired the series and for which all the works are named, is a place of contradictions, abstractions and extremes. It has a white, intense, diffuse light that seems to come from everywhere at once. The site has a complicated history, that is part natural phenomenon and part disastrous human meddling, involving the descent from man-made earthly paradise to a sediment-rich, three-headed-fish pond. It is a surreal place, both geologically and psychically. Come to think of it, it already looks a lot like a Kevin Appel painting. And despite the Malevich-like scrims of obfuscation, pattern interferences, inverted spatial relationships and thick snaking ropes of line and color floating midair, these paintings look a lot like the Salton Sea, too.

—SHANA NYS DAMBROT