

# In “Souvenirs from Nowhere,” An Alchemy of Oil and Water

Bo Joseph considers his abstract works to be closer to found objects than mixed-media paintings. They begin as a series of spliced-together photos, culled from the artist’s expansive archive, that Joseph deconstructs, builds up, and deconstructs again in an unusual, labor-intensive process.

ARTSY EDITORIAL  
BY MOLLY OSBERG  
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Installation view "[Souvenirs from Nowhere](#)" at McClain Gallery. Image courtesy of McClain Gallery.

This fall, the California-bred, New York-based artist brings his delicate lines and large-scale works to Houston’s McClain Gallery in “Souvenirs from Nowhere.” The show contains both the artist’s signature collage

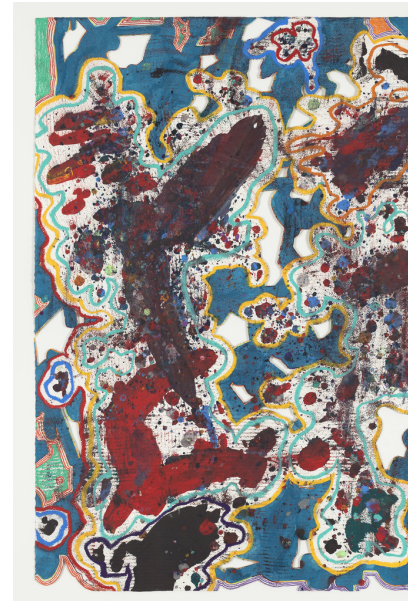
structures and pieces from his new “Experiments in Expiration” (2015) series, a body of work that feeds off the detritus of his intense studio practice, including pastel shavings and spilled acrylic, layered together to realize works that are more objects than paintings.



Bo Joseph  
*Experiments in Expiration: Absurdity*, 2015  
McClain Gallery



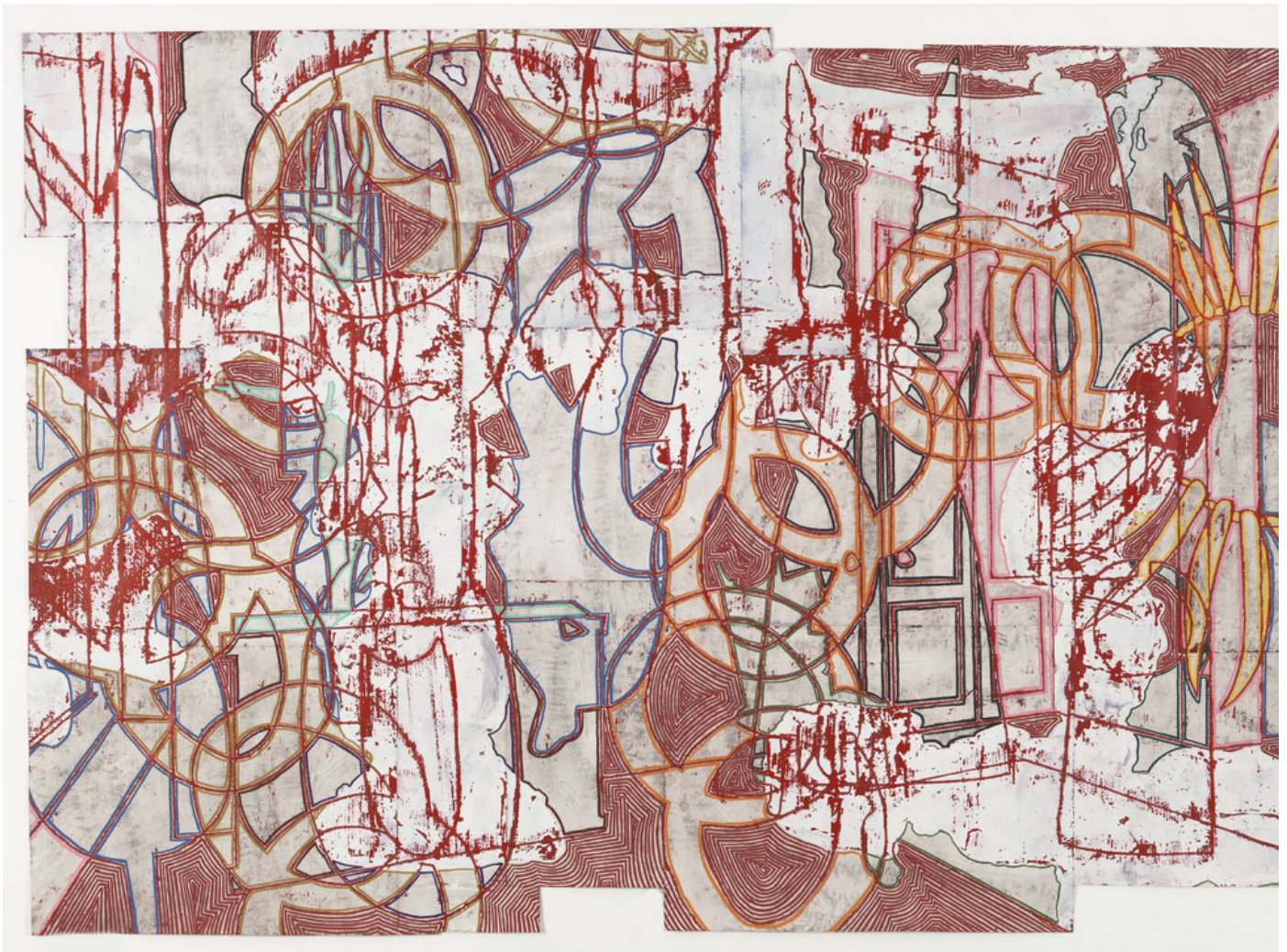
Bo Joseph  
*Experiments in Expiration: Obliquity*, 2015  
McClain Gallery



Bo Joseph  
*Experiments in Expiration: Improvidence*, 2015  
McClain Gallery

Some of the works in “Souvenirs from Nowhere” may, at first glance, appear to be completely abstract, but upon closer inspection suggestions of recognizable things emerge: a door, a flower, a face. To create these images Joseph exploits the repulsion of oil- and water-based materials, a tactic that allows for a curious effect that looks washed-out yet finely drawn.





Bo Joseph  
*Pangaea: Terra Ignota*, 2015  
McClain Gallery



Bo Joseph  
*Disunified Theory: Dark Shift*, 2015  
McClain Gallery



Bo Joseph  
*Pangaea: Terra Australis*, 2014  
McClain Gallery

In interviews, the artist has said he is drawn to de Kooning's embrace of the "off-kilter," and that sense of imbalance is very much at play in this



show. Joseph first strips down a variety of images—ancient masks pulled from art catalogs, as well as personal photographs and book illustrations—and puzzles together their outlines so they overlap with each other, using oil pastel to work into their distinct shapes. Individual pieces of paper are cobbled together into a larger works and then washed in acrylic paint. He then scrapes them with a razor and sands them down. In one last move, which gives the paintings their soft auras, Joseph coats the work in a water-based ink and rinses it off. Often, the artist has noted, the delicate wet paper breaks apart while he’s working and the fragments of paper are joined back together. It’s a reminder not simply of the delicacy of the process, but of the importance of letting the materials guide the works as much—if not more—than the original subject.

—Molly Osberg

*“Souvenirs from Nowhere” is on view at McClain Gallery, Houston, Sep. 12–Nov. 7, 2015.*

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