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NY CULTURE

A New Painting Exhibition, ‘The Forever Now,’ Opens at MoMA



‘The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World’ opens this weekend at the Museum of Modern Art.
STEVE REMICH FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By **ANDY BATTAGLIA**

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A sense of history looms over “The Forever Now,” a painting exhibition opening on Sunday at the Museum of Modern Art, even though none of the work on display is even 10 years old.

“The contemporary attitude toward what could be considered a new idea or innovation is different,” said Laura Hoptman, the show’s curator. “What do you do after the end of history? That’s where we are now.”

The show, she said, is an attempt at real-time art history when the idea of new painting styles and movements seems to have run its course. With access to limitless archives online, she said, references to the past have become a part of progress.

“There’s a huge amount of information that we have,” Ms. Hoptman said. “Not just new information but old information, which is new. On the Internet, an artifact looks the same as a picture from yesterday.”

The subtitle for the show, “Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World,” borrows an idea from science-fiction and cultural critiques like Simon Reynolds’s book “Retromania,” which describes the decade of the 2000s as an era when cultural progress stopped and styles from the past, present and future came to coexist.

“One of the things that is most obvious about contemporary art over the past 10 or 15 years is its pluralism,” Ms. Hoptman said. “Everything is going on all the time and everywhere. Art history is a discipline of putting things in order and creating a story, and it’s getting harder. That story has come to an end, and we have to figure out what to do.”

The condition applies to artists as well. The 17 painters in “The Forever Now,” which mixes young and emerging artists with more established figures, hail mostly from the U.S. and Europe. Each was selected, the curator said, to represent different ways of reconciling the past.

“As long as you’re respectful of quality and the history of art, then you can use it freely,” said Josh Smith, who adopts familiar historical styles—referencing disparate sources from Abstract Expressionism to Paul Gauguin and Edvard Munch—in paintings that range wildly in terms of style and technique.

Matt Connors, whose paintings in the show evoke the geometry and elemental colors of artists such as Josef Albers and Ellsworth Kelly, said he finds nourishment from the past.

“It doesn’t seem unusual to me to continually be in a research mode,” the 41-year-old artist said. One of the joys of his work, he added, is “connecting to other artists and



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other histories.”

Amy Sillman, the oldest artist in the show at 59 (the youngest is 28-year-old Oscar Murillo), described the current state of painting as consistent with the way most artists now work, drawing from references across the ages.

“I look at stuff from ancient Egypt, and I also look at now,” she said. “I don’t think about it as art history—I think about it as art. People live with everything at once, including the future.”

Painting is especially well-suited to this sort of time travel, or “the quality to transcend time,” said Charline von Heyl.

“It doesn’t even matter what the message of a painting is,” she said. “A painting is going to have the same relation to the body with the same visual implication as it did 300 years ago, 200 years ago, 100 years ago. There is almost nothing else in the world that does that.”