

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Phyllis Tuchman, "Michael Williams: Opening," *The Brooklyn Rail*, June 5, 2020

BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

ArtSeen

Michael Williams: *Opening*

By [Phyllis Tuchman](#)



Michael Williams, *Scooped Painting*, 2020. Inkjet on canvas, 106 x 143 7/8 inches. © Michael Williams. Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels.

Michael Williams was among the unlucky artists who had a solo show shuttered when New York went into lockdown in mid-March. On view for only two weeks, his exhibition at Gladstone Gallery in Chelsea featured 11 large paintings and five small collages. While these works are now accessible on the internet, this isn't an ideal way to view them—partly because of the way they were made, and partly because his installation was integral to how you respond to his art.

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For starters, Williams composes his canvases on a computer and then prints them with inkjet. In an instant, on command, he can change colors he's considering without any consequences. He doesn't need to scrape off paint or sand surfaces. For this exhibition, he didn't embellish his work with additional paint, something he's often done in the past. Consequently, when you look at his art on a website, what you see, to some extent, is what he sees before his paintings are fabricated in canvas in a different set of dimensions.

Scooped Painting (2020), a large, horizontal work, is a case in point. At almost 9 by 12 feet, it belongs to the seeing is believing category. Even standing inches away from its surface, it was practically impossible to comprehend that what seemed to be a multitude of tangible and decidedly creamy brushstrokes were not examples of impasto applied by a spatula or the like. Instead, they were fabricated from computer files.

Painting (2020) is another canvas best seen in person. Looking over the shoulder of a mop-headed mutant—stretcher bar corners serving as its arms—you found yourself regarding, as the figure did, a chaotic abstraction of the sort Williams has exhibited in the past. The painting within a painting makes more sense when it's closer to its real-life dimensions.

Then, there was the matter of the sequencing of the art on view. From the first painting that presented itself until the last one tucked away in the rear of Gladstone's West 24th Street outpost, the installation set the tone for how the work was experienced. As soon as you entered the gallery, *Struck Set* (2020) beckoned. The artist depicted a spacious room that you—or, at least, I—wanted to enter. Even though the scene was in disarray, I wanted to sit down on the chair whose back faced me. It would be hard to achieve the same sensation with a thumbnail or even a jpg.

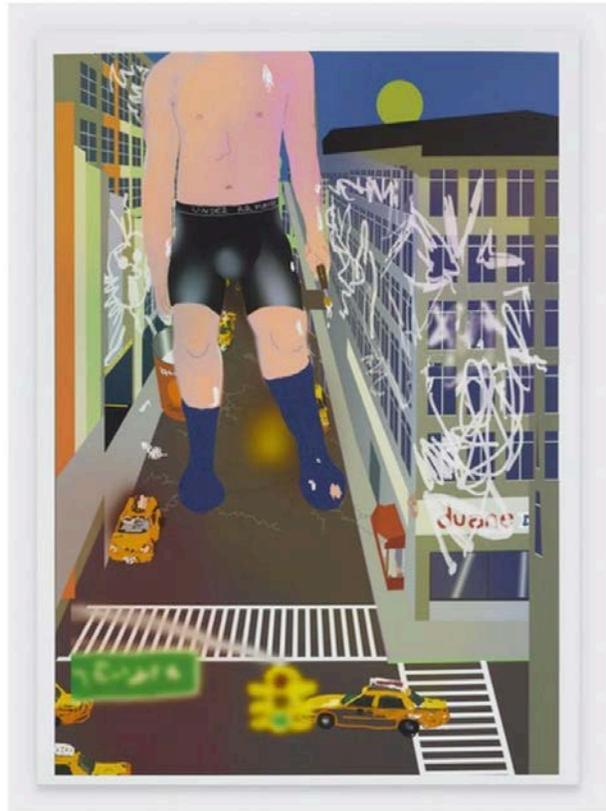
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Or consider the giant depicted from the neck down in *Curb Your Enthusiasm* (2020). This creature loomed larger in the nook in which the canvas was placed than it would have in the other display rooms. Standing in the middle of a New York City street, under a full moon, a bare-chested figure wearing Under Armour briefs and high socks called to mind a monster-gone-amok movie. Two mangled yellow cabs, an overhead traffic light, and the façade of a Duane Reade drugstore further bolstered this impression.

With his latest inkjet paintings, Williams seems more relaxed than he's been previously. You no longer feel him metaphorically shouting, "Look, Ma, No hands." He's no longer executing pictures that resemble complicated jigsaw-like puzzles or multi-layered confections. Instead, recognizable imagery is now front and center.

Nevertheless, distortions abound. There are all sorts of marks and passages that seem awry. When push comes to shove, these remind you that you're looking at a work of art hanging on a wall, not an illustration in a magazine or an advertisement on television.

These funky components are remnants from files that have been removed; and are an unexpected by-product of Williams's process. Black squiggles here, a pink patch there might be likened to pentimenti or even errata, but they're more like homeless brushstrokes.



Michael Williams, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, 2020. Inkjet on canvas, 116 1/4 x 83 5/8 inches. © Michael Williams. Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels.

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There's also imagery that Williams does not need to invent. For example, his super realistic wall socket looks like it was lifted directly from a hardware catalogue. Similarly, two plates from a dinner service belong to the famous, art-filled Kronenhalle restaurant in Zürich, a city where Williams has had several solo shows. That table, incidentally, is covered by a cloth stained with red wine from an overturned goblet. Surely it was easier to attain this effect with a computer program than with a paintbrush.

Over the course of several solo shows, Williams has exploited all sorts of possibilities available to him when he utilizes computer programs and inkjet printers. This outing was particularly successful.



Michael Williams, *Truth Or Consequences*, 2020. Inkjet on canvas, 111 x 85 inches. © Michael Williams. Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels.