

Art in America

GEDI SIBONY

Greene Naftali

Gedi Sibony pursued a disarming new direction in his fourth show at Greene Naftali. For a decade now, the New York native has practiced a distinct brand of minimalist assemblage, combining the humblest of detritus—carpet remnants, pieces of drywall—into sculptures that are at once abject and have a certain grandeur. His creations have regularly coaxed words like spirituality, magic and grace from art critics. Surprisingly, his latest outing consisted almost entirely of paintings, but with a twist.

The 11 new pieces (all 2014) were made, the artist says, by cutting out sections from the walls of defunct aluminum tractor trailers and hanging them as found. Each of the works, measuring from 6 to 10 feet on a side, bears some of the aluminum panel's original colors and designs—the geometry of a Pepsi insignia, the image of a sweating bottle of a Canada Dry emblem. But in each case, to a greater or lesser extent, a combination of age and rolled-on paint has conspired with the fragmentation imposed by the artist to obscure the imagery and logos. (Painting over the brands is presumably legally required when the trailers are taken out of service.)

In *The Great Abundance*, that sweating bottle looms large, the ice cubes in which it rests partially obscured by roller marks fanning out from the panel's bottom center. With seemingly gratuitous care, a nameless painter has used rollers of various sizes, each just large enough to cover identifying text or symbols.

The first three letters from an Allied Van Lines logo are presented in the nearly 9-foot-wide *All*. Those characters, rendered in italic typeface, are plainly legible despite having

been painted over with jagged strokes of pale peach. That hue creates a taut harmony with the faded orange of the aluminum truck.

There's sufficient liveliness and seeming intentionality in the paint marks to make you wonder about the artist's hands-off claim. At first I assumed that Sibony was involved in applying the paint. (He was actually trained as a painter.)

Sibony's presentation comes amid lively discussions about zombie formalism and provisional painting. These works share characteristics of both but, being found objects, fit into neither classification. They have perhaps more in common with the *décollages* of midcentury French artists Raymond Hains and Jacques de la Villeglé.

Held by Hands, a 2012 sculpture in a darkened rear room, is a model for an installation Sibony created at the Pulitzer Foundation in St. Louis with objects from the institution's holdings. In that work, two ancient stone figurines appear to gaze into the firmament of an actual Lucio Fontana "little theater," which hung behind them. Even with modest materials like foamcore and plaster, the model suggests the wonder surely felt by prehistoric people gazing at a starry sky. Fontana often wrote, the artist told me, of "the mystery of the universe," something that certainly obsessed those long-ago humans too. That Sibony could evoke such wonder and mystery with crude mockups only underlined his ability to conjure the exalted from the lowly.

—Brian Boucher

Gedi Sibony: *The Great Abundance*, 2014, aluminum semi-trailer, 95½ by 89½ inches; at Greene Naftali.

