

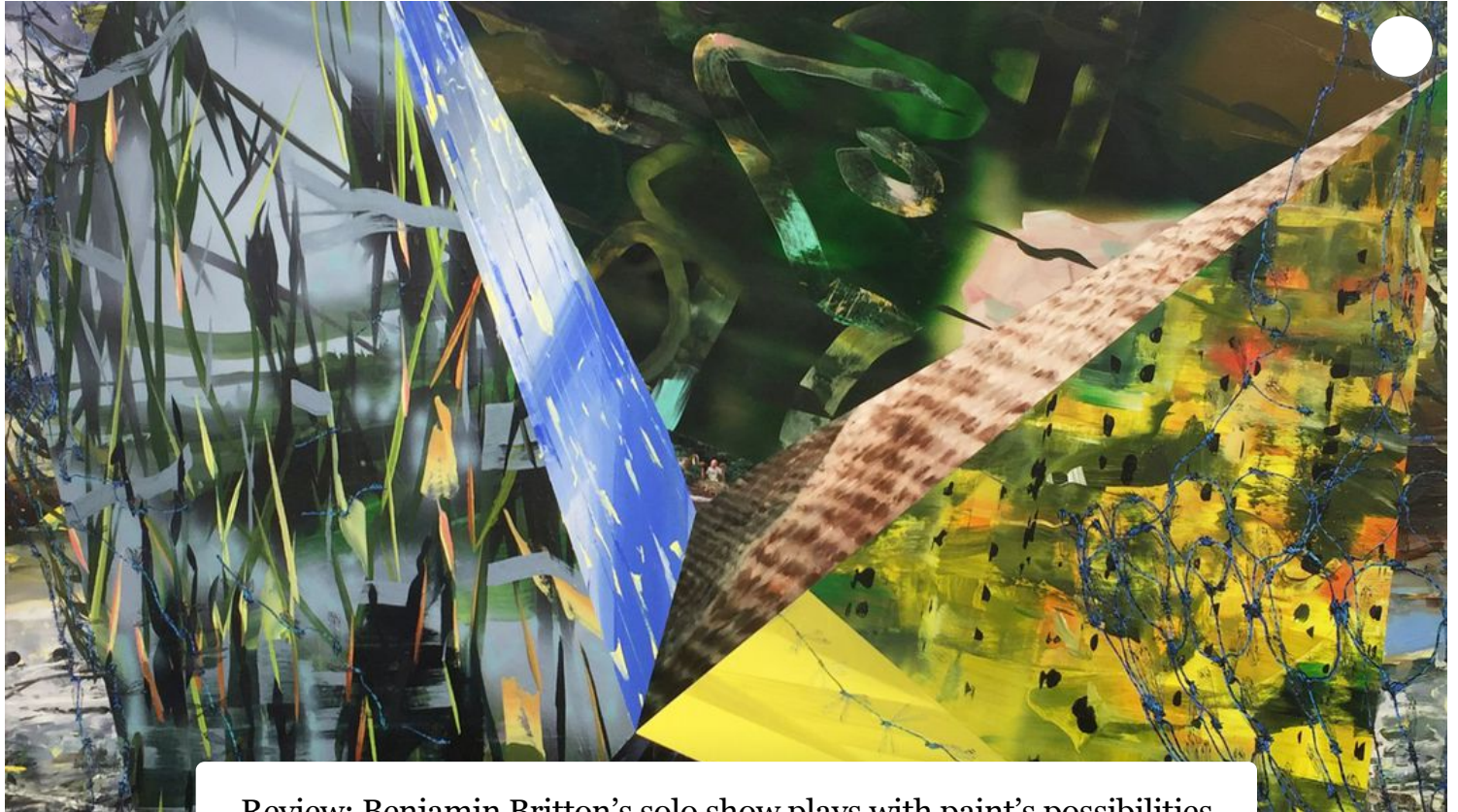
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Review: Benjamin Britton's solo show plays with paint's possibilities

LIFE | Dec 5, 2016

By Felicia Feaster

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ART REVIEW

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“Benjamin Britton: The Incandescent Sub-Present”

Through Dec. 23. Noon-5 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays. Marcia Wood Gallery, 1037 Monroe Drive, Atlanta. 404-827-0030, marciawoodgallery.com.

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Bottom line: Challenging, surprisingly fun painting from an artist playing with the form.

Strange times call for strange art, and Benjamin Britton’s sublime, hypnotic paintings certainly fit the bill. Like an episode of “Black Mirror” played out in paint, Britton’s paintings shred our sense of reality and perspective, turning the world into a fun house mirror. We see slivers of the knowable universe, sprinkled like jimmies, throughout Britton’s canvases. But the rest is disorientation, as we seek to square up representation and sci-fi abstraction.

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In one of the show's best, most archetypally mind-blowing paintings, "Attended-to From the Most Casual Organs" (cryptic titles play backup singer to Britton's cryptic paintings), the most prominent form in the painting is a kind of prism-like, multifaceted Tony Smith sculpture that blots out the landscape beyond.

That geometric form at the painting's dead center looks composed on each side by a different sort of textile and pattern. That multisided octahedron shape is propped up in one corner by a stick, like a fort made up of castaway blankets and shirts. But we can make out some of that landscape behind that shape: A beach and water lie beyond, along with large rocks, and even a tanned, hairy sun worshipper in the corner. And like a video game Easter egg, hidden within that abstract sculptural form is a tiny window into that beach scene giving a secret glimpse of seagulls standing by the water's edge. Looking at Britton's shifting, complex, busy, secret-holding paintings, it turns out, is kinda fun.

Britton employs similar tactics in other paintings on view in his solo show "**The Incandescent Sub-Present**" at **Midtown's Marcia Wood Gallery**. The painting "Body First, but Not Always, Then Mind, Also Not Always" is dominated by another geometric monolith that both reflects and obscures the landscape behind. Deep within that shape is a window into another reality, a crumb of something real in a painting filled with a clash of recognizable forms and confusing, unrecognizable ones.

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Painting in acrylic and oil on canvas over panel, Britton's distinctive colors are pumped-up and fake like television rainbows, created in factories instead of in nature. His artificial forms blot out the reality beyond and even his jungles and forests glow with, as his show's title suggests, an "incandescent" light.

An instructor at the Lamar Dodd School of Art at the University of Georgia, Britton is clearly engaged in a formalist, conceptual exercise in his work and a toppling of all the things we take for granted in painting. His seductive solo exhibition at Marcia Wood Gallery is very much painting about painting. But Britton's work is more than that. It also serves as commentary and has an investigative dimension, as if to question how unstable and prone to shape-shift reality itself can be.

In his artist's statement, Britton has said that part of his mission is to "reward looking," and in that sense, his paintings do have a puzzle-solving satisfaction. There is a delight involved in casting your eyes busily over their surface, digging for clues, seeking to unlock the code. It's no better circumstance for a painter — or for a viewer — to find the more you look, the more there is to find.

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