

Two Coats of Paint

SOLO SHOWS

Alan Prazniak: Balancing the artisanal and the epicurean

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Alan Prazniak, *Witch Haze*, 2024, oil on Linen, 14 x 18 in., 15 x 19 x 2 (framed)

Contributed by Tom McGlynn / Alan Prazniak's paintings fall into productive intervals between landscape and still-life and between abstraction and representation. His most recent show at Geary comprises sixteen medium and small paintings (all from 2024) that are rigorously composed and wide-ranging in palette, bringing to mind the lyrical abstractions of Philip Guston and the quasi-landscape compositions of Nicolas de Staël. Prazniak has acknowledged as inspirations Arthur Dove and Marsden Hartley's groundbreaking works, which embodied similarly massed shapes in bold, contrasting colors. The modernist tension between recognizable form and resolute abstraction suffuses Prazniak's work.



Alan Prazniak, *Old Olive*, 2024, oil on linen, 15 x 21 inches

In *Witch Haze*, medium and dark blue rectangular and triangular forms sway in Dove-like counterpoise between a yellow-orange band that sweeps across the canvas. This diminutive work breathes an expansive sigh in its rhythmic swing. *Visitation*, an even smaller painting, is similarly imbued with a gently rocking syncopation of cool and warm hues, here in waves of diminished saturation. Prazniak's compositions do get more complicated. *Earthbound*, the largest canvas in the show, has a completely different feel, its forms balanced slightly left of center and thus exerting more asymmetric pull than the smaller works. In its still-life schema, overlapping light and dark hues pile into a triangular apex against a yellow and brown backdrop. *Old Olive* likewise resolves into a collection of shapes on a plane that translates into an interior scene, in this case closer-up.



Alan Prazniak, *Knight Dance*, 2024, oil on Linen, 14 x 18 inches, 15 x 19 x 2 inches (framed)

That said, the way Prazniak paints his forms tends to discourage representational readings. Some are thickly impastoed while others are barely scumbled, and the sometimes sharp contrast between the two characteristics keeps shallow and recessional space in constant flux, echoing Milton Avery's juxtaposition of dry-brushed areas against deeply stained passages in landscapes. The tendency is most vivid in *Daphne Moon*, in which a patchwork of blues, oranges, yellows, and violets mount in alternating passages of lightly brushed and thickly laid rectangular and triangular forms. Often, as in this work, the artist will introduce an orb that rises high and locks in the landscape allusion – say, to an autumnal scene topped by a harvest moon. With respect to *Like the Leaves*, the title itself points to such a reference.



Alan Prazniak, *Daphne Moon*, 2024, oil on Linen, 23 x 27 inches

One of the strongest paintings in the show is *Night Dance*, where the artist's massed forms are – uncharacteristically for this exhibition – situated in the foreground against an almost black background. A circular form is contained within the approximately rectangular shapes, precluding the inference of a rising or setting sun or moon. This encourages greater focus on the Prazniak's clever abstract composition and gestural fluency. Taken as a whole, this show manifests both the artisanal and the epicurean sense of painting as phenomenally enacted and pictorially sampled. It's a tricky balance to maintain, yet Prazniak's color sensibility seems to reconcile these ostensibly disparate paradigms.

“Alan Prazniak: Potions,” Geary, 34 Main Street, Millerton, NY. Through October 6, 2024.

About the author: Tom McGlynn is an artist and writer based in the NYC area. In 2023 he opened his third exhibition at Rick Wester Fine Art and in 2024 had his first European solo at Settantotto Gallery in Gent, Belgium. He is an Editor at Large at The Brooklyn Rail.