

Lovely Challenges

BUCHWALD AND LENAGHAN
GO FOR CLARITY

BY MARIO NAVES

The paintings of Howard Buchwald, on display at Nancy Hoffman Gallery, are as much a call to arms as an exhibition of art.

Listen to Buchwald tell it: "Painting is not in the service of some purpose, objective, image or idea residing outside, prior to and independent of the specific work." Momentarily commiserating with the aesthetically challenged, he does admit to "understand[ing] the anxiety that direct looking and feeling still produce."

But any "attempt to overcome this feeling by supplanting what is right there...is largely beside the point." Don't come to Buchwald, then, with high-flown theoretical flourishes or pressing sociological agendas. Codifying art by any means other than direct visual engagement stifles its integrity—why don a straitjacket when you're given free agency?

A fixture of the New York art world, Buchwald believes in the eye above all. His rigorously choreographed arrays of wriggling, rubbery lines and declarative, eye-rattling colors couldn't kowtow to extra-aesthetic imperative if they wanted to. The rhythms are too headstrong, the compositions too unpredictable, the sense of purpose too fiercely independent.

The pictures have the graphic clarity of superhero comics—you know, KA-POW!—and recall the New York School in their scale and ambition, though Buchwald's firm sense of humor is entirely his own. The black line muscling its way through "Mapped (Large Red)" (2010) would steal the show if it weren't for the acidic tonalities of "In or Out" (2008), a monumental canvas whose title is both plain-as-day descriptive and a challenge to the viewer.

While looking at Andrew Lenaghan's paintings at George Adams Gallery, I overhead a visitor exclaim, "New York has never looked so lovely."

Really? There's much to commend in the work, not least its crisp light and keen sense of place. But "lovely"? That's such a mild adjective for pictures whose verisimilitude is inseparable from a pointed and, at



(Above) Andrew Lenaghan, "McGuinness Blvd/Clay Street," 2011, oil on panel, 24 x 32 inches.

(Left) Howard Buchwald, "Float," 2012, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 90 inches.

Courtesy of the artist and George Adams Gallery, New York.

moments, bristly animism.

Lenaghan has long been drawn to areas of Brooklyn that, when not mundane, are distinctly unlovely—a graffiti-laden building in Greenpoint, anonymous industrial structures in Williamsburg and the stained and mottled roadway bordering the Bedford Avenue Armory. Family is also a mainstay—in one painting, children watch *Dora the Explorer*; in another, a woman stands by the mirror in an unkempt bedroom. Geometry, as it informs the city's infrastructure, our homes and backyards, is important, too.

In their details, the picturesque and domestic are rendered with a skittering line that accumulates—sometimes tenuously, always convincingly—into solid form. The cobblestone

walkway at the bottom right of "New Stadium, Atlantic Avenue" (2011) is a particularly telling marker of Lenaghan's pictorial abilities; the way in which errant mark-making and fidelity to observation are navigated is emblematic of his bracing and flinty intellect.

Howard Buchwald

Through March 10, Nancy Hoffman Gallery, 520 W. 27th St., 212-966-6676, www.nancyhoffmangallery.com.

Andrew Lenaghan: Recent Paintings

Through Feb. 18, George Adams Gallery, 525 W. 26th St., 212-564-8480, www.georgeadamsgallery.com.