

SURFACE

April 2015

IDEAS IN DESIGN

EXHIBIT Ryan Sullivan at ICA Miami

The Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, opened its doors this December (just as Miami Basel was ramping up for 2014), with a curatorial mission to discern experimental work within South Florida's art-booming environs and beyond. In its temporary home in a landmarked building in the Design District, ICA presents its third exhibition to date: a survey of recent paintings by New York-based artist Ryan Sullivan (April 16–Aug. 20). While canvas paintings might sound like a conservative choice for an institution pushing innovation, a close look at Sullivan's work reveals an unorthodox studio practice, one that validates the enduring possibility for painting in today's increasingly digital age. His work employs outsized abstractions that rely on poured, sprayed, and saturated layers of oozing, swirling, and spreading paint; the strata wrinkle, crack, and erupt almost volcanically under gravity and weather. What results are drooping skins and lunar surfaces that emerge from the tension between forces of physics and the artist's hand. Says Sullivan: "In every painting I'm trying to bring the materials to their edge point, where they're uncontrolled, and then trying to stabilize or freeze that authentic experience of making it." The final image—a topography of many acts of paintings, one subsumed by the next—has a gestural quality that proves difficult to grasp. "I'm trying to present something that doesn't have an obvious linearity to how it's made," Sullivan adds. "The process becomes out-voiced by the image that's in front of it—an image that feels familiar and also strange. I want to give people an experience in having to reconcile what that is." —Emily Weiner

