

RYAN SULLIVAN

Critics Picks: Ryan Sullivan

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ARTFORUM

New York Ryan Sullivan

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Two distended oval depressions hollow out the surface of an untitled 2011 painting by Ryan Sullivan. Purple and abscessed, riddled with dusty black and yellow ridges, they look like a set of lungs ravaged by carcinogens. This is one of sixteen recent paintings, all untitled, in Sullivan's expansive solo debut. Each one fixes a trajectory of fast and beautiful ruin: Sullivan pours oil, enamel, and latex paints on a canvas, waits for the toxic pool to form a skin, like a pudding, and then tilts the frame to let the substances slide, gather, and crease. His chaotic process grafts the cosmic to the cosmetic. The paint-skin forms lunar landscapes as it hardens and cracks. In addition to the canvases, the exhibition includes eight paintings that are, by convention, called works on paper, even though these are more like paper in work. The paper's pulp has broken and dissolved into fibrous particles trapped in a slab of hardened paint, a host subsumed by its parasite.

At a time when human bodies grapple with chemical preservatives, plastic surgery, and hazardous pollutants, Sullivan treats masses of paint like wild creatures, letting them grow and roam before making handsome taxidermy of them.

In conjunction with the exhibition, the gallery has published a slim book of Sullivan's snapshots. White paint clings to a hairy forearm; droplets condense on a gallon jug; light catches in the dents of a damaged van; filthy snow clings to the back of a trailer truck. The photos record moments when the distinction between organic and inorganic gets confused. Everything reacts to wind, water, and time, and in each image, Sullivan guides the viewer's gaze toward the strange results. Outside, the paint peeling from the garages off Greenwich Street looks livelier and more vivid than before.

