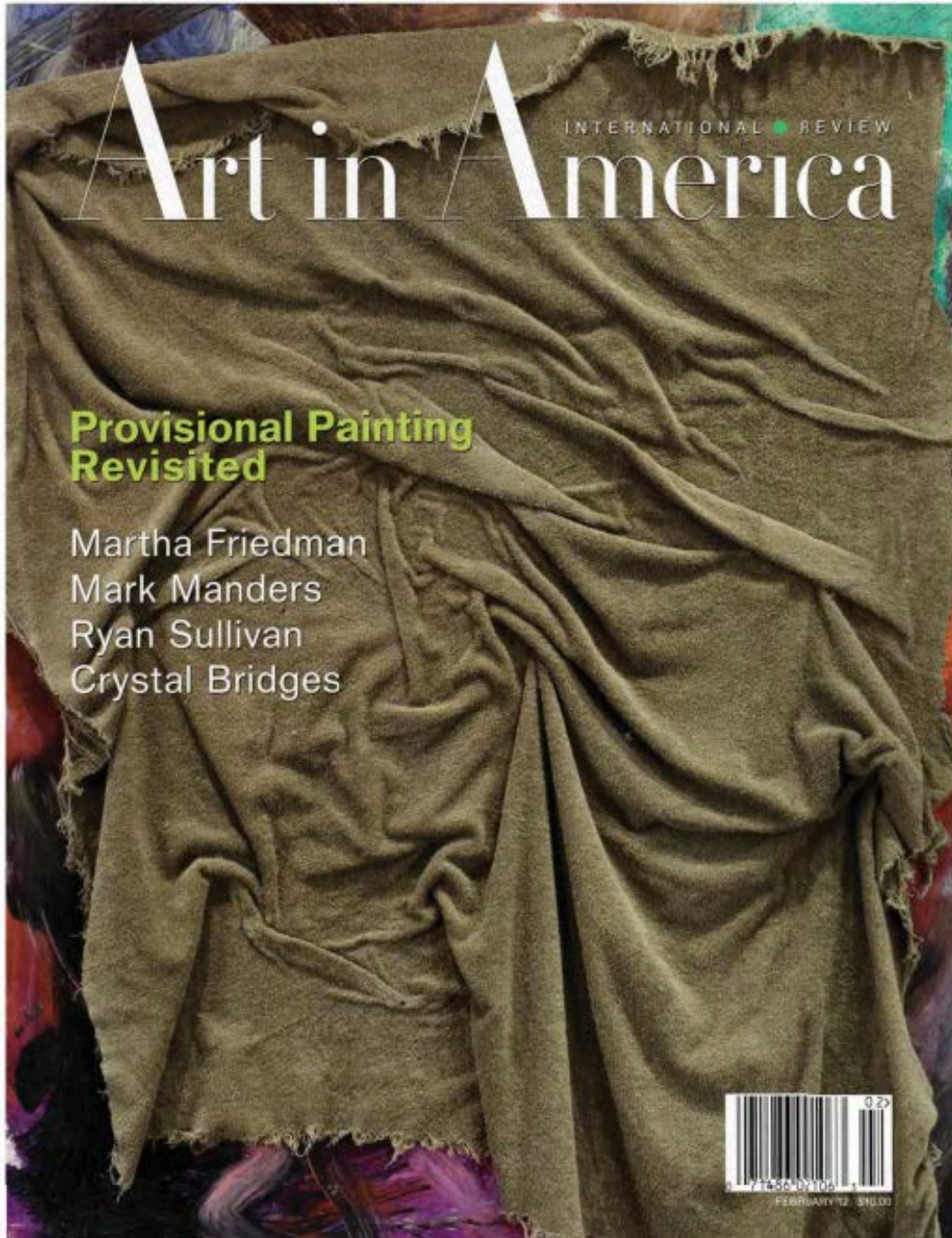


RYAN SULLIVAN

"First Look"

By Alex Gartenfeld

Art in America, February 2012



FIRST LOOK

RYAN SULLIVAN BY ALEX GARTENFELD

A RYAN SULLIVAN painting leads by seduction: paint bunches up like folds in a garment, tempting you to touch it. Colorful, all-over compositions depict marble or rusted metal but can be comfortably designated abstract. They break into actual material as hunks of paint leap off the canvas, sag or droop, and as acrylic bubbles and cracks to reveal hidden layers, just as dramatic, underneath the surface. Pregnant with substance, Sullivan's works offer the sublime and then follow through with real plenitude.

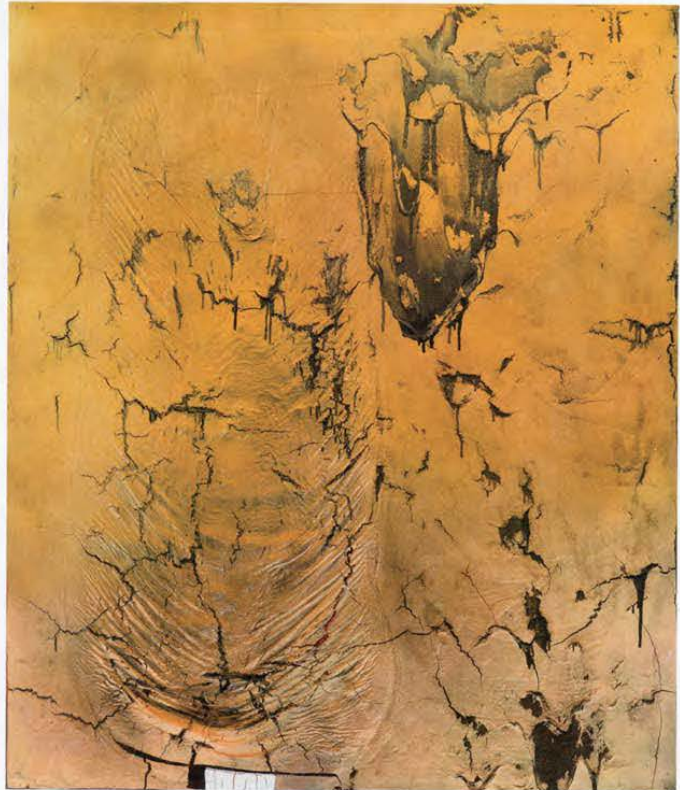
At 28 years old, the New York-based artist, who studied at RISD, arrives fully formed with only a few group shows under his belt, wielding paintings that contend with contemporary formalism and temper seduction with suggestions of the body and its marketability. As other contemporary abstract painting flaunts its decorative potential, Sullivan's is excessively sumptuous, even luxurious. His piece in a recent group show, "Grisaille" at Luxembourg & Dayan London, fit poorly into the show's theme. The color in his painting, *January 10, 2011* (2011), is rich, in a clouded surface that oscillates between electrified sky and deflated rubber balloon. At center right is a large patch of gray with a white seam, an opaque block that's neither foreground nor background. It creates the perverse illusion that cardboard has been stuck to the surface.

Only slowly do these paintings unfold as scabrous human parts. In *December 30, 2010-January 13, 2011*, dramatic drips approximate a ruptured suture that leaks blue fluid. *January 10, 2011* is a rich near-monochrome that ranges from gold to auburn; Sullivan aims not for the sublime finish of an Yves Klein but rather for the semblance

of a spongelike skin sucking on the stretcher bars. The slide from close-up of grassy patch or velvety curtain to awkward flesh is irreversible. Many of the works evoke Alberto Burri's warping and burning. Of primary importance to Sullivan is paint's ability to surprise, and to transcend description. The novelty of these works lies partly in Sullivan's innovative process, which creates unexpected effects. On canvases lying flat, the artist lays down pools of primer and acrylic that dry at different speeds, resulting in pockets that rupture and dump their contents when the artist climactically lifts and turns the painting.

The visibly broken puddles make clear that Sullivan is painting on the horizon-

tal, and that there is real shock, even violence, in the transformation from Steinbergian flatbed (the critic's realm of "begetting, conceiving and dreaming") to image. Sullivan's paintings present the relationship between viewer, object and maker as a slickly packaged but fragmented and embodied labor. This month, in Sullivan's first solo show, at New York's Maccarone gallery, he'll present a new series of canvases that are as large as he can physically handle by himself. The artist, as should be obvious, titles his works after the duration of their making—an amusing record of periods in which he's been most prolific, and a testament to the time he's spent relinquishing his pounds of flesh. ○



Ryan Sullivan:
October 14, 2011-October 26, 2011,
oil and latex on canvas, 7 by 6 feet.
Courtesy Maccarone Gallery, New York.

CURRENTLY ON VIEW

Ryan Sullivan at Maccarone, New York, Feb. 10-Mar. 17.