



Gabriel Hartley: *Crimp*, 2010, oil, acrylic, ink and spray paint on canvas, 102 1/4 and 78 7/8 inches; at Foxy Production.

GABRIEL HARTLEY
FOXY PRODUCTION

This fall British painter Gabriel Hartley returned to Foxy Production—where, a year before, his work had been a highlight of the group show “Abstract Abstract”—with his first solo exhibition (all works 2010) in the U.S. Anchoring the gallery’s main room were four giant canvases (approximately 9 by 6 feet), made with oil and spray paint in a rugged, ballsy style that brought Guston to mind. Although these large works varied in mood and color, they spoke with one voice. Reef’s prime movers are roughly rendered, gently looping forms—cousins to those in Brice Marden’s “Cold Mountain” series—in a weathered-copper green that stands in contrast to the peachy pink ground. Hartley complicated the boundaries between the colors by spraypainting over them with white and orangey red. *Crimp* is a field of interlocking jagged shapes in yellow and

purple seemingly laid over a series of steps that roll out toward the viewer. Built up with oil, acrylic, ink and spray paint, the painting features bold, thick areas that come forward visually while the lighter ones recede. *Strip* consists of a thicket of sharp stick- and bonelike forms, for which it owes a debt to the “Dogtown” series by that other Hartley, Marsden, as well as to the jumbled limbs of Picasso’s bathers. By pushing his aggressive forms right up to the picture plane, however, the young painter achieves an immediacy that expands upon the emotional territory of these predecessors. *Motley* may be the least well-resolved of the four large paintings but is also the most daring. A field of powder-blue patches is overlaid with a yellow network that is itself surmounted by dark, unyielding bars in red and green. The work is a glorious mess—seemingly the result of an improvisational process in which each move on the canvas was made in response to the ones that came before, with no turning back. Also on view were two smaller, quieter paintings (both 30 by 24 inches) with textured surfaces and subtle, soft-edged forms. Spray paint applied over thickly clotted oil gives *Grade* a dusty, lunar surface. Rough linear patterns carved into the paint recall the petroglyphs of Dighton Rock or the cuts left by ice skates. Pale tutti-frutti colors animate *Bulb*, where the marks scored into the surface form jagged trails that tumble down the picture, only to lead the eye flipping and flopping back to the top. Two sculptures, thoughtfully made constructions in paper and resin, complemented the canvases. *Mould* is parchment-colored tangle, lightly spray-painted with mossy green, that has the lightweight rigidity of a lobster shell or a rawhide chew bone for dogs. *Peak* has a splotchy slateblack surface and in form resembles a shark’s fin or tooth, or a deflated samosa. While Hartley’s sculptures are competent, they are not as compelling as his paintings, which are among the best seen in New York this season.

—Jeff Frederick