

On a recent trip, a customs officer asked Henry what he does for a living. He said, "Painter." "Like a house painter?" Well, sort of.

When Gunderson moved to Red Hook, Brooklyn a few years ago, his home was in such disrepair that the landlord offered him six months of free rent to fix it up. I remember him methodically remodeling the strange small house on a city block so that he could live like a ship's captain in his domestic quarters and single large studio room. He set himself to removing ceilings and laying floors, all while other houses on the block were being gentrified by huge crews building speculative luxury housing in hopes of flipping property that had once been flop houses for longshoremen. Inside this home studio, Henry Gunderson eventually made his House paintings, also without any assistance.

Nobody wants to talk about the pandemic, but something happened to our living spaces: we became momentarily atomized. For this exhibition, Gunderson paints eight house-shaped canvases, distilling the feelings of isolation into unpopulated facades. If you are wondering if the house shape feels inherently psychological, preschool children have been asked to take the "House-Person-Tree test," to evaluate their mental health for the last hundred years. Here, rather than a place where a family lives, Gunderson's paintings feel single occupancy. They represent American lone-ness, from Thoreau's cabin on Walden Pond to the cabin where Jack London wrote *White Fang* or even Ted Kaczynski's shack. These house paintings are "Unapaintings" as much as they are a group of paintings.

As they are installed together at Perrotin, hung low off the floor, the houses create a neighborhood, encouraging us to inhabit this solitude together. A child might ask, "Who lives here?" The only painting I'll answer for would be *Blue Earth Dwelling*; we see what could be a woman's long boots with her wet green and blue socks drying after a long stomp in the mud. At the peak of the house appears an image of Mother Earth, whose prism refracts an atmospheric rainbow around the facade. The interior suggests a haunted house, where spirits live and envelope you as you enter or jog by. *Marathon Man* and *Marathon Woman* coexist with this neighborhood, two paintings about endurance, staying mentally and physically active as you move through the streets, past each fantasy house facade.

Gunderson crafted this expansive neighborhood through a variety of techniques and tricks. In this body of work, he airbrushes backgrounds of the marathon runners for a blurred simulation of movement, paints oil over acrylic for dandelion seed puffs, employs various printing and stamping techniques, inkjet transfer, sanding, scraping, faked spray paint scrawl. Gunderson makes a couple of particularly impressive painting moves, connected in a way that I'm not sure he intended. In *Daisy Chain Reaction LP*, he sanded a ring into painted canvas to give the illusion and scale of a vinyl record sleeve. In *UFO in the Flatness of Deep State (Case No.1)* he used an oversized brush to make largescale abstract paint strokes as a backdrop, before painting in the ultra-reflective flying saucer. In each of these works, the form of disc looms just in front or behind the canvas.

In Gunderson's figurations, tight realism and Trompe-l'oeil representations contrast graphical flatness. The style serves a type of earnest image making that feels at odds with subtler, more surreal humor. Because of his approach, the canvases on view feel more part of the material world than Gunderson's contemporaries, like Jamian Jullano-Villani or Orion Martin. The complicated surfaces are the main push and pull of these paintings. The details are brilliant from inches away, but at the same time discernible from afar. Gunderson strikes me as a sign painter, the type of paintings that you put outside of an establishment, paintings that often face an empty landscape, paintings that last through each and every night. They recall the Pop '70s style of James Rosenquist, vernacular painting often associated at that time with billboards, something functional that communicates a specific purpose.

"Like billboards passing in the night Gunderson's pictures singe my psyche. I put the car cigarette lighter to my forehead to make the pain real." - Water McBeer, gallerist and collector

Water McBeer became popular in the early days of the art world figuring out how to navigate Instagram. Look closely and notice that the shows are actually miniature artworks in a miniature gallery, and all of the pictures of the opening receptions are faked. To look more closely, the entire Water McBeer gallery is a satiric construction by Henry Gunderson.

Water McBeer was one of the last moves Gunderson made in miniature, before embarking on this expansive neighborhood. In January 2020, Henry hadn't started the House paintings, we hadn't had a lockdown yet, and I had my birthday party in Gunderson's studio. The only decor was an improvised disco ball consisting of spiky mirrors attached to a life replica of my head. It cast an unintentional shadow during the dancing, a spiky sphere like something out of a lab, ominously virus-looking in retrospect. Henry left this floating head in place, and it hovered above, overseeing his entire painting process. All through the pandemic, for over a thousand days, my disembodied head floated, eyes closed, hovering while Henry Gunderson labored on this exhibition, House Painting and Various Odd Jobs at Perrotin New York.

— Joey Frank