



**CLAIRE ASHLEY**  
DALLAS

One often wonders where painting would have gone if it had followed Clement Greenberg's tidy edicts of boundary reinforcement and medium specificity. If taken as process in perpetuity, painting that uses its characteristic methods to criticize its own logic—painting qua painting—would result in row after row of monochromatic paintings, or, as it worked out in 1957, Yves Klein's paintings in International Klein Blue, each virtually identical to the other with the exception of the price tag. The life of painting according to Greenberg's self-critical modernism would be something like a Fordist assembly line, only slightly more colorful.

And, then there is the possibility of painting like Claire Ashley. Though her paintings forgo flatness to play out on three-dimensional inflatables in *Claire Ashley: Fluorescent Pop*, they are, as Greenberg would have liked, non-objective [H. Paxton Moore Fine Art Gallery, El Centro College; January 26—February 23, 2012]. Just as with the paintings of Pollock, Hofmann, and de Kooning, gesture, color, and paint-for-the-sake-of-paint take on their surfaces. *Clown*, 2011, for example, is an abstract painting whose markings bring to mind the paintings that, for Greenberg, were most optical: the work of Frankenthaler, Louis, Noland, and Olitski. *Clown* has a long drip of blue paint right at its core, directly on top of an almost perfect bull's-eye. Gestural stripes of yellow on its trunk offer a counterpoint to the two horns on top, which are painted in stripes in primary colors. Recalling modernism of a slightly earlier moment, the patterns are akin to the diamond-shaped argyle worn by one of Picasso's saltimbanques. Bearing the blown-out markings of yellow, red, and pink spray paint, *Clown* sits cross-legged out front on the gallery floor. Filled full of air that is electrically pumped into its body, it is a painting and quite a bit more.

More cheek than bravado, a matter of kinetism rather than static rumination, Ashley's paintings are more closely related to Klein's mischievous and variegated price tags than to his clean, almost identical monochromatic surfaces. Like Klein's tags, each of Ashley's paint-



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ings is different. Some sit on the floor. Others lean against the wall. *Oddball*, 2011, attaches to the wall, high above the floor, and close to the ceiling. Some, like *Discobag*, 2011, are wearable. Most provocative and beautiful is their morphism: they are paintings with giant inflatable bodies. Paeans to the last gasp of modern painting, they are, at the same time, invitations to play in a romper room of new form that is suggestive of the pneumatic bouncy boxes for children and seasonal blow-up figures that ply the front yards of suburban America.

*Discobag* is latently ludic. When not in use as a bloated article of clothing, it sits at an angle against the wall, its pliable, smushy, multicolored undercarriage functioning as a ballast in lieu of absent feet. Ten feet high, it is a temporary totemic form, blown up by air from a pump plugged into a wall outlet. When sealed up and worn by the artist it becomes completely other. The union of fleshy body, synthetic plastic sheath, and the expanding, constricted air can only be summarized in the word *kinetic*. It is theatrical both as Fried would have it and like a mutating, free form Barney the Dinosaur or misshapen Michelin Man.

Ashley's inflatables are multifaceted. They are fun and accessible and they beg to be touched. At the same time, they bear the gravitas and beauty that come with referencing painting's past.

—Charissa N. Terranova

Records—the vinyl variety—have clearly captivated the imagination of numerous artists on both sides of the Atlantic over the past few years. From Finland's Petri Ala-Maunus and the UK's Jim Lambie and Haroon Mirza to Canada's Craig Leonard and the USA's Maggie Michael, artists have been exploiting the medium as a means of examining the object's material qualities, cultural status, and fetishistic appeal. But in *Bit Symphony*, Liam O'Callaghan takes this musical artifact in an altogether different direction [Temple Bar Gallery + Studios; December 16, 2011—February 11, 2012]. Responding to a yearning to make music, this non-musician chose to harness the collective power of used stereos and turntables to produce a sculptural installation that plays bits from various recordings. The result is an absorbingly complex sculptural installation that also performs splendidly idiosyncratic music.

O'Callaghan first produced the work in 2009 and has since continued to tinker with it. Originally floor-bound, here the sound equipment has been stacked atop a network of dilapidated furniture that stands on an equally dilapidated layer of overlapping Turkish rugs. It resides in a dimly lit gallery. Illuminated by a pair of overarching spotlights, the arrangement intimates a concert hall setting. The score, which plays at twenty-minute intervals, enables the installation to be experienced in active and inactive states. Viewed purely as sculpture, the composition simultaneously delivers a highly formal interplay of circles and rectangles and suggests a carefully organized junk store window display. The diverse range of materials offers evidence of the contradictory desires that shape consumer impulses and notions of the domestic environment: Whereas brushed aluminum, foam speaker baffles, and electronic amplifiers exemplify technological sophistication, the abundance of wool and wood grain implies an attraction to the rustic.

Upon activation, amplifier lights blink and a lone repetitive sound emerges from speakers within the stack. The volume slowly crescendos and new sounds gradually arrive one turntable at a time. Soon after all

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: **Claire Ashley**, *Clown*, 2011, spray paint on plasticized canvas tarpaulin and fan, 10 x 8 x 6 feet (courtesy of the artist and H. Paxton Moore Fine Art Gallery, El Centro College, Dallas); **Liam O'Callaghan**, *Bit Symphony*, 2009–2011, installation, dimensions variable (courtesy of the artist and Temple Bar Gallery + Studios, Dublin)

turntables are playing, the sounds begin to ebb; then that final click, and silence. Deciphering the labels on the recordings reveals the inclusion of the *Live and Let Die* soundtrack, Strauss' *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, George Michael's *Faith*, Osibisa's *Jumbo*, and a *Golden Hour of Comedy* LP. But none of the rhythmic taps, whirs, or droning correlates with these records. The screw-filled mug, electrical adaptor, and other common objects, which restrict the styluses' movement, catch our attention, as does the desk lamp behind the installation, which throws light onto the laptop and the glass-topped circuitry box controlling the work's operation. Obviously, O'Callaghan's aim is to hide nothing. Nevertheless, the installation retains an air of wondrous mystery.

*Bit Symphony* operates on many levels. Comprising components produced by Sony, Aiwa, Phillips, and other manufacturers, it presents a mini-survey of home stereo systems. It also makes use of instruments produced for private use in a public spectacle. Moreover, the fact that so much dented equipment still functions as well as it does might surprise many viewers. The sound element might obliquely recall Debussy's *La Mer* and Ravel's *Boléro*, which, together with the work's title, casts the ordinary record player as an unlikely orchestral instrument. This installation, in fact, conjures up a host of references. In certain respects the ambiance in the gallery recalls jazz lofts popular in 1970s New York City. But it also references scratching, the long history of mechanical and automated musical devices, and such artistic precedents as Laurie Anderson's installation *Jukebox*, 1977. The visual and aural richness of O'Callaghan's project makes it impossible to forget.

—John Gayer