

PRESS RELEASE

Jack Pierson

Opening reception: 6:00-8:00 p.m. Wednesday, March 31, 1999
March 31 - May 1, 1999

For his first solo exhibition at Cheim & Read, Jack Pierson will exhibit large paintings on canvas from three recent series, "Hang On To Your Ego" (1997), "Watercolors" (1999) and a series of ocean images. The new paintings, digitally sprayed on canvases up to 7 by 12 feet in size, are not derived from photographs, as earlier sprayed works on canvas have been, but from recent digital videos the artist has made. These works, while they use the same technology as photographic advertising billboards, are perceived as paintings in the same sense that Warhol's photographic silk-screens are paintings.

The images, often close-ups, are abstract, unreadable. Pixels shimmer like heat waves and dissolve into walls of pure color. The closer we come to something: a mouth, the ocean, the box of paints we might look at daily without really seeing, the less we seem to know it. For Pierson, the blue ocean abstractions, "My life" (1998), "After many a summer" (1998) and "Mother of pearl" (1999), become backdrops, "like the opening shots of Baywatch, the video ocean you need to complete a romantic kind of scenario."

Reviewers of Pierson's recent photographs, exhibited last November at Regen Projects in Los Angeles, made comparisons to Rothko and to color field painters of the 1970s: Poons, Noland and Olitsky. As David Pagel wrote in the Los Angeles Times: "In Pierson's photographs, the impulses that drive formalist abstraction are no different from the desire to catch a fleeting reflection off a starlet's trailer on in the front window of a porno theater." The size, canvas support, and sprayed paint of the present works combine to reinforce the affinity to color field painting.

The exhibition at Cheim & Read will also include a group of new collages made from fragments cut or torn from Pierson's color photographs. Often put together with scotch tape, they have an improvisational quality as though they had composed themselves from scraps that fell to the floor. The fragmentary photographic images are in themselves mostly unreadable, registering as swatches of pure color or painterly texture, which is often what they are in fact photographs of. Occasionally a green discloses itself as ocean or horizon but careens off at right angles to another horizon, keeping the viewer spatially disoriented.