

**Loess**

Jack Ryan

June 10th - July 8th 2022

Press Release

*Loess* is a new collection of paintings that advances Jack Ryan's ongoing investigation into the relationship between collective and private meaning-making. In these pictures, everyday symbols from his previous work resurface into a variety of new, increasingly abstract spaces. To these environments, Ryan brings in a new fascination with pointillism. Setting aside the 19th-century movement's focus on the way the eye perceives color, Ryan stipples his surfaces to explore a broader stance about the nature of perception itself—that it is fundamentally flickering, fragmentary, and above all, subjective. There are as many worlds as there've been eyes to see them.

Ryan's visual world often deals with collective images that've lodged their way into him. In one picture, a nude boy is set below a soft, brumous landscape in subdued purples, a pointillized image adapted from a trailer park near Ryan's childhood home. This boy—a member of the cast of Ryan's recurrent symbolic motifs—first appeared in a drawing from his previous exhibition with Baader-Meinhof, *Coagulation*. On paper, the precisely drawn figure had a diagrammatic aura, almost like a scientist's specimen of "boy." He was presented in a three-dimensional rendering space, floating inside grid lines and graphite smudges, brought out onto an analytic stage of concentrated meaning. The graphite grid that surrounded the youth before has liquified and opened out into Ryan's new, semi-abstract environment. More colorful, more lush, set in a gathering gray-green fog of paint.

We take a trip to the mall in *Untitled*, a kind of pointillist retail montage. With a palette mixed from commercial wallpaper, a wide-open field of muted, brushy beige splinters leftward into a swarm of dappled forms: figures in profile, bits of commercial architecture, letters from a defunct K-Mart sign. The retail symbols' pointillist treatment enters our eye like apparitions flickering through a sprinkler's mist, softening their origins from our collective reality, as if we're glimpsing them in the process of absorption, into new relationships, into their new painterly world. These images, like the bulk of Ryan's visual artifacts, emit a distinctly alien hum. We recognize people, but their inner lives are opaque to us. Their distant quality comes from their function as emblems. They exist alongside the rest of Ryan's symbolic repertoire of glyphs gathered from life on earth: religious symbols, flags, flowers, architecture.

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These icons carry a collective weight, shaping how we move through the world and make meaning of it. For Ryan, this is an unwelcome imposition, the external world's brand pressing into his personal symbolic one, forcing him to cope with meanings he didn't originate or agree to, yet are deeply a part of him. The predominantly abstract paintings that populate the rest of the exhibition are his response to being branded, a way of withdrawing into himself. They close the gap between the outer world and an inner symbolism of his own design. In *Cold Comfort*, outside images (a foot, a dotted spiral) are outnumbered on an overwhelmingly abstract surface, a blue eruption of homegrown forms.

In the painting *Loess*, Ryan recedes from the outer world's emblems entirely into a tumbling, earth-hued abstraction. The larger forms that make up the picture's border crumble inward, breaking into smaller shapes and variegated gestures that grow in both complexity and concentration towards the center. This painting shares its title with the exhibition, referring to natural build-ups of dust and debris, windblown from afar, into new bluffs and hills. It's a process of severance and reconstitution that rhymes with the enigmatic relationships in these environments, a series that invites us in, so that we may inject into them what we will and roam back inward.

- David Block

Jack Ryan (b. 1990) lives and works in New York City. Previous solo exhibitions include *Coagulation*, Baader-Meinhof, Omaha and *Aniara*, 15 Orient, NYC. This will be Jack Ryan's second solo exhibition with Baader-Meinhof.