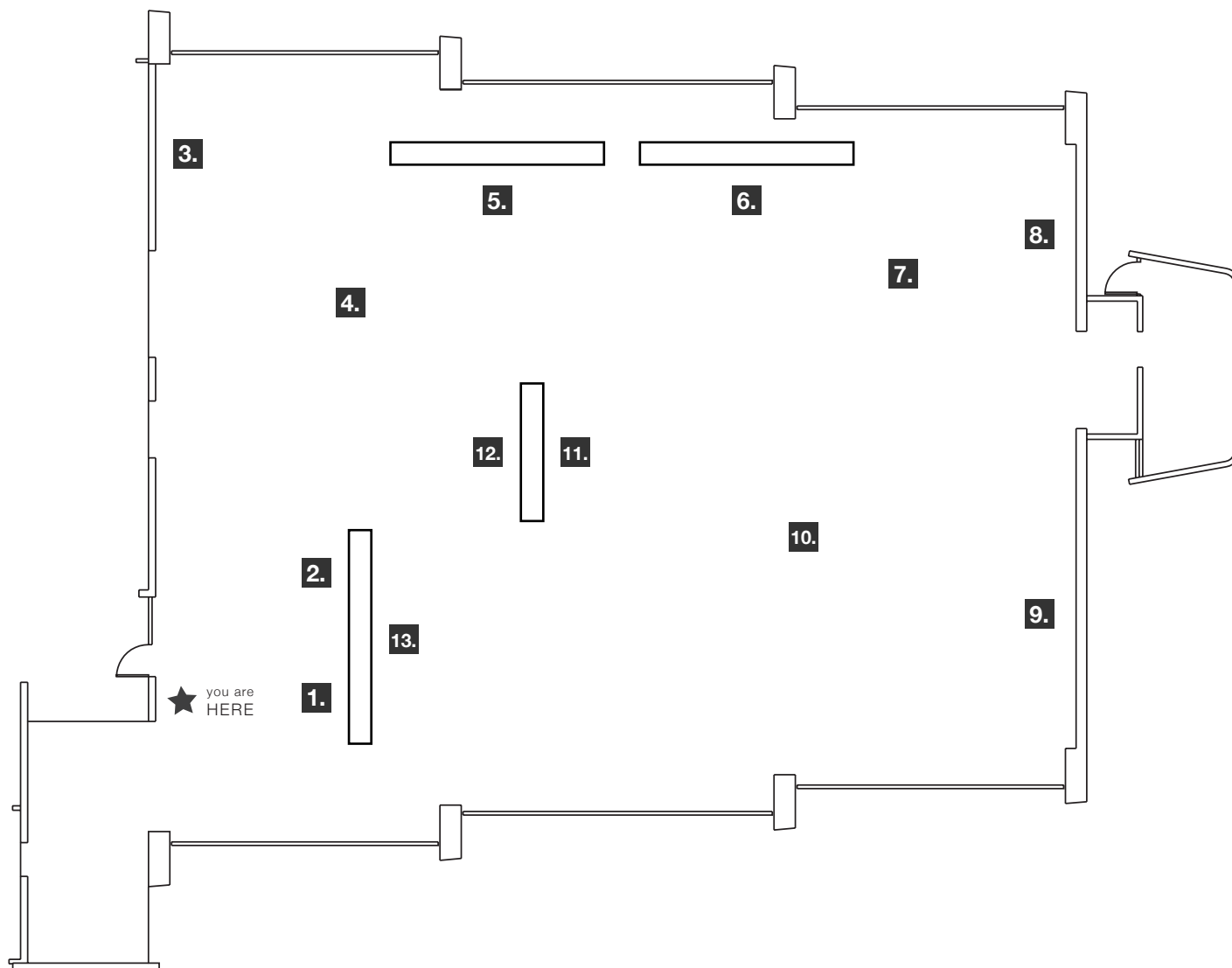


GREAT HALL

MAX ESTENGER 1991-2016



- 1. Red** (1989) acrylic on raw canvas, 40 x 40" (4 panels, joined)
- 2. Yellow and White** (1987) acrylic on canvas, 60.5 x 27" (5 panels, joined)
- 3. Red** (2016) oil-based spray paint on wood panel; stainless steel, raw canvas, 120 x 48" (7 panels)
- 4. Untitled** (2006/2007) sheetrock, plaster, wood, enamel; acrylic on plexiglass, 27 x 36 x 28"
- 5. OSHA Green & Orange** (1994) oil enamel on stainless steel; raw canvas, polyvinyl over wood, stainless steel 60 x 91" (7 panels)
- 6. White** (2001) oil enamel on polyvinyl; Belgian linen 29 1/4 x 84" (5 panels, joined)
- 7. Perfect Night** (1997) wood, enamel on steel, plexiglass, 8 x 168 x 12"
- 8. Twenty Four** (2007) acrylic on canvas, 40 x 130.5"
- 9. Black and White** (2015) oil enamel on stainless steel, oil-based spray paint on polyvinyl; raw canvas, 72 x 228" (6 panels)
- 10. Booth** (2016) sheetrock, oil enamel on stainless steel, polyvinyl over wood, 90 x 142 x 73"
- 11. Unpainting #4** (1993) stainless steel, polyvinyl over wood, raw canvas, 85 x 40" (3 panels) *Collection of Steffany Martz, New York*
- 12. Black See-Through Painting** (1991) polyvinyl over wood; acrylic on canvas, 70 x 70" (four panels) *Collection of Dr. Paul Curtis Bellman, New York*
- 13. Black and Yellow** (2014) oil-based spray paint on stainless steel and raw canvas; polyvinyl over wood 67 x 30" (3 panels)

Max Estenger was born in Los Angeles in 1963, and received his M.F.A. in 1988 from the University of California, San Diego and has been living and working in New York City since 1988. For many years he was represented by the Steffany Martz Gallery in Chelsea where he had three one-person shows; his most recent solo exhibitions were in 2014 at the John Molloy Gallery in New York and rumba in Santa Monica. His work has been featured in the *New York Times*, *Artforum*, *FlashArt*, *Artnet*, among others, as well as the book, *La Couleur Importee (Readymade Color)*, and in the “Learning to See Color” group exhibition at the University of Denver Art Museum that opened in January 2016.

Curator's Essay

GREAT HALL

Max Estenger 1991-2016

13 February – 29 May 2016

This survey of New York-based artist Max Estenger presents close to twenty-five years of painting and sculpture, along with a site-specific large-scale sculptural piece based on a Brooklyn subway token booth. A rigorous formal language is the driving force in these adamantly non-pictorial “specific objects” that cannily engage with sixty years of antecedents in the non-representational realm. Along with “Booth,” his *See-through* and *OSHA* paintings, in which real space is created by the actual visible supports, more recent vibrantly hued color band works, and blocky and ruggedly elegant sheetrock sculptures will be on display. This extensive sampling is a consequential and overdue consideration of an artist who melds learned elucidations of direct experience to aesthetic gratification with integrity, a moral dimension, and tough-minded tenacity.

Taking recent painting trends into account, this appraisal is timely as a counterbalance to the current deluge of market-friendly, accessible, formalist pastiche. The conviction and thoughtfulness, the continuous tactical rigor, smarts, and perfectionism is an antidote to a glut of indiscriminately borrowed moves and decorative, not to mention lucrative, recycling. What is presented here is oppositional in its seriousness and in its ambition to be “about” something, using the artist’s reverence for Barnett Newman as benchmark, who with his fellow travelers in the 1950s employed scale, bold new formats, size, and audacity in a quest to do something genuinely new. That legacy of abstraction that isn’t in “quotes” or playing with tropes is to this true believer a directive to take the medium somewhere fresh, no matter how hard that might be, and to succeed. That’s now, but it is also important to remember how unfashionable this mission was when Estenger arrived in New York in 1988, and has continued to be in the face of, subsequently, neo-expressionism and its attendant self-aggrandizement, the shrill hectoring of “political” art, and then the following twenty years of willy-nilly pluralist mishmash. Along with Steven Parrino, Alan Uglow, and Robert Ryman, to name a few others of the faithful, Estenger has been resisting prevailing winds from way back and continues to in the present, an artistic and philosophical insistence and consistency of vision that deserves both analysis and attention.

After seven hundred years of European figuration and a hundred years since the breakthrough of abstraction, the mute, not-a-picture object remains fascinating. Analog, not video or film, not a window onto anything. In this oeuvre not only is there passion for the blank, raw canvas, the seductive tan surface, but for non-traditional spray and industrial oil enamel paints. “I’m trying to use this vocabulary of materials and forms that I’ve developed and combine it in as many fresh and inventive ways that can still constitute painting,” is a straightforward declaration of intent. “Booth,” like previous three-dimensional constructions such as 1997’s “Perfect Day,” is part painting, part architecture, and part sculpture. Frustrating yet intriguing the viewer, who won’t be able to see inside unless they are over 6’5” tall, it brings scale and the body’s relationship to itself and the piece into sharp relief. More generally he walks the tight rope of art and design, with élan, both high-minded and pleasing to the eye. Playing a long game, delivering narrative and visual innovations that provide an escape from the formalistic straightjacket. All this is Estenger’s aesthetic, forthright, and forceful. “Everything in art is ultimately what the thing looks like in actuality,” couldn’t be more applicable and to the point, and serves as a succinct manifesto for his dedicated path.