



Falling Rocket 19, 2023
Acrylic on Hahnemühle watercolor paper, 14^{5/8} x 11^{5/8} inches

Stephen Maine

Falling Rocket

February 29 - March 30, 2024

Opening Reception:

Thurs Feb 29, 6-8PM

Satchel Projects is pleased to present *Falling Rocket*, an exhibition of new works on paper by Stephen Maine, from February 29 through March 30, 2024. There will be an opening reception for the artist from 6-8PM on Thursday, Feb 29.

Emerging from Maine's most recent series of canvas-based "residue" paintings, the works in *Falling Rocket* are their buoyant, light-footed, unruly cousins. Opening up his approach to process, the artist introduces both deliberate and improvisational moves to "shake loose" the composition. The resulting paintings exert a dynamic, off-kilter energy while subtly mining the origins of abstraction.

Taking James McNeill Whistler's 1875 proto-abstraction *Nocturne in Black and Gold - The Falling Rocket* as a jumping-off point, Maine considers paint's ability to capture a moment while signifying the nature of abstraction. Maine's *Rockets* occupy a dual position: the physical, concrete nature of the "stuff" of paint alongside its representational connotations. Whistler's embers seem to be in the act of separating from representation as they descend into an ambiguous, horizonless field; gravity also plays on Maine's compositions – both the implied gravity of the vertical picture plane and the literal gravity that activates his idiosyncratic mark-making apparatus.

Maine developed his "direct/indirect" approach to painting using an inventive DIY mechanism that occupies the center of his studio. A large, hinged printing plate made of wood and rigid foam is suspended at one end and manipulated by means of a pulley attached to the ceiling. Maine carves and manipulates the surface of the plate to create an all-over relief texture. It is then rolled with acrylic paint and lowered onto the canvas. The process is repeated, the

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surface again coated and lowered, resulting in an abstract painting that walks a line between the deliberate and the unplanned, the incidental drips, blobs and off-register judders a welcome procedural happenstance.

The works in *Falling Rocket* were made with a similar process using smaller plates, the paper providing an absorbent surface while carrying a different sense of figure/ground. The white of the paper acts as an inverse parallel to Whistler's black void, the dual nature of paint-as-embers, flung and falling, onto and into the space/plane.

Fireworks are an auditory as well as a visual experience. We know their muffled pops and booms, their echo a signature, connoting space and distance. In Maine's *Rockets*, the iteration and reiteration of the marks are also a kind of echo. But there's humor, too: "In some of the *Rockets*, the configuration of blobs is overprinted two or three times. This kind of reiteration is typical of my approach to the bigger paintings, and I think there's something funny about it – as if I'm insisting on the pictorial efficacy of this largely arbitrary arrangement."

As the marks assert their presence on the paper, the color possesses its own clarity and energy. Maine mixes each color separately, looking for an inherent strength of identity, then brings the most compelling ones together, attentive to chromatic resonances. Prismatic rather than neutral, the colors in the *Falling Rockets* activate each other. Translucent glazes are skimmed over thick, opaque topographies, creating chromatic passages that morph from warm to cool and back again. As Maine pushes the elastic possibilities of paint, the argument between representation and abstraction plays out as the embers tumble through space.

Stephen Maine (b. 1958) is a painter living and working in West Cornwall, CT. His work has been shown in solo exhibitions at Public Private Gallery (Hudson, NY); Hionas Gallery (New York, NY); Furnace/Art on Paper Archive (Falls Village, CT); Calendar (Albuquerque, NM); Odetta (New York, NY); Five Points Gallery (Torrington, CT); Icehouse Project Space (Sharon, CT); Silas von Morisse Gallery (Brooklyn, NY); 490 Atlantic Gallery (Brooklyn, NY); and the National Arts Club (New York, NY). Group exhibitions include John Molloy Gallery (New York, NY); Tanja Grunert Gallery (Hudson, NY); County (Palm Beach, FL); Transmitter (Brooklyn, NY); Five Myles (Brooklyn, NY); the Visual Art Center of New Jersey (Summit, NJ); the Brattleboro Museum (Brattleboro, VT); ParisCONCRET (Paris, France); the Johnson Museum of Art (Ithaca, NY); The Drawing Center (New York, NY); and R C Erpf Gallery (New York, NY). Maine has received support from the New York Foundation for the Arts (2000) and Yaddo (2012). His exhibitions have been the subject of articles in *ARTnews*, *Artcritical*, *The New Criterion*, *Dart International*, *Two Coats of Paint*, and *The Brooklyn Rail*, among others. He is a longstanding member of American Abstract Artists and the International Association of Art Critics.

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