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# HYPERALLERGIC

## Entering the Mischievous Portals of Monumental Paintings

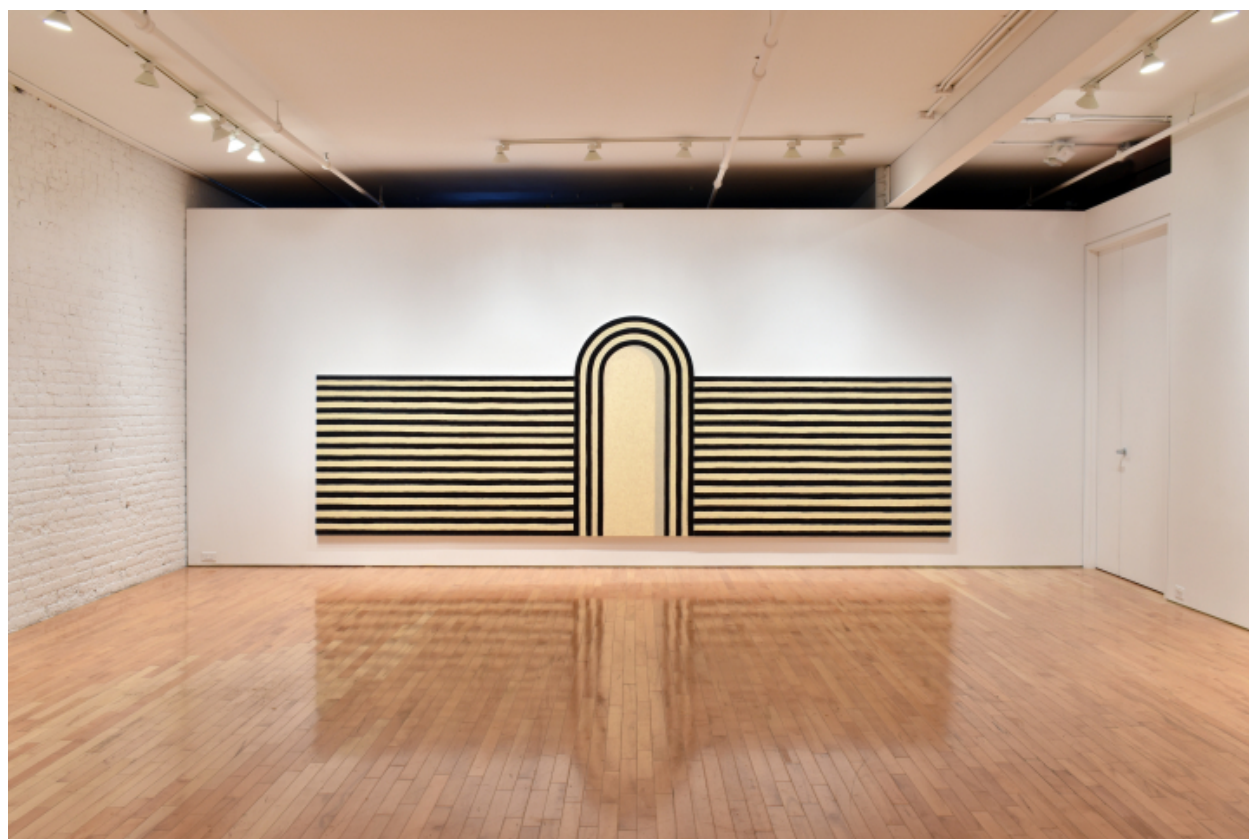
Matt Kleberg's paintings are nonetheless accessible, affording the viewer opportunities to "trespass."

By Emmalea Russo on October 5, 2019



Installation view of *Matt Kleberg: Trespassing* (images courtesy of Hiram Butler Gallery; photographs by Chris Santa Maria)

In Matt Kleberg's geometric kingdom, five large-scale paintings and swarms of drawn studies are monumental yet inviting, formal yet playful. Kleberg's depictions of portals, in oil stick paintings both titanic and spacious, serve as theatrical channels into other worlds as well as mirrors reflecting this one. *Trespassing* contains the architecturally inspired and boldly colorful abstract work central to the artist's practice, but with new flourishes and lively, statuesque curves.



Matt Kleberg, "Trespass Against Us" (2019), Oil stick on canvas, three parts, 66 x 192 inches

The show's largest painting is also its most curious. "Trespass Against Us" (2019) resembles a gate or fence. Black and white horizontal stripes stretch outward from a central arch. At 66 by 192 inches, I thought I might be able to walk through the passageway beneath the arch. But not quite, as Kleberg reveals proof of his hand; the oil stick breaks the spell. The several studies and drawings for these paintings are replete with to-do lists ("haircut, text family"), notes and quotes, and pen-and-ink renderings thumbtacked alongside "Out the Wilderness (Scaffold Askew)" (2019), a large-scale painting with four arches, all in a range of bright oranges. An arch-shaped Linden's Buttercrunch Cookie wrapper hangs among the scattered drawings, a reminder that these towering forms are everywhere, in all sizes; we even eat

them — a relaxed counterpoint to the show’s more sizeable moments. Instead, the sketches and debris evince the impish, sweet, and haphazard.

The work evokes early Frank Stella, Agnes Martin’s deceptively simple grids, and, at times, the shimmering geometries of Mary Corse. Hung only a few inches above the floor, the paintings seem monumental but accessible. There are many opportunities to trespass, and Kleberg’s paintings, with their open archways and mid-sections, act as invitations — reminders that every gate has an opening, every fence a latch. The works in *Trespassing* can come across as slightly mischievous, the arches summoning the terms “arch-scoundrel” or “arch-rogue” – an ultra-clever trickster. Kleberg’s paintings, drawings, and titles project this attitude.

“Blind Arcade (Pure Compression)” (2019) is one such arch-rogue. Seven arches are installed in a row, increasing and then decreasing in height to make a larger arch. This is where the paint transforms to suggest actual stone. These arches are decorative portals, but they evoke the illusion of stone, creating a dramatic moment for the viewer.



Matt Kleberg, “Touch and Go (Trilithon)” (2019), oil stick on canvas, 90 x 80 inches

Kleberg's sense of humor is combined with surprising bursts of color in "Elvis Leg" (2019) and "Touch and Go (Trilithon)" (2019), which are composed of straight and wavy multicolored lines. In the latter, a block of stacked horizontal lines seems to be sliding toward the bottom of the picture plane. Kleberg's paintings open portals, alchemizing oil stick abstractions into wittily mystic moments. Kleberg will likely keep trespassing to find more unexplored terrain. To quote the artist's excited scribble: "Boldness and uncertainty but not ambivalence!"

*Trespassing* runs until October 12 at Gemini G.E.L. at Joni Weyl (535 West 24th Street). The show is a Hiram Butler Gallery pop-up.