

CHASON MATTHAMS

Chason Matthams (b. 1981, Pacific Grove, CA) is interested in the extensive amount of work that goes into the production of a narrative. How do certain stories persist throughout history, and how they are updated in order to resonate within the present time? But also, as the great television writer David Milch put it “We live with fragmented sensibilities. Moment to moment our stream of consciousness is so constantly modified by whatever waves of experience comes over it from the outside. We sustain the illusion of a continuing coherent sensibility. We are in a modulated flux between the input of the outside and which of our senses we are using to assign meaning to that input, and under those circumstances.”

Chason Matthams graduated with a BFA in Fine Art from New York University in 2004 and an MFA from New York University in 2012. Previous solo exhibitions include “Glimpse” at Magenta Plains (2022); two at Tyler Wood Gallery, San Francisco, CA (2013, 2019); “Advances, None Miraculous,” Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York, NY (2015); and “A Hell for Rainbows,” Thierry Goldberg Gallery, New York, NY (2019). Previous group exhibitions include “Beyond the Pale,” Interstate, Brooklyn, NY (2014); “Break Out,” Fr d ric de Goldschmidt Collection, Brussels, Belgium (2015); and Cynthia Daignaults “The Certainty of Others,” Flag Art Foundation, New York, NY (2017); “L’IM_MAGE_N” Ashes/Ashes, New York, NY (2017); “Stockholm Sessions” at Carl Koystal, Stockholm, Sweden (2021); “Nature Morte” at The Hole, New York, NY (2021). Matthams lives and works in New York, NY.

Whitewall Art

September 2022

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Portrait by Krista Louise Smith, courtesy of Chason Matthams.

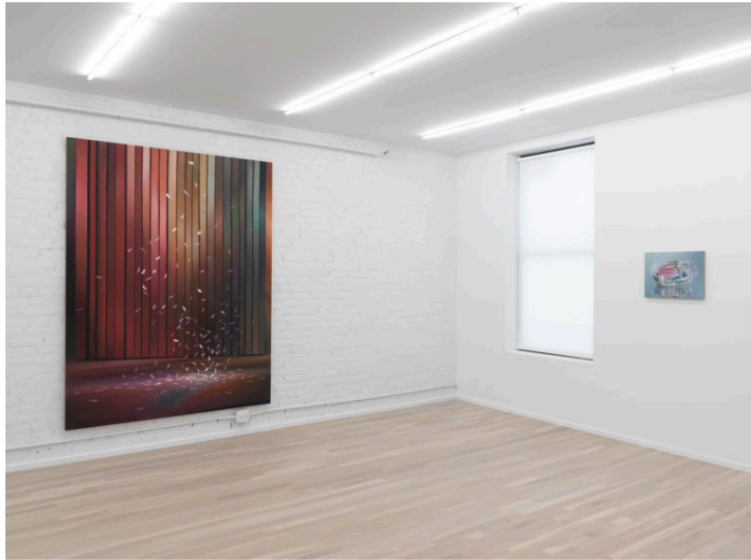
ART

Chason Matthams on Cameras, Corsages, Confetti, and Color

By Isabelle Friedman
September 19, 2022

Chason Matthams's exhibition "Glimpse" fills the walls of **Magenta Plains** with a series of canvases ranging from intimate to large-scale, demonstrating the painter's meticulous gaze on a handful of unassuming objects. Hyper-realistic and vibrant in carefully-selected colors are a series of cameras, corsages, and falling confetti, their depiction transforming the viewer's perception of everyday items into an experience worth contemplating. While taking in Matthams's seemingly invisible brushstrokes and pristine eye for light and hue, one can't help but feel that these objects carry an emotional weight.

Whitewall caught up with the artist to learn more about the show, open in New York now through October 22.



Installation view of Chason Matthams's "Glimpse," courtesy of the artist and Magenta Plains.

WHITEWALL: What was the starting point for your upcoming show, "Glimpse?"

CHASON MATTHAMS: Often after finishing a large body of work I will copy a historical painting with the hope that its ethos carries through to my next body of work. This always results in the bizarre sensation of feeling like you are having a conversation with a kindred spirit long dead and perhaps nudges my river of thought from the last few years in a particular direction. For better or worse, I never have a starting point for a show though. For me, the idea has to emerge and slowly form behind my back. Anytime I sit around thinking and come up with an idea, it just falls flat or I end up fighting it while making the actual paintings.

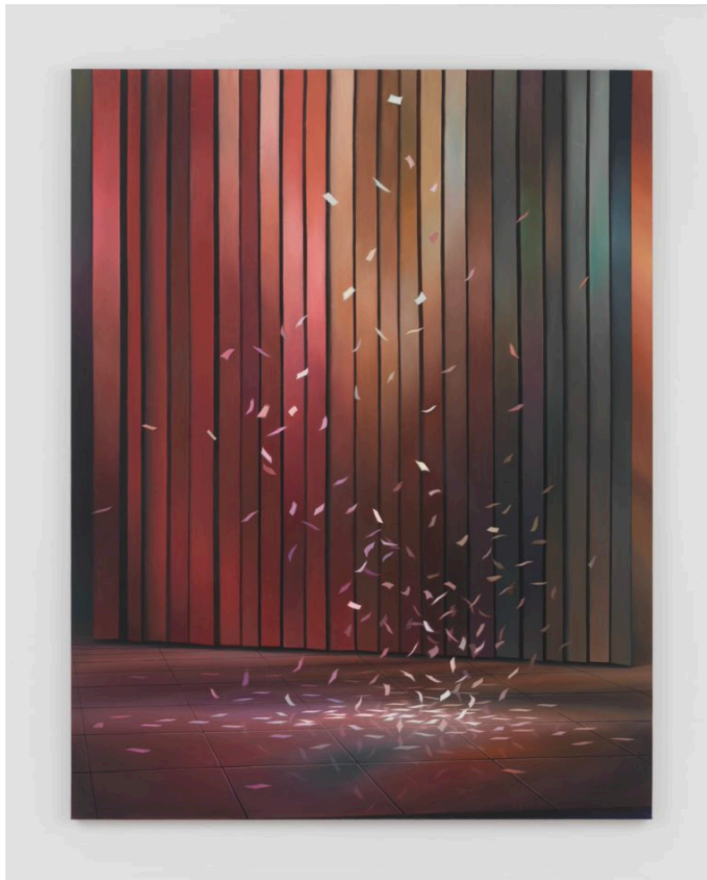
WW: What are the themes and inspiration behind this show?

CM: This grouping of works is the most limited arrangement I've come to. There are three subjects: cameras, flowers and one painting of confetti. The connective thread is that they are all attempts at catching some sort of ephemeral moment in the most static and still way possible. For me, each painting also has the feeling of being both celebratory and mournful, depending on the particular day I walk into the studio.

WW: What is it about cameras and corsages that are intriguing for you to depict?

CM: I keep returning to the cameras and corsages because every time I paint them they work anew as excellent prompts that reveal where I am at. I find it much like returning to a favorite book that you have read throughout your life. Each time you project onto it differently or a theme emerges that you completely passed over the decade before. In a way, repainting the same subjects and rereading a beloved book have the same spirit to them.

Here, I am thinking about Giorgio Morandi, Maureen Gallace, or Peter Dreher who painted an ordinary empty glass over 5,000 times in his life. Each camera can be seen as a metaphor for how I am processing the world in that particular moment. In the same way, each arrangement of flowers marks the way I might be celebrating or mourning the events of that particular time. To me, both indicate this tragic, pathetic, beautiful thing we have to do—which is look out at our vast, bottomless, ever-shifting environment and squeeze it through the narrow tubes of our body in order to momentarily navigate it.



Chason Matthams, "Confetti," 2021, Oil on linen, 82 x 62 inches; courtesy of the artist and Magenta Plains.

WW: *Confetti* is similar in theme to your other included works, but the scene is very different. What's the role of *Confetti* within a collection primarily composed of works depicting cameras and corsages?

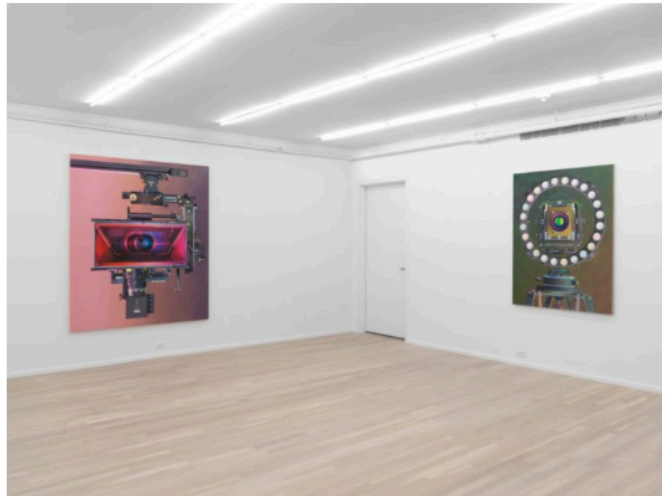
CM: To be honest, even though the painting was started years ago, the confetti is too new a subject for me to entirely wrap my head around. The biggest difference for me is the open space it creates. The corsages and cameras have a real sense of confinement to them; they are literal boxes. Where even if the confetti is confined to a stage, there is a greater sense of movement to it.

Maybe the confetti is an event marking the occurrence or end of something, allowing for an emotional release and a way of moving on? Though without an audience, its emptiness could suggest the way so many parts of life unceremoniously pass by us or fade away without acknowledgement? While the corsages and cameras might be marking events we choose to focus on, maybe the confetti is more about feeling states that pass by too quickly or the memories we forget to hold onto? I'm looking forward to attempting the next iteration in order to work through some of these thoughts.

WW: How do your previous experiences working with Comedy Central and creating movie posters connect to your current works?

CM: I was a background artist working on a few animated shows, mainly "Jeff and Some Aliens". The assignment there was to create an environment in which the dramas and calamity of the characters could unfold. In designing a character's home, you would want to make it specific to them of course, but not too distracting as to take away from a character's storyline. In a way, the paintings I am making do the same thing; they are specific yet empty enough for various narratives to play out.

For the posters and illustration work that I have done, you really are in service of the film or the writer, and the finished work should reflect their idea. In this way, the finished product is a depiction of a previously arrived at idea. This has been clarifying for me as I do not want my paintings to do that. I want the paintings to be totems that contain the history of an idea being grappled with, the product of an ongoing thought process. I am drawn to artworks that embody a way of being and doing, instead of illustrating an idea or agenda.



Installation view of Chason Matthams's "Glimpse," courtesy of the artist and Magenta Plains.

WW: So much of your work places a heavy emphasis on color choices. How do you utilize color to evoke the intended emotions and effects you're aiming for?

CM: Color is a hell of a thing. I should probably only make grisaille paintings. The last show was actually called "A Hell for Rainbows", the conceit being that "hell" for a rainbow would be taking away its full spectrum and forcing it into a specific palette. It is always wild to me that I can set out to make a hellish painting, but then you walk over to your tubes and pick up indigo instead of ultramarine as a way to cool down the warm pigments, and all of sudden hell is less hot and shifts into a warm, womb-like embrace. Color is squirrely in the paintings like that, too. Sometimes I walk into my studio and a camera is focused on the sun rising and other days it turns into the fires burning.

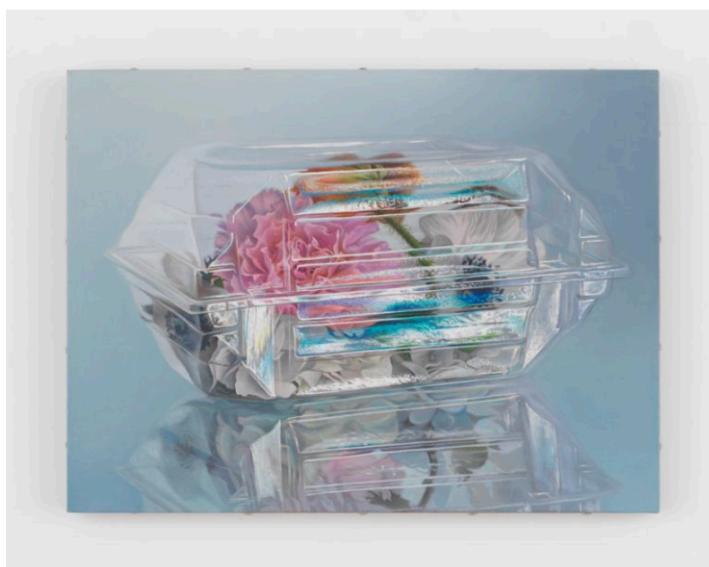
WW: Can you tell us about your studio? What's a typical day like for you there?

CM: I am very routine-oriented. I like the stillness of repetition and the ripples in the water that are revealed because of it. For the sake of my tender little ego, I'll go over a more ideal day rather than the ones interrupted by lethargic dread. For those days, you can replace 2-4 hours of working with your classic doom scrolling and pouring over images of trivial significance and momentary distraction, which you know, is also part of the "work".

For almost ten years now, I wake up and edit a photograph I've taken in nature and post it on Facebook, of all places. I read a study that said even looking at a picture of nature has psychological benefits. Living in New York City, I hope that is true. After establishing that peace, I obliterate it by reading the news and responding to emails. Then it is time for meditation, 16 pull ups and a run or calisthenics to try and get it back.

I cherish being in a state of flow and try to create spaces for it all day, thus painting. Depending on the size, each painting takes between 2 weeks to 2 months, so while some days I'll stretch or gesso a canvas, most days are straight painting. I don't keep any comfortable chairs in the studio, so it is hard to "hang out" in there. I try not to do a lot of thinking in the studio either because that often leads to more thinking and less doing.

Music is better for flow states but at some point I burn out and need the distraction of a podcast or audiobook. I save my favorite album for the last hour of the night. Before leaving, I will take a picture of the painting so I can compare it to the previous day to track my choices. Every night I come home and do 16 more pull-ups and eat a slice of carrot cake. I feel very fortunate to have days like this.



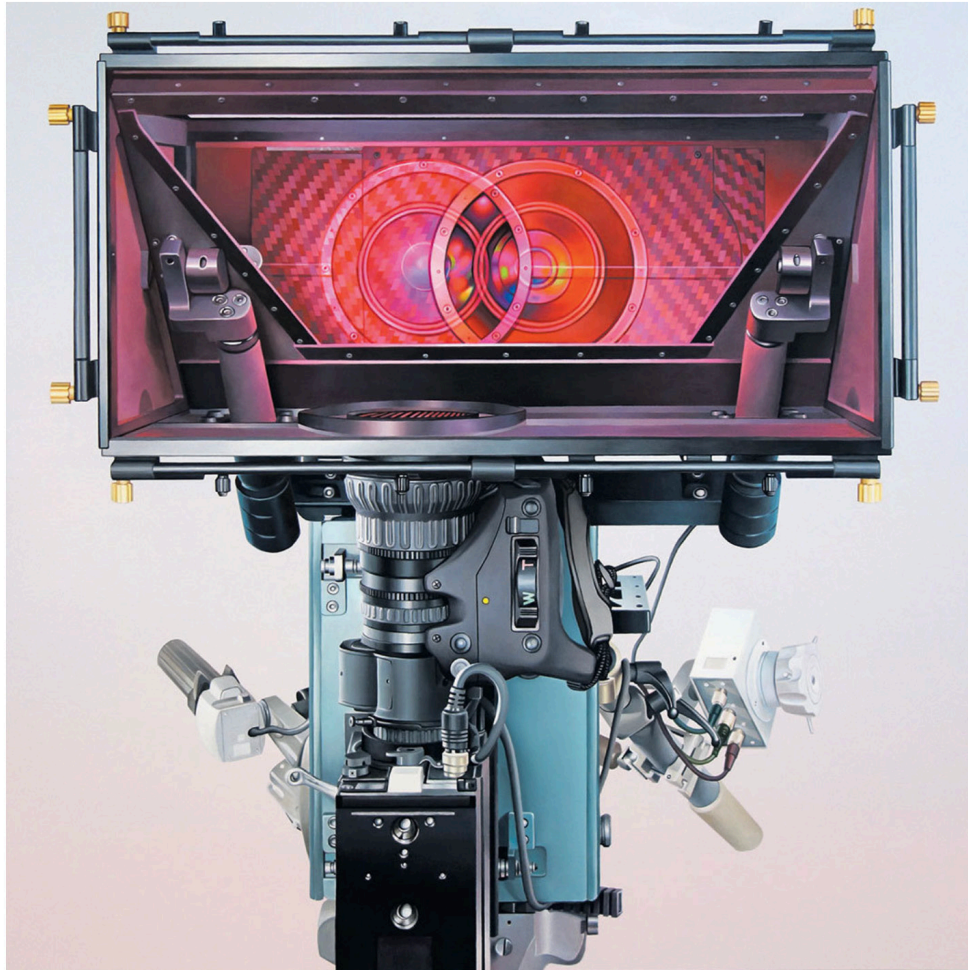
Chason Matthams, "Corsage (blue)," 2021, Oil on linen over panel, 14 x 18 inches; courtesy of the artist and Magenta Plains.

Artforum

March 2020

ARTFORUM

PORTFOLIO: CHASON MATTHAMS



Chason Matthams, *Untitled (3D, red)*, 2020, oil and acrylic on panel, 40 × 40".

BRAD PITT'S NOSE IS WEIRD. Its bulbous tip seems vaguely clitoral in Chason Matthams's 2011 oil painting of the star. It also reminds me of a Cézanne apple, trying to unfurl itself in every direction against its two-dimensional prison. Pitt's chapped, full lips are tightly pursed, and his sallow, putty-like face is veiled in a thin layer of grease. His irises are a cloudy blue. And it appears as though someone has dislocated his left eye by digging their grimy thumb into the squishy area beneath it, just above the zygomatic bone, forcing the orb to sink deeper into its socket. Pitt's not exactly handsome in this portrayal, but he's not exactly unhandsome, either. The portrait is off-putting but affecting—tender, even.

Matthams based his painting on a photo of a waxwork replica of Pitt. The artist believes the effigy, which he found through a Flickr account, might be languishing somewhere in a touristy Russian museum. He's not sure. But one thing he is absolutely certain of is how a gaze—whether fueled by affection, pity, fear, or rage—distorts the object of its attention, remolding it according to how we want to take it in, psychically and, yes, even physically. Think, for instance, of those Hollywood actors and actresses who go under the knife in order to look younger, tighter, and sexier for their insatiable fans. The film industry feeds on novelty and insecurity, of course. Yet it's the power of our desires—to kiss Brad's cheeks or caress his muscular arms, to stroke his thick blond hair or bust up his pretty white teeth—that shapes and reshapes people like him, along with anyone else we choose to scrutinize and contemplate with great intensity.

In this presentation, Matthams renders movie cameras—mechanical oculi—with astonishing technical facility and a fervent devotion. I am fixated on *Untitled (multiple lenses, orange and red)*, 2019, which depicts a vintage model from Eumig, an Austrian manufacturer of AV equipment. (The company, now defunct, is famous for the *Volksempfänger* [People's Receiver], a type of radio popular in the Third Reich: ALL OF GERMANY HEARS THE FÜHRER WITH THE PEOPLE'S RECEIVER, announced a Nazi broadside from the 1930s.) The full-frontal severity of Matthams's subject is almost pornographic: Its soft-focus lavenders, powdery pinks, satiny grays, and lurid gingers call to mind the prurient colorways of a *Hustler* spread. I marvel at its precise facture, but there's so much going on here beyond mere skill. Matthams captures a quiet violence, a latent evil, that unsettles as it seduces. I stare at his ravishing, villainous camera, and I'm pretty sure it stares right back at me—or *into* me, with more than a little ruthlessness. It makes me feel vulnerable and exposed. But I do rather enjoy the sensation.

— Alex Jovanovich



Chason Matthams, *12th Street New York* (detail), 2012, acrylic on canvas, 9 × 24".



Chason Matthams, *Rainbow Balloon 3 (red)* with Thomas Moran's "Rainbow over the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone", 2018, acrylic on linen over panel, 16 × 20".



Chason Matthams, *Untitled (large warm playback)*, 2015, oil and acrylic on panel, 48 × 60".



Chason Matthams, *Wax Mannequin Brad Pitt*, 2011, oil on canvas, 40 × 30".



Chason Matthams, *Corsage (green, orange, and pink)*, 2019, oil on linen over panel, 14 × 18".



Chason Matthams, *Rainbow Balloon 5 (a bigger rainbow and a rainbow within)* with Thomas Moran's "Rainbow over the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone", 2019, acrylic and oil on linen, 39 × 52".



Chason Matthams, *Untitled (multiple lenses, orange and red)*, 2019, oil on panel, 24 × 18".

The New Yorker

May 2019

**THE
NEW YORKER**

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

ART

Chason Matthams / Gracelee Lawrence

Two solo shows are united by a beguilingly creepy edge. Matthams's photorealist paintings depict isolated objects: deflated Mylar balloons, a bust of Hercules, corsages in their coffinlike plastic florist containers. The hyper-detailed, glistening quality of "A Hell for Rainbows," as the suite of canvases here is titled, complements the sanded surfaces of Lawrence's charmingly perverse 3-D-printed sculptures, on view in the gallery's lower level. The mannequin-smooth body parts and Brobdingnagian food items have a matte-pastel finish. A boulder-size shallot with a human navel is called "To Eliminate the Risk of Uncontrollable Feelings"; in "An Acute Sense of Physical Famine," two asparagus spears tiptoe away on their fingertip bases.

—*Johanna Fateman*

Artforum

March 2020

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CRITICS' PICKS



Chason Matthams, *Large Warm Playback*, 2015, oil on linen, 40 x 60".

NEW YORK

Chason Matthams

THIERRY GOLDBERG GALLERY

109 Norfolk Street

August 11–September 13, 2015

Here is an artist happiest in the graveyard we call Google Images, promiscuous in his desire to absorb everything: stupid and brilliant, sickening and funny, banal and beautiful. Lots of people do this kind of looking now—gluttonous, glazed over, staring—and try

making it into something. But few have the chops or intelligence to metabolize this modern habit into such febrile and gorgeously unhinged art.

Chason Matthams can paint like a motherfucker. Or a fatherfucker—he doesn't care. His pictures look like a synthesis of Ingres, Ub Iwerks, and Norman Rockwell, fed on a steady diet of GHB and Nickelodeon. They radiate a sinister, fraudulent light. Though fussed over and finessed within an inch of their lives, these paintings act out—they are nasty, irritating, visceral. It must have something to do with the temporal space one's shunted into while in their thrall. The sweat equity involved in his careful and tender rendering of so much mass-cultural excreta—by his hand and no other—mesmerizes.

Behold the cyclopean head of Miss Montag—*Heidi*, 2010—orange as a new Birkin, scraped out of a Malibu afternoon and pasted onto a dead field of bluish gray, every bead of moisture around her collagen-enhanced lips flashing like little knives on a face that got lifted beyond reason at twenty-three. She is weird, “sexy,” and hopelessly broken, a casualty of reality television and more than a little self hatred. Let's blame it on *Large Warm Playback*, 2015, a creepy, sensuously detailed portrait of a high-definition studio camera aimed into a nethersphere of seedy purple light. It's dead and alive simultaneously, as good paintings are, and exactly like us as we sit there, camera-like, vacant and watching.