

Press release

Jonathan Lasker

New Paintings

21 June—30 July 2022
Opening 21 June 2022, 6pm—8pm

Thaddaeus Ropac
Paris Marais
7, rue Debelleye, 75003 Paris



1. Jonathan Lasker, *Equitable Landscape*, 2021

Illuminating the viewer's desire to compose a picture or illusion in his or her mind is one of the central themes in my work. My paintings help viewers form pictures in their mind with indications of real world space, such as: horizon lines, forms set against backgrounds, rudimentary perspective, and forms and marks set in foreground or background space. — Jonathan Lasker, 2007

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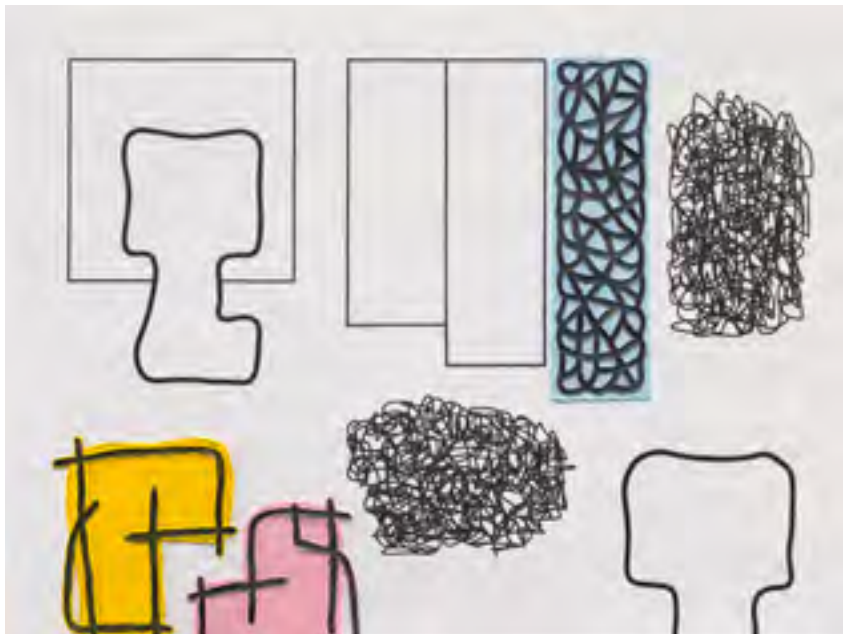
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Thaddaeus Ropac Paris Marais presents an exhibition of new works by American painter Jonathan Lasker. Throughout his career, Lasker has developed a distinctive formal vocabulary based on different mark-making processes in response to the prevailing Minimalist and Conceptual art movements. Together, the group of paintings on view showcases the artist's new, playful approach to his idiosyncratic visual language.

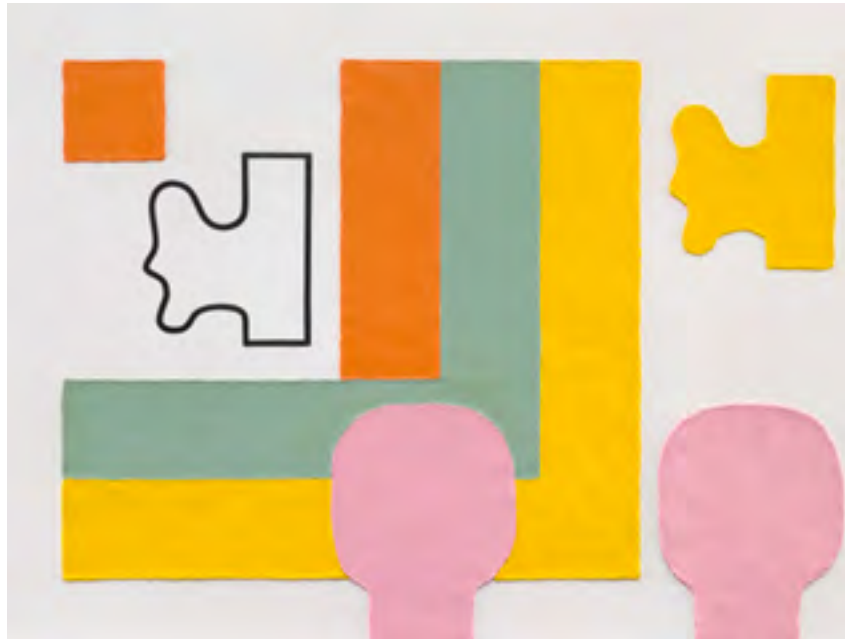
Lasker is a considered, deliberate painter, who uncouples line and colour in his works, inviting us to think through the construction of images and narratives out of paint. In his new paintings, he juxtaposes his signature scribbles and sober black outlines with thickly-rendered, sherbet-coloured shapes that appear to converse and interact on the canvas. Set against a white background, in contrast to previous paintings on coloured grounds, these organic, fluid forms are poised on the edge of representation, opening up new visual dimensions for viewers to explore.



2. Jonathan Lasker, *Esoteric Construction*, 2020

As the artist remarks, the white grounds that characterise his more recent works 'function differently', allowing the various elements of the composition to interact more freely with one another. 'They're liberated,' he explains, 'they're on their own'. Viewers may then form their own associations between the disparate forms that populate the works, prompted by the seemingly narrative titles Lasker gives to his paintings – '*Characters in Search of a Plot*' or '*Why Opinion Forms*'. Encouraged to experience themselves through the act of viewing, viewers become, in the end, the subject of Lasker's paintings.

I often think of my paintings as a form of image kit or perhaps as jigsaw puzzles, which offer components of painting as clues pointing the viewer not to a finished narrative [...], but rather to a self-awareness of how one construes a painting. — Jonathan Lasker, 1986



3. Jonathan Lasker, *Why Opinions Form*, 2021

Encased in a cartridge of red scribbles, the artist's signature in *For Jonathan* (2019) exemplifies the humour with which Lasker has infused his visual vocabulary in recent years. This new compositional element is an extension of the line as one of the foundations of painting, which the artist has explored throughout his career in the form of structural grids and graphic scribbles. Like a thread pulled out of the surrounding tangle, it playfully highlights the social and artistic implications that are attributed to a line when it takes a shape we recognise as someone's name. As Lasker explains, 'In traditional painting, a brushstroke is the means to an end, but in [my work], a brushstroke is a thing unto itself.'

Key to accessing Lasker's works is his process, which begins in the form of sketches realised freehand like a stream of consciousness. On the canvas, by contrast, the garbled lines seem all but erratic. Transposed first onto a study, they are then enlarged and carefully traced with a paintbrush and thinned black or red paint. The result is a series of unbroken circuits that hover between conscious and unconscious, the mechanical and the hand-made. At once laboured and spontaneous, these forms reveal the different temporalities within which Lasker's works operate.

The colourful impasto forms, by contrast, are created by pushing and ploughing paint across the canvas. Making them is an intense, physical act that is belied by their whimsical appearance. In a similar way, the black furrows that sinew through some of the coloured shapes in *Esoteric Construction* (2020) and *Equitable Landscape* (2021) require careful attention and some degree of force. Realised before the underlying form has time to dry, they echo the artist's signature, physically anchoring the act of making into the paint itself. As Lasker says: 'There's something existential about it,' adding, 'there's a lot at stake in each element of the painting, because if the execution fails then the painting fails.'

Lasker's paintings are defined by paradox and engineered through a friction between opposing concepts and visual elements. 'I use random, unconscious marks to consciously compose the constituent shapes within the picture,' he explains, 'in other words, I seek to confront the unbounded subconscious with the containment of bounded forms.' At once thick and flat, conceptual and intensely physical, his works highlight the poles of creativity that underpin the making and consumption of images: abstraction and figuration, order and disorder, mathematics and metaphor.



4. Jonathan Lasker, *Bold Horizon*, 2021

In the age of computer-generated images and machine learning, Lasker's carefully engineered compositions become a visual and mental playground within which to exercise our distinctly human powers of association and abstract thinking. 'Mechanical perception – artificial intelligence – can never do more than understand things in their particularity,' he explains, 'it is not equipped to understand things universally. Such an understanding', he continues, 'is essentially imaginative. It is through imagination that we can contemplate a bigger reality.'



Intuitive drawing made
by Jonathan Lasker

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5. Portrait of Jonathan Lasker in his studio

Jonathan Lasker

Born in Jersey City, New Jersey in 1948, Jonathan Lasker lives and works in New York. He initially pursued a career as a rock musician, and began developing his highly self-reflexive pictorial language in the 1970s as part of a generation of painters known as the 'Neo-Conceptualists.' As a student at CalArts, where the prevailing approach to art was Conceptualism, he remembers that 'to be a painter meant you had to take a stance, because there was a very antagonistic attitude towards painting there.'

The mentorship of Susan Rothenberg and Richard Artschwager, however, allowed him to forge his own path and mount a challenge to the medium's status quo, creating a unique system of painting based on a figure-ground relationship in which the figure and ground stand in a dialectical relationship to one another. 'In a way it was good for me,' he remembers, 'because it forced me to shape my reasons for making paintings. It also forced me to make paintings that had reasons for being paintings.'

Although Lasker's forms are created intuitively, the compositions themselves are structured and controlled. Using doubled, transposed and translated shapes, he creates paintings made up of distinct, clearly defined elements. 'In Lasker's work, forms [...] are part of a larger schema, but independent in terms of form, colour, texture, and manner of paint application,' describes art critic Richard Kalina. 'Each image [in the picture] becomes a thing itself, an element to be examined, experienced and categorised; a component of the larger grammatical structure that Lasker has built.'

Jonathan Lasker's early solo exhibitions include the ICA Philadelphia in 1992 and a retrospective that travelled to the Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Germany; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and Kunstverein St. Gallen, Switzerland in 1997–98, followed by exhibitions at the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, USA; Forum for Contemporary Art, St. Louis, USA; and The Power Plant, Toronto. A major retrospective of his work was held in 2003 at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid and the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf. In 2015, the exhibition *Jonathan Lasker: Paintings 2001–2014* was shown at the Musée d'art moderne et contemporain in Saint-Étienne, France.

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Share your thoughts with:

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1. Jonathan Lasker, *Equitable Landscape*, 2021. Oil on linen. 191 x 254 cm (75.2 x 100 in). © Jonathan Lasker. **2. Jonathan Lasker, *Esoteric Construction*, 2020.** Oil on linen. 152 x 203 cm (59.84 x 79.92 in). © Jonathan Lasker. **3. Jonathan Lasker, *Why Opinions Form*, 2021.** Oil on linen. 152 x 203 cm (60 x 80 in). © Jonathan Lasker. **4. Jonathan Lasker, *Bold Horizon*, 2021.** Oil on linen. 76 x 102 cm (30 x 40 in). © Jonathan Lasker. **5. Portrait of Jonathan Lasker in his studio.** © Jonathan Lasker.
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