

## JOSHUA MARSH: Ten Things

*by John Yau*

JEFF BAILEY GALLERY

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In his first solo show in New York, Joshua Marsh continues to explore as well as expand the slippery exchange between definition and deferral, a thing's weight and light's weightlessness. The subjects of his paintings are undistinguished domestic objects and outerwear: pitchers, oval mirror, dustpan, single flip-flop, pair of boots. With the pitchers it is apparent that the artist arranges them so that they defy expectations of stability we might associate with a still life. The inverted pitcher is talking to both art history and itself; it is an actor in a comedy poised on the edge of a calamitous tragedy.

A worthy descendant of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, via television, computer screens, movie screens, surveillance cameras, and X-ray machines—technological light—Marsh is interested in perceptual states, the interaction of light and form. His method is straightforward: oil paint on panels that range from 8 by 11 inches to 50 by 32 inches. The fact that they are not all the standard, one-large-size-fits-all is a good indication of his independence. Carefully, but without fuss, he caresses the paint onto the smooth surface. While the combination of high-key colors and ethereal shapes evokes the computer screen and its ability to turn everything into glowing light, the surface is replete with the faint traces of the paintbrush. Color-wise, he works either through contrast or tonality. The palette in “Chair” (2010) is lemony yellow and different intensities of green, while “Boots” (2010) consists of shades of dusky pinks. His sharp contrasts and tonal shifts transform things into ghostly silhouettes disrupted by visceral shadows.

It is clear from the different interfaces and slippages between the physical thing and the atmospheric light that Marsh doesn't have it all figured out, that he arrives at a specific interaction in each work. He pushes the paintings into the realm of experience. They originate not from a photograph but from a sketch of something observed. He seems to believe that drawing and painting can still be a means of discovery. In his paintings of pitchers, lying on their side, leaning and tilting, it is evident that he has not turned them into a motif, a stable subject that he could reconfigure with color, and in doing so he has kept his options open.

The spectral light emanating from these paintings establishes a fruitful dialogue with the physicality of the paint. The setups feel discovered rather than contrived. His determination to place a thing in a changing world—to try and investigate an inherently unstable situation—speaks well of his ambition.

If, as some theorists have argued, we live in a mediated world, Marsh's paintings remind us how that has impacted our daily life. We cannot see things for what they are, no matter how hard we try. Technological light, and all the nervous tics that it has implanted in our minds and senses, colors everything we see. The point, Marsh seems to be making, is that one doesn't have to succumb to this deleterious situation and join the club of cynics and ironists, that seeing for oneself is still the primary desire of being. A young artist who isn't trying to fit into a well-established narrative— isn't that wonderful?