

Akron native must pick up intensity to remain rising star with the brush

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SHAHEEN MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART Swirls of coffee-colored pigment explode out of a curtain of pinkish flame in an untitled abstraction by Daniel Hesidence.

REVIEW

Shaheen Modern and Contemporary Art What: "1736: New Works by Daniel Hesidence." An Akron native, who is making it big in the New York art world, shares recent abstractions with Northeast Ohio

When: Through Friday, July 28.

Where: 740 W. Superior Ave., Suite 101, Cleveland.

Admission: Free. Call 216-830-8888, or go to www.shaheengallery.com

Paint is amazing stuff. It has its own slippery logic, its own magical properties. But it takes a gifted artist to let the genie out of the tube. Daniel Hesidence, a 30-year-old native of Akron who now lives in Long Island City, N.Y., is getting plenty of attention on both sides of the Atlantic in that regard.

Hesidence has received favorable reviews in New York for his semifigural and abstract paintings and will be included in next October's "USA Today" exhibition in London, organized by contemporary British art collector and gallery owner Charles Saatchi in collaboration with the Royal Academy of Arts.

A new exhibition of Hesidence's work at Shaheen Modern and Contemporary Art in Cleveland shows that he possesses amazing gifts but needs to endow his work with greater emotional heft.

The show is filled with abstractions that deal with high-velocity brushwork and a lovely luminescence that Hesidence coaxes out of smeared pigment on canvas. But there's a persistent sense that the artist's virtuosity comes easily and doesn't cost him much. His paintings have an easy grace that asks for admiration, not empathy.

Nevertheless, the exhibition is a chance to connect with the work of a painter with local roots who's on the rise in the art world. It also illustrates a change in art-world fashion.

In 1999, Saatchi courted publicity through the shock-art tactics of his notorious "Sensation" exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, which included Damien Hirst's pickled shark suspended in a tank of formaldehyde.

Since then, Saatchi has embraced painting big time. "Nothing," he told The Art Newspaper recently, "is as uplifting as standing before a great painting." As one of Saatchi's favored artists, Hesidence is part of the new wave championed by an influential dealer.

All 10 works by Hesidence in the Shaheen show are untitled, which focuses a viewer's attention strictly on the nonverbal messages communicated by Hesidence's brushwork and his preferred methodology of painting wet into wet, with multiple layers of oil paint that blur into one another, achieving the slick, fluid highlights of satin or silk.

The largest painting in the show, a composition nearly 12 feet across, is filled with violets and metallic blues, and shot through with flashes of white and screaming red. It suggests the attenuated draperies of El Greco, along with patterns of light refracted through a blurred kaleidoscope. Another image, painted with pinks and streaks of white on a soft blue ground, is a floating orb of pale fire. In another, a burst of electric pink flames out of swirls of coffee and aquamarine.

Hesidence's work reconnects with the venerable tradition of American Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s, but not in a way that directly recalls the gestural language of any of the great painters of that era. But his works on view at Shaheen lack a sense of coming from the gut.

According to dealer Brett Shaheen, Hesidence declines to say much about the paintings, preferring to let viewers come to their own conclusions, which is correct and fair.

But the show's title, "1736," a number chosen by Hesidence, coyly hints at private meanings the artist won't divulge to Shaheen or anyone else. As a pose, it's obnoxious. We're not talking about an artistic giant whose work is worthy of exegesis in a doctoral thesis. At least not yet.

Hesidence has powerful gifts and is most definitely a talent to watch. But he needs to mature and to gain power and identity. If he doesn't watch out, his virtuosic skill with brushes and oils could become a trap.

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