

ARTnews

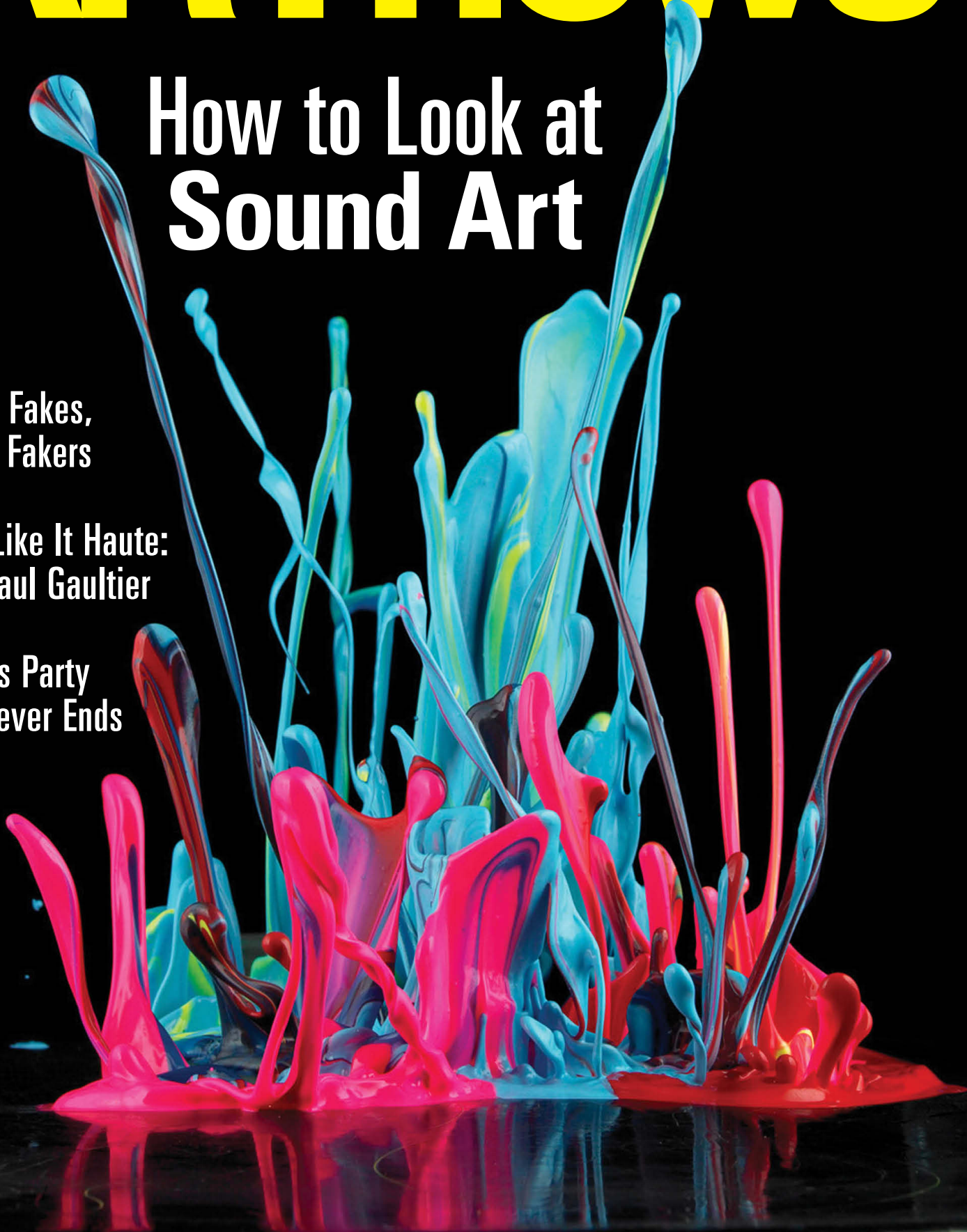
NOVEMBER 2013

How to Look at Sound Art

Fakers, Fakes,
& Fake Fakers

Some Like It Haute:
Jean Paul Gaultier

Renoir's Party
That Never Ends



'The New Abstractionists VIII'

Walter Wickiser

The four abstractionists featured in this exhibition, Joan Miller, Renée Lerner, Jaro, and Austin James, distinguish their work from that of earlier abstract artists, even as they credit the traditions to which they are heirs. Miller's jewel-like canvases harken back to early 20th-century paintings in which color is an end in itself (think Matisse, Miró, and the Orphic Cubists). Lerner's tousled fabric, felt, metal, mesh, and other scrap hangings draw upon the legacies of readymades and objets-trouvés from Schwitters to Bourgeois. Jaro's flat, geometric compositions are visibly indebted to Russian Suprematism. James's broad cascades of pigment in mineral hues invite comparison with Color Field painters and such lyrical abstractionists as Frankenthaler and Diebenkorn.

The artworks shown here are nonetheless resolutely of their time. What united these contemporary abstractionists was the absence of ideological agendas. Malevich, an inflexible purist, never would have tolerated Jaro's flirtations with representation; interlocking shapes in *Composition in Red* (2013) and *Composition II* (2011) suggest skyscrapers, smokestacks, celestial bodies and beams of light. Lerner's *Red Dress with Chains* (2013), composed of crimson and black fabrics interspersed with links of metal, suggests decadent eveningwear. James's pictures might fit in a lineup of 20th-century modernist work, until it becomes

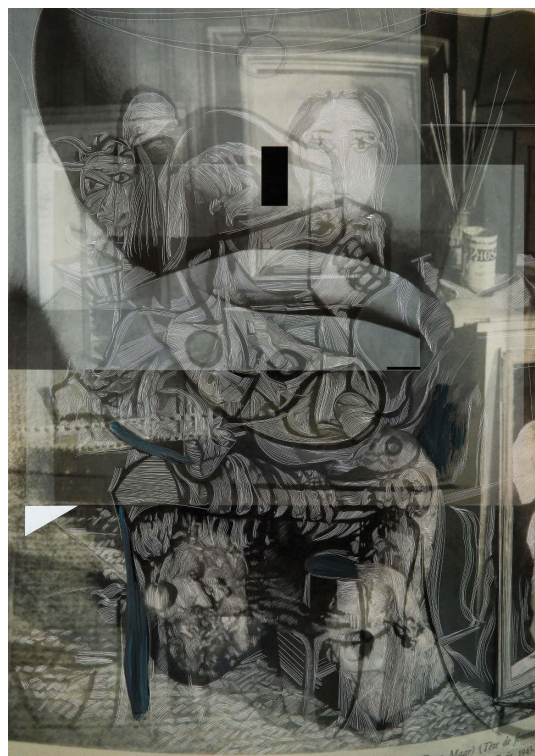
apparent that their surfaces are sealed in resin, which reflects the spectator and violates the modernist credo that the canvas is a porous boundary through which the artist communicates feeling. Miller's abundant delight in laying down color is thoroughly contemporary. Unlike the early modernists, she has nothing to prove and nothing to lose. In works such as *Heady Creek II* (2012) exuberance infuses her strokes, blooming across the canvas. Abstraction has never spoken with a single voice. These artists are pursuing disparate aims in an ongoing exploration that, happily, shows no signs of slowing down.

—Johanna Ruth Epstein

Sebastiaan Bremer

Edwynn Houk

Under and among layers of scratches and paint in these mostly black-and-white mixed-media works lurk figures and glimpses of an artist's studio. A close look revealed that the 16 pieces in this show were actually photographs that had been artfully altered and obscured through digital means. The chromogenic prints contain imagery pulled from such artists as Picasso, Matisse, Brassai, and Bill Brandt. The photos consist of combined fragments and whole paintings



Sebastiaan Bremer, *Chaise*, 2013, unique hand-painted chromogenic print with mixed media, 23 1/2" x 16". Edwynn Houk.

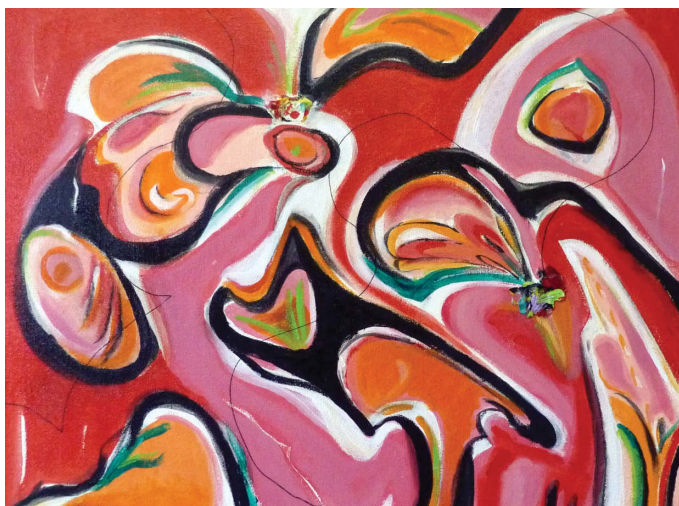
whose color Bremer darkened and desaturated. He then either "etched" the images, scratching the dark photo emulsion to leave white lines or he cut away larger white shapes. Tiny white dots of paint were applied to some images, covering the

flesh of a rounded female form, for instance. Other works here included brush marks in blue or black, and a few featured color in the photo itself, as in one peachy image of a woman's back.

Sometimes a trace of the photo's source could still be glimpsed, as in *Chaise* (all works 2013). Beneath a photo of a studio covered with Picassoesque scratched forms, the name "Dora Maar" appears in type, presumably a fragment from the caption of the original photo, pulled from a book. In *Papa Bravo*, swooping etched lines move fluidly over a murky ground that resolves into a woman's crossed legs, a darkened version of one of Bill Brandt's Eaton Place nudes.

More intriguing were images whose sources were harder to identify. *Combustion* shows a spectacular reclining nude with smooth lines radiating from an upturned, rapturous face. There are hints of Picasso and Matisse in the form and pose, but on the chaotic surface, a couple of thick fists rest on or near the body. In many images the handmade marks seemed to obscure or dispute the photo below, but here they conjure unexpected shapes—perhaps the hands of the artist himself.

—Rebecca Robertson



Joan Miller, *Heady Creek II*, 2012, oil on canvas, 18" x 24". Walter Wickiser.