

KATE WERBLE GALLERY

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MODERN PAINTERS

25 Artists to Watch in 2014

Alexi Worth

December 2013

Michael Berryhill

Born in El Paso, Texas. Lives in Brooklyn.

"I'm thinking mainly about light as a means of activation of the image, or a way to seduce," says artist Berryhill, whose canvases pulse with a hard-to-define luminosity. "The way my paintings look is the result of a reliance on invention instead of observation—because I found out what the image is, or I understand it, by making it." This goes a long way toward explaining Berryhill's eccentric subjects: fictitious architectural structures, luridly colored masses that might be perversions of the form of Rodin's Thinker, still-life tableaux rendered less still by frantic, kinetic patterning. He explains the genesis of one work, *Egyptian Swing*, 2012, by noting that his initial impulse was to depict "a tumor doing a pole dance. And while I was working on it, it took on this pharaoh headdress pattern, which made me think of Egypt. And I was working on it during the Egyptian Spring uprising— this is a pretty typical chain of events for my process." Another painting, *Elephant Mouse Hole*, 2012, was birthed from a similarly nonlinear burst of inspirations: a drawing of an abstract shape that assumes the contours of an elephant; the memory of the so-called Elephant Rock in Berryhill's hometown of El Paso.

As someone working within a fairly traditional format—and creating paintings that are objects in their own right, not footnotes to a larger conceptual project—Berryhill is comfortable considering the fate of his medium. He's inspired by the work of his peers (people like John McAllister and Josephine Halverson) as well as those whose work or legacy he admires from afar (Charline von Heyl, Peter Saul, Tal R, Philip Guston). "Painting may be in and out of fashion," Berryhill says, "but like a vampire, it's undead, and can't be killed. It may be sickly and old-looking from time to time, or may be all sexy and seductive, but either way it's here for good."