



Peter Halley, *One Step Beyond*, 2007. Acrylic, fluorescent acrylic, and Roll-a-Tex on canvas. Private Collection, London.

Geometry of the Absurd: Recent Paintings by Peter Halley

SBMA Presents Artist's First Solo Museum Exhibition in the Western U.S.
On View November 8, 2015 – February 21, 2016

October 22, 2015—For over 30 years, Peter Halley's paintings, with their characteristic Day-Glo color and distinctive faux-stucco surfaces, have engaged in variations on the same closed set of geometric forms, designated by the artist as prisons, cells, and conduits — “icons that reflect the increasing geometricization of social space in the world in which we live.”¹

Treating space as a manifestation of social control—an idea inspired by the artist's interest in Michel Foucault's notion of a carceral society—Halley's paintings provide metaphors for the constantly proliferating communication and organizational networks that have come to dominate our world. Over a career of three decades, the artist has deployed his trademark iconic forms with ever increasing intensity, resulting in works with ever more dazzling combinations of color, shape, and texture, assuring their continuing relevance in the post-millennial information age.

A progenitor of neo-conceptual painting, Peter Halley is widely recognized for expanding 20th-century non-objective geometric painting by tying its meaning to the social landscape, communications networks, and digital technology. Halley began exhibiting in the mid-1980s alongside such artists as Sarah Charlesworth, Jeff Koons, Haim Steinbach, and Philip Taaffe. His early works drew inspiration from the urban environment of New York City, New Wave music, and the French post-structuralist writers. The

¹ <http://www.peterhalley.com/>

scope of Halley's ambitions has expanded throughout the years. In the 1990s, he founded *index* magazine and began making site-specific installations incorporating digitally-printed wall murals. In the 2000s, he served as director of Yale's prestigious MFA painting program and has engaged in a series of collaborative projects with designers and architects including Alessandro Mendini.

Geometry of the Absurd: Recent Paintings by Peter Halley features eight large paintings produced between 2007 and 2015. The paintings selected for the exhibition share in common a distinctive double-stack composition—with two prisons or cells, one precariously suspended above another. This work presents, as Colin Gardner suggests in his catalogue essay, “a twist on the artist's earlier horizontal, side by side cell and conduit paintings (with their necessary sense of enclosure).” The dynamic of each painting is found in the endlessly jockeying for position of two prominent shapes, as if each is attempting to be “on top.” Together, these works project a worldview in which technology and social connections have run amuck, expressed through a geometry that has lost its claim to rationality and become senseless and absurd.

Peter Halley was born in 1953 in New York, attended Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, and graduated from Yale University with a BA in Art History in 1975. He lived in New Orleans in the late 1970s, where he studied painting at the University of New Orleans, receiving his MFA in 1978. He has lived and worked in New York since 1980. In 1985, Halley had his first one-person exhibition at International with Monument, a groundbreaking East Village gallery, whose conceptually rigorous program stood in stark contrast to the then-dominant Neo-Expressionist movement. Beginning in 1991, a survey of Halley's work, organized by the CAPC Musée d'art contemporain in Bordeaux, France, toured Europe with stops at the Musée d'art contemporain, Lausanne, Switzerland, the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. In 1992, the Des Moines Art Center hosted his first solo exhibition at a U.S. museum. In 2014, an extensive exhibition of his work took place at the Musée D'Art Moderne in Saint Étienne, France.

Halley has executed permanent installations at the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport and the Gallatin School at New York University. He has taught at the School of Visual Arts, New York, the University of California, Los Angeles, and Columbia University. He served as the Director of Graduate Studies in Painting and Printmaking at the Yale University School of Art from 2002 to 2011. He published *index* magazine from 1996 to 2005. Halley is also recognized for his critical writing. In 2013, his texts were anthologized in *Peter Halley, Selected Essays, 1981-2001*, published by Edgewise Press, New York.



Geometry of the Absurd: Recent Paintings by Peter Halley is accompanied by a color illustrated catalogue with an essay by Colin Gardner, author; Ph.D. in Cinema Studies; and Professor, Integrative Studies/Critical Theory and Department Chair of the Department of Art, University of California, Santa Barbara. The exhibition is organized by Julie Joyce, Curator of Contemporary Art at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art.

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Peter Halley, *Bluff*, 2007. Acrylic, fluorescent acrylic, and Roll-a-Tex on canvas. Collection of Nicholas Hunt.

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