



Venice Biennale artist, Avery Singer talks processes, robots, and post-human painting

Orit Gat

'I'm interested in the ways in which artists have removed the hand from painting using technology,' she says

The daughter of two artists, **Avery Singer** was born and raised in New York City, growing up in a Tribeca loft. Her parents named her after the painter **Milton Avery**, whose work she would see at the Museum of Modern Art, where her father worked as a projectionist. Drawing on this intellectual heritage, Singer's work combines programs such as SketchUp and the modeling software DAZ 3D with references to the Dutch Golden Age. Computers and projectors have become emblematic of Singer's process, which shifts from digital to painting, asking questions about the limits and possibilities of both. Ahead of her participation in the 58th Venice Biennale, she spoke with Orit Gat about her new airbrush tool (ordinarily used to paint airplanes), her upcoming commission for the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, and her new works in Venice and Basel, where they'll be presented by **Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler**.

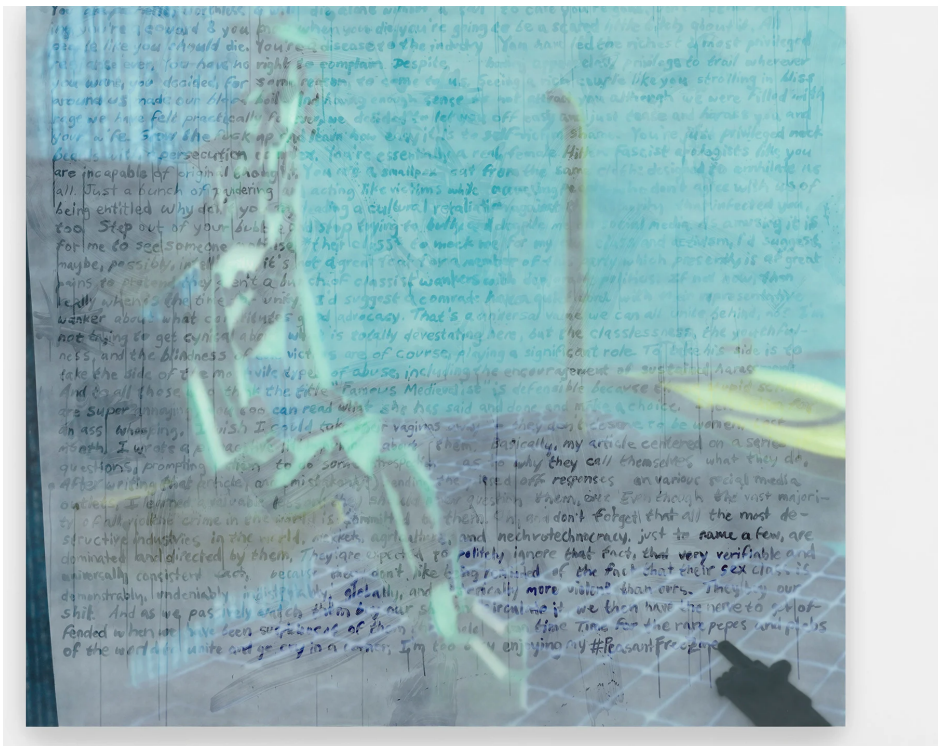


Avery Singer, Untitled, 2019. Courtesy the artist and Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin.



Orit Gat: You're working on a Museum Ludwig commission, the second of the institution's biennially held Schultze Projects [the first was with Wade Guyton in 2017], for which a contemporary artist is invited to make a mural for the museum's main stairwell, in memory of the artist Bernard Schultze. What are you planning?

Avery Singer: I am working with a new technique: it involves using a digitized airbrushing system that operates on an X, Y, and Z axis. You make a primitive 3D file for it, as well as a color file, and it airbrushes based on the directives you give it. I'm interested in the ways in which artists have removed the hand from painting using technology. **Wade Guyton** is printing with a flatbed printer. **Christopher Wool** uses silk screening, as does **Laura Owens**. **Albert Oehlen** did these computer paintings that were printed, I think, using a flatbed and silk screen. I wanted to have my own way of doing this, using a technology that no one else would have used, something that would be closer to the airbrushing that I have been doing by hand in my previous paintings. I found a company in Japan that was making a machine mainly used for printing logos on trucks and airplanes. I reached out to a dealer in Switzerland and asked if I could rent his workshop for a few weeks to experiment with it. I went there, and, within a month, I made five paintings for an exhibition I did at Secession, in Vienna, in 2016.



Avery Singer, Reputation Demolition on Dereliction Island, 2018. Courtesy the artist and Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin.



What's the machine called?

It's got the cheesiest name ever. It's the Michelangelo ArtRobo.

What is the process involved in making one of these paintings?

This painting [*Untitled*, 2016] has about 16 different files and settings on the print system, to evoke the feeling that it is an image that is receding across an irregular surface. I thought the clearest way to illustrate something like this would be to utilize the architectural idea of scaling up a grid and relating it to another grid, because anyone can understand what a grid is. It's a Cartesian idea of space that we've all grown up with. We executed the painting from background to foreground, painting the shadows first, then I hand brushed the shadows of the brushstrokes, wherever color was occurring. Then [I added] the small grid in the middle of the canvas, then the colors behind it, and so on.

Can you tell me about the paintings you're showing at the Venice Biennale?

I made two new works for Venice, then there are five older paintings that I've exhibited before. There's a self-portrait in the shower, a subject from art history – like Venus, or bathers – that I picked up because I was interested in the light passing through air, water, and glass. It's very classical genre with a huge history. Then there's another work, with a face in a giant sensory-deprivation tank, which like the shower portrait, is taken from a group show with **Alexander Carver** and **Pieter Schoolwerth** at Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler and **Miguel Abreu** in New York. For the show, we created an architectural model of an open-air luxury toilet pavilion. It started as a

joke about what the new high-rise luxury residential towers in New York might offer people. The water theme gave me a subject and a form.



Avery Singer

It feels like the subject of your paintings is often image-making itself.

I wanted to illustrate something that anyone could look at. You're going to see a depiction of photographic space in a digital image but painted.

Is it important that the process is visible?

In painting, we have become used to seeing process, to seeing how paintings are made. It's something Isabelle Graw writes about in her book [*The Love of Painting*, 2018] which she calls the 'vitalistic fantasy' – being able to tie your own subjective experience of perceiving the first to the last stroke of the brush. It's this romanticized connection between understanding, emotion, and decision-making – a thought process the viewer can follow almost from start to finish. I actually want to remove that connection, I think it's way more interesting that you would not be able to have that relationship to it.

And what replaces it?

Something where there is no start and no understanding of where the artist's hand was. Look at *Untitled* [2019]. It started when I asked the animator I work with to make a model of a woman

with her hands in front of her face as if she were showing off her manicure. And then I added face tattoos and scars, and so on, to her face and hands. Then, I completed a digital-airbrush underpainting of that. I did it and then thought, 'It's executed but it doesn't have a painterly language,' which I wanted it to have. So I thought I would try to make it look like there was a piece of glass between her face and her hands. I went back into the model, took a photo, taped up that area, sprayed an outline, then colored on top of it. There's this white outline that does not translate as a reflection. It just looks like an image that's there. Then I added the dripping-down effect, as if it's liquid running down a pane of glass. I don't even know what it is anymore. But for me, what's interesting is that it started from this file of a woman that we made up. And I don't know if I've seen another person try to make a photo-realistic painting of such a model before. It's a weird thing to try to do – photo-realism of a thing that doesn't exist.

— The 58th Biennale dell' Arte, 'May you live in interesting times', curated by Ralph Rugoff, takes place from May 10th until November 24th 2019. The 2019 edition of Art Basel's Basel show will take place from June 13th to June 16th in Basel, Switzerland.

Orit Gat is a writer and editor based in New York City.

Top Image: Avery Singer, Untitled, 2019 (detail). Courtesy the artist and Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin.