

Matthew Palladino

GARTH GREENAN GALLERY

Computer “graphical interfaces” have a cultural significance that is impossible to overstate. The window, the toolbar, the drop-down menu, the scroll bar: These ubiquitous mechanisms mediate our interactions with the digital—which is to say, an outsize portion of our work and play. (As others have noted, what Leo Steinberg called the flatbed picture plane—artwork as matrix of information, receptacle of data, vector in transmission—anticipated the computer desktop’s mode of address.) For his first solo show in New York, San Francisco-based artist Matthew Palladino presented eight Pop-style works that focus on one of the most omnipresent tropes of desktop life: the pictographic icon.

But though Palladino apparently takes inspiration from this facet of design for the screen, he jettisons the layered flatness that is the screen’s defining characteristic. His works are reliefs, cast from vacuum-formed molds that have been impressed with the shapes of miscellaneous objects—wads of chewed gum, banana peels, chains, lobster-shaped bread pans, beer bottles, tubes of lipstick, disposable plastic cups. Painstakingly hand painted in bright 1 Shot enamel sign paint, the embossed items are typically repeated several times in a single composition, arranged in horizontal or vertical rows or arrayed in tight configurations across the surface. More often than not, Palladino created his molds from ersatz knickknacks and novelty items rather than the real thing—the head of a blow-up doll, for example, instead of an actual human face—and the shapes, in turn, take on those commodities’ infantilizing clarity and slick Platonic generalness.

In works such as *Atlantis* (all works 2014)—consisting of rows of quasi-classical columns and garishly red lobsters—the resemblance to certain apps, such as Candy Crush and FarmVille, is unmistakable. The row of paintbrushes and palettes in *Still Life* prompts nerdy associations with a video game’s “power ups” or “extra lives.” And in general the scale of Palladino’s icons with respect to the works’ overall size is that of emoji characters as they appear on an iPhone screen. Although Palladino cites the serial repetitions of commercial graphics in works by Eduardo Paolozzi as a key influence, his approach seems more of a piece with those of a range of younger artists who emulate Photoshop tools and other digital-imaging software—think, for instance, of Laura Owens’s drop shadows, or of the “emboss” effects simulated by Greg Parma Smith. (Palladino’s works also raise the ghosts of Jonathan Lasker’s cartoonish, candy-colored abstractions, in which the gestural mark, in all its ostensible uniqueness, is repeated as if spat out by a machine.) The relationship with computer design is not limited to the imagery’s icon-like appearance, however; it also extends to the work’s syntax. For we don’t read Palladino’s pictographic arrays from left to right, like text, nor do we absorb them altogether in an instant, as a gestalt—rather, we parse them by continuously scanning the relief’s surface, juggling multiple data points all at once. The frenetic visual experience his works proffer is not unlike the polyvocal shock and overwhelming distractions of a desktop crowded with windows and shortcuts.

In spite of their bright, arcade-game gleefulness, Palladino’s works are disturbed by undertones of violence. *The Accident* evokes a highway horror, with a tire’s skid mark bisecting a canvas festooned with Christmas-tree air fresheners, a six-pack’s worth of crushed beer cans, smushed wads of gum, and flattened rubber face masks. In *Night Ride*, lurid s/m accoutrements such as black gloves, handcuffs, and a chain appear alongside pairs of Groucho glasses and two sexually suggestive fruits: cherries and bananas. The diptych *The Flight*, meanwhile, features two pages from an aircraft safety card, which have shattered like ceramic. Updating the best of Pop art for our smartphone and desktop age, Palladino defamiliarizes culture’s visual surface to gesture at the nightmares that linger underneath.



The Accident, 2014, Oil-based enamel on panel, 63 1/2 × 51 1/2"