

Marissa Bluestone

*Action Paintings*

Curated by Ashton Cooper

November 17 - December 15, 2017

While Harold Rosenberg’s classic 1952 essay “American Action Painters” famously positioned the canvas as “an arena in which to act,” Marissa Bluestone’s recent body of so-called action paintings take an approach that is far more recreational than gladiatorial. Here, action refers not to the painter “himself” but to the subjects of the paintings — Bluestone and her friends playing games, dancing, smoking, and making art. In this series of action paintings, Bluestone cheekily revives the term and gives it a new utility in the service of portraying her queer community.

Because she painted them on the floor with broad strokes of color, Bluestone first called the works action paintings as a joke. The name stuck and her initial wisecrack set the tone for a group of paintings that are equally comical and sincere. Bluestone’s sense of humor is often embedded in the paintings via visual gags, some of which remain inside jokes while others are legible to the viewer — such as two dice players wearing matching Venus symbol hats in *Hoping for the Best* or the slightest hint of an exposed butt crack in the background of *Going Horizontal*.

Bluestone also tests rules of taste and conventions of style. Frequently containing hues from every section of the color wheel, the paintings transgress art school rules to flirt with the unrefined. Bluestone underlays her vivid jewel-tone palette with a ground of pearlescent paint that adds a shimmer to the compositions and a luminescence to the figures, but also toys with the association of glitteriness and tackiness. By constructing bodies and faces from pools and strokes of tempered paint, Bluestone muddles the distinction between abstraction and figuration. Bodies remain contingent and open-ended.

Bluestone is implicitly, and often explicitly, present in her compositions. In *5-5*, for example, she invisibly occupies the other end of the ping pong table. Bluestone composes from memory, with drawings functioning as studies for the paintings. As such, the paintings don’t function as exact portraits. Instead, they are loosely rendered homages to the fact that people are complex and difficult to pin down, capable of too much action to be contained in a single image.