



"INTELLECTUAL PARLOR GAME"
2011
Howard Sherman
ACRYLIC AND MARKER ON CANVAS
70" x 60"
PHOTO: COURTESY MCMURTREY GALLERY

HOUSTON

Howard Sherman: "Apocalyptic Wallpaper" at McMurtrey Gallery

For at least the half dozen years, since this writer first came into contact with them, Howard Sherman's paintings have been recognizable by their signature explosiveness and humor, as well as by their stubborn refusal to be artistically pigeonholed. Sherman's penchant for ultra-colored bombast and abstract-expressionist action obscures subtle figurative motifs, thoughtful wordplay, and skillful visual trickery. Seemingly slashed onto canvas in a creative outburst, each work reveals its depth under scrutiny. With this newest batch of paintings, displayed under the well-chosen title "Apocalyptic Wallpaper" (it might well be the catchall term for Sherman's *oeuvre*), it's obvious more figures are emerging from Sherman's abstract subconscious. He's been compared to Jean-Michel Basquiat based on the frenetic energy and street-vibe of the work (as well as the tersely clever and borderline-profane scrawls of text he employs), but Sherman has always leaned more heavily to the abstract. It's only now that elements of clearly rendered narrative have begun to appear. He recently completed several residencies in which he explored more minimal abstracts on paper, which he credits as prompting a major discovery, and he also endured a spell in which his painting style was being copied and sold under his name. Both experiences he credits as goading an evolutionary shift in his work. While it's been rewarding to see Sherman's work at previous stages, this one marks the maturity that comes from an artistic reassessment, particularly Sherman's oblique look back at his cartooning past. Works like *Intellectual Parlor Game*, with its knocked-out female faces (based on photos of women wrestlers), and *Cement Shoes* (both 2011), which depicts a kind of mythological, six-legged, brick-footed, blurry mass with protruding cartoon arm and fork "fin," demonstrate efforts to integrate recognizable imagery into these wonderfully vague grenade blasts of witty absurdism.

—TROY SCHULZE