

Paintings that Conjure the Ghostly Hand of the Artist

by [Anthony Cudahy](#) on February 16, 2016

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Installation view of Ginny Casey's "Blue Hands" (2015) at 106 Green (all images courtesy 106 Green)

Ghost Maker brings together **Ginny Casey**'s new large-scale paintings of still lifes and floating hands. The surfaces of these paintings are lovingly worked over in multiple thin layers which build up the forms, providing a visual depth and a paint history. The colors are mostly muted, adding power to moments of saturation. The namesake color of "Blue Hands" practically glows. These are very considered paintings, self-referentially depicting the unseen acts the painter undertakes to make a final piece.

Giorgio Morandi comes to mind when looking at this body of work. Outside of the obvious shared focus on jug-like objects positioned carefully on tabletops, both artists share a complex understanding of composition. Although Morandi's paintings have the potential to appear like simple arrangements, closer inspection reveals the magic in the meeting of shapes and colors, creating a marvelous surface tension of hard edges dividing space between objects and the horizon line. Casey's paintings hold up to this lineage, where the interactions between negative space, color, and shape are just as exciting as the narratives the paintings relay.

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Installation view of 'Ginny Casey: Ghost Maker' at Gallery 106 Green

It's within these narratives, and the character and inherent strangeness Casey gives to her objects, that she truly diverts to her own wavelength. Many times the paintings feature apparitions of hands working to make or change objects, but often the action has already passed and we are presented with carefully arranged mementos. Each painting positions a few stock elements: amorphous vases standing, tilting over, or smashed alongside ghostly hands; wire clay cutters; and violent tools, such as a hammer and knife. No matter the object, each belongs to the same world. Here shapes are mutable and slightly wonky, obeying a logic specific to the painting. The ceramics have personality: They can be bird-like, like in "Droopy Vase," or phallic-like in the background of "Blue Hands." Mostly, the ceramic shapes are like the objects depicted in the painting's foreground, caught in the transition of creation. Perspectives shift in these quivering landscapes where shapes morph and repeat, but what you see is always believable, and always grounded.

“Pressing Matter” presents an elusive narrative. There is a disembodied hand pushing down, at a diagonal, held stationary and caught in the act of molding some material. Meanwhile, a single autonomous finger points forever upwards, encircled in pink bands. A knife is positioned near, and whatever action separated the hand and finger from their respective bodies is far in the past, bloodless now as the scene is set. Two eyes peer out from a sliver in a rock, fixed not on the scene but the viewer. Everything else feels frozen, including the rock encasing the eyes.

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Installation view of 'Ginny Casey: Ghost Maker' (click to enlarge)

We similarly find remnants of destruction in “Broken Vase.” Here, a hammer has smashed a vase to several bits. The hammer is enormous, curving around most of the table. The violent action has even bent the weapon’s handle. Each of the shattered pieces has a beauty and specificity to it, destroyed in order to create.

There is an outlier here: “Little Stack” features a hand as many of the other paintings do; however, here, it creates a rift which distorts the viewer’s understanding of the other pieces. Like a Kilroy that hasn’t fully climbed over the horizon and set in its usual pose, the hand makes what would be a horizon line suddenly sharp — the edge of a cliff. All the other paintings contained the objects within the same understood space and the horizon read as flat. With this break, that edge lends the rest of the series a mysterious tone.

Through these ghost makers, the paintings refer to their own origins. They are paintings that have been built up, rearranged, worked over, molded, and assembled, seemingly caught in motion — in transformation.

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Ginny Casey, "Broken Vase" (2015), oil on canvas

Ginny Casey: Ghost Maker continues at Gallery 106 Green (104 Green Street, Greenpoint, Brooklyn) through February 28.

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