

ARTFORUM

Jules de Balincourt

ZACH FEUER GALLERY (LFL)
530 West 24th Street
September 6–October 13



We Warned You About China, 2007, oil and enamel on panel, 80 x 70".

Many of the most challenging painters working today—Dana Schutz, Daniel Dove, Lisa Sanditz, and Tom McGrath, for example—are disparately engaged with one central (albeit multifaceted) question: What is at stake in negating intelligible mimetic imagery with passages of pure facture and, inversely, in undermining the autonomy of materials and process with overt images? And how can mining this dialectic through the act of painting help illuminate and analyze the human and material conditions of contemporary life? Where this ambition takes hold and directs Jules de Balincourt's practice, his work is at its strongest. The modestly scaled *Remembering Our Great Dead Heroes* (all works 2007), for example, is an atmospheric night sky alight with streams of thinly applied oil paint that snake wildly across the picture plane, recalling the elegant chaos of an extravagant fireworks display. The title of the work, inscribed neatly in block capital letters along the lower edge of the panel, recasts the viewer's understanding of the picture as more than pure abstraction, foregrounding instead the vast lacuna between the frivolity of fireworks—and indeed paint—and the fallen heroes such spectacles ostensibly commemorate. *Untitled*, on the other hand, reads less critically and more decoratively as an essay in heterogeneous painterly effects rendered adeptly but comparatively aimlessly. The map-based painting *We Warned You About China* is both the exhibition's sore thumb and its highlight. The least painterly and most graphically stark in the show, the panel flirts with the aesthetics of propaganda, only to sabotage this association with a garish, irrational patchwork of colors, punctuated by randomly placed exclamation marks that operate as mock gestures of alarm in a painting that is pointedly arresting.

—Christopher Bedford

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