



Devening Projects

T.J. LY-DONOVAN  
*Oily Foam*

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Devening Projects  
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The new paintings by T.J. Ly-Donovan hint at the long-practiced Japanese art of kintsugi as a philosophical and material influence. Kintsugi—with origins in 16th-century tea ceremonies—is the art of repairing broken pottery with lacquer dusted with gold, silver or platinum. It is similar to wabi-sabi, the Japanese tradition of embracing the flawed or imperfect. Deeply rooted in this ideology is the belief that beauty, wonder and the exquisite can emerge fully from the fragments of something irrevocably altered by an unfortunate accident. This wonderful sense of positivism grounds the work featured in *Oily Foam*, Ly-Donovan's first solo show with Devening Projects.

When considering the charged arrangement of shapes and surfaces in Ly-Donovan's paintings, it seems at one point there may have been uniformity, a more ordered containment. Then something happened. Something unsteadied the design; punctured the topography and sent it flying. The shards of displaced and shifted tectonic plates then landed to form new compositions a bit less steady, slightly more uncertain. Destabilized for only the briefest moment, the broken planes are soon cemented together with channels of luminously colored and viscous oil paint—like the gold mending seams seen in kintsugi vessels—carefully laid into the gaps with precision and care. The joinery created by these robust seams provides some reassurance that these bonds will confidently support the new composition. The fusing-back-together of all the bits and pieces is clear evidence of an artist with deft skills and the ability to assemble something stunningly new-from-old.

These are paintings that bring pleasure and joy from a sense of optimism that one only achieves when realizing that what has been repaired and loved is superior to a new replacement. The stuffed animal whose split seams are sewn back together; the neglected empty lot transformed into a community garden; the abandoned building renovated to reveal the beauty of its architecture and the skilled work of long-gone craftspeople. These gestures of hope express the desire to reuse rather than abandon. Evoked most profoundly in the work of this exceptional young artist is exactly that: the willingness to reveal the new wonder in what may have been lost in a previous incarnation.

Another wonderful aspect to the paintings of Ly-Donovan is rooted in his inventive material use. Humble craft foam and oil paint are rarely seen together in contemporary painting, but the combination is deeply connected to his life experience. Being a father of small children as well as a skilled painter, his exposure to materials used both by kids and professional artists are celebrated in the work with a high degree of intelligence and nuance.

The balance created by how the work is both utterly complete and simultaneously barely stitched together reflects both the human condition and our culture at large. Tenuous and wondrous; we somehow achieve both.

(Born 1979) Through the use of oil paint and craft foam, T.J. Ly-Donovan's paintings are coalescent clashes between high and low art-making materials. Fusing the exalted with the lowly, Ly-Donovan's paintings playfully traverse the indefinite spectra between painting and sculpture, window and object, minimal and maximal, systems painting and casualism, the romantically expressive and the incidental. Prior to an eight-year hiatus from painting, Ly-Donovan's work was shown throughout the United States and abroad, including group exhibitions at the University of Texas at Dallas; University of Wisconsin-Madison; Julius Caesar Gallery, Chicago; Good Children Gallery, New Orleans; Biennale Internationale d'Art Non Objectif, France; and 6B Gallery, Belgium. He has had solo exhibitions at universities throughout the Dakotas. *Oily Foam* is Ly-Donovan's first solo exhibition in Chicago, and first time exhibiting work since his return to painting.



Oily Foam 13, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 9.5 x 5.5 x 1.5 inches



Oily Foam 15, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 12 x 9 x 1.25 inches



Oily Foam 1, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 13.5 x 10.5 x 1 inches



Oily Foam 5, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel 13.5 x 9.5 x 1.5 inches



Oily Foam 17, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 8 x 6.5 x 1 inches



Oily Foam 12, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 10 x 7 x 1.25 inches





Oily Foam 2, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 9 x 7.5 x 1 inches



Oily Foam 7, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 9 x 9.5 x 1.5 inches



Oily Foam 4, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 10 x 8 x 1.25 inches



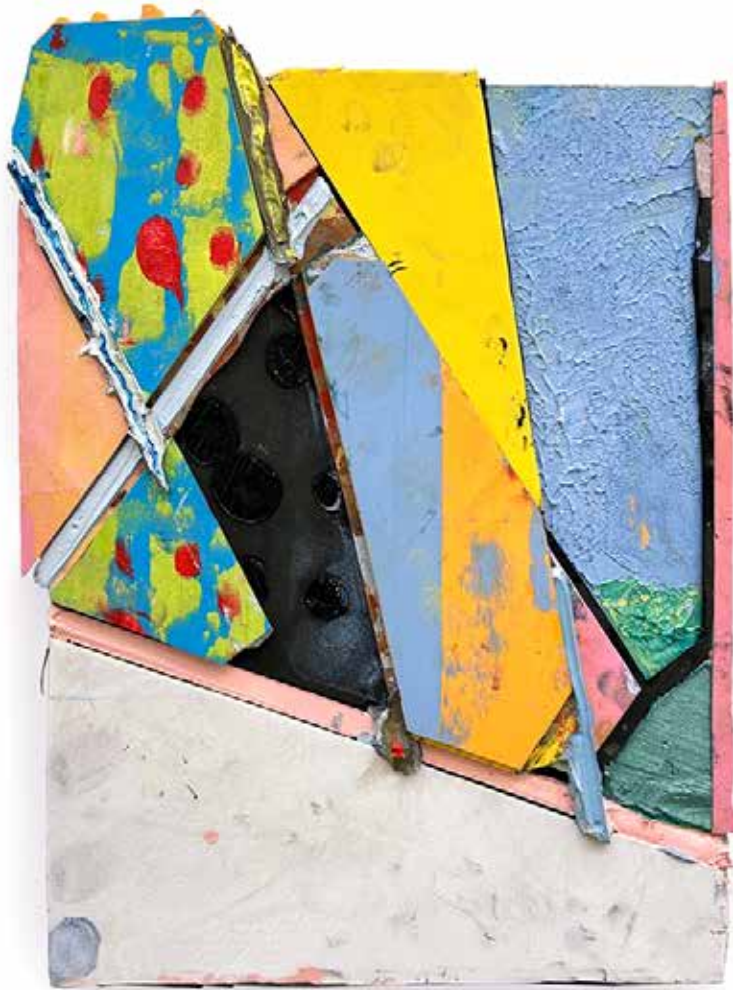
Oily Foam 25, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 10 x 10 x 1.5 inches



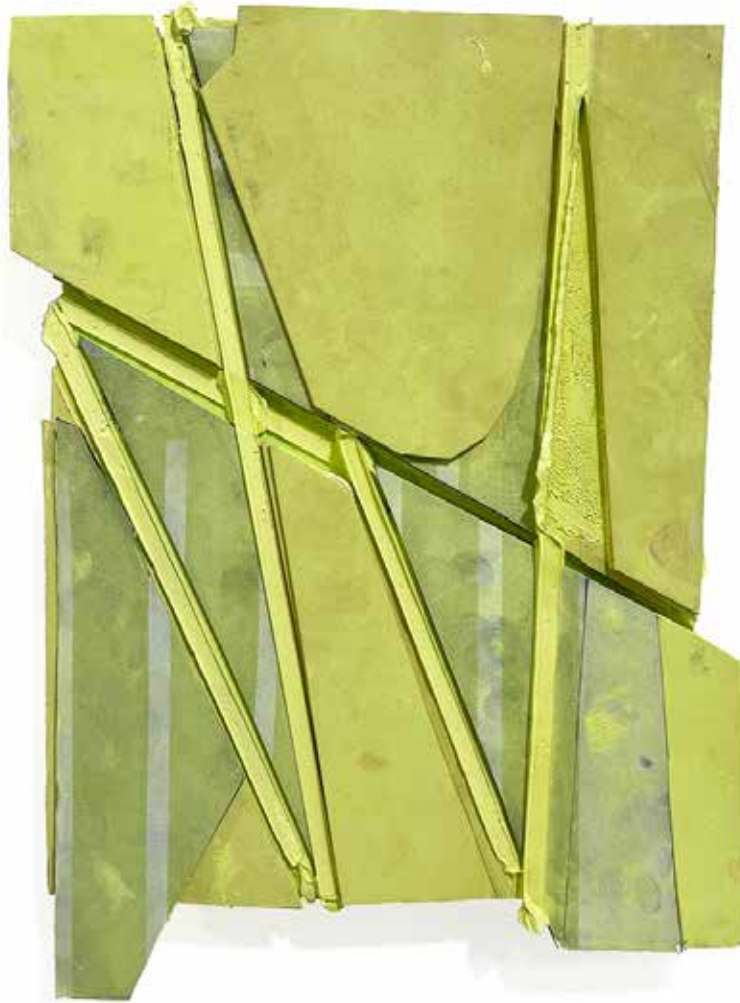
Oily Foam 7, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 11 x 11 x 2 inches



Oily Foam 11, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 10 x 8 x 1.5 inches



Oily Foam 14, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 11 x 8.5 x 1.25 inches

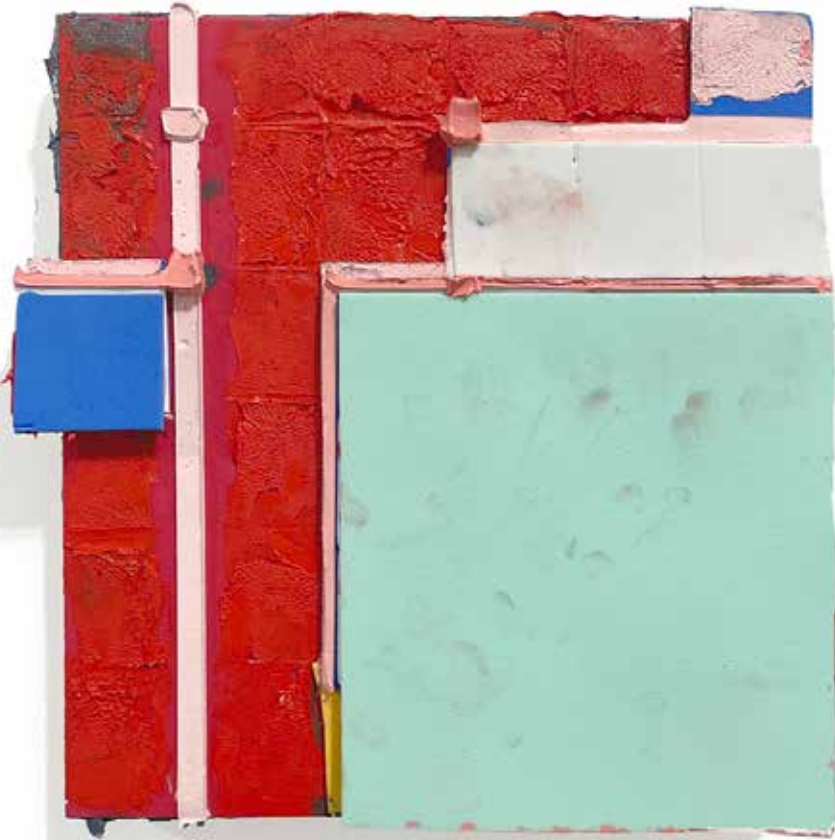


Oily Foam 3, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 11.5 x 8.5 x 1.5 inches





Oily Foam 10, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 10 x 8 x 1.5 inches



Oily Foam 9, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 8 x 9 x 1.5 inches



Oily Foam 22, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 8.5 x 8.5 x 1.5 inches



Oily Foam 18, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 10 x 8 x 1 inches



Oily Foam 29, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 11 x 8.5 x 1.25 inches



Oily Foam 9, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 8 x 9 x 1.5 inches



Oily Foam 22, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 8.5 x 8.5 x 1.5 inches

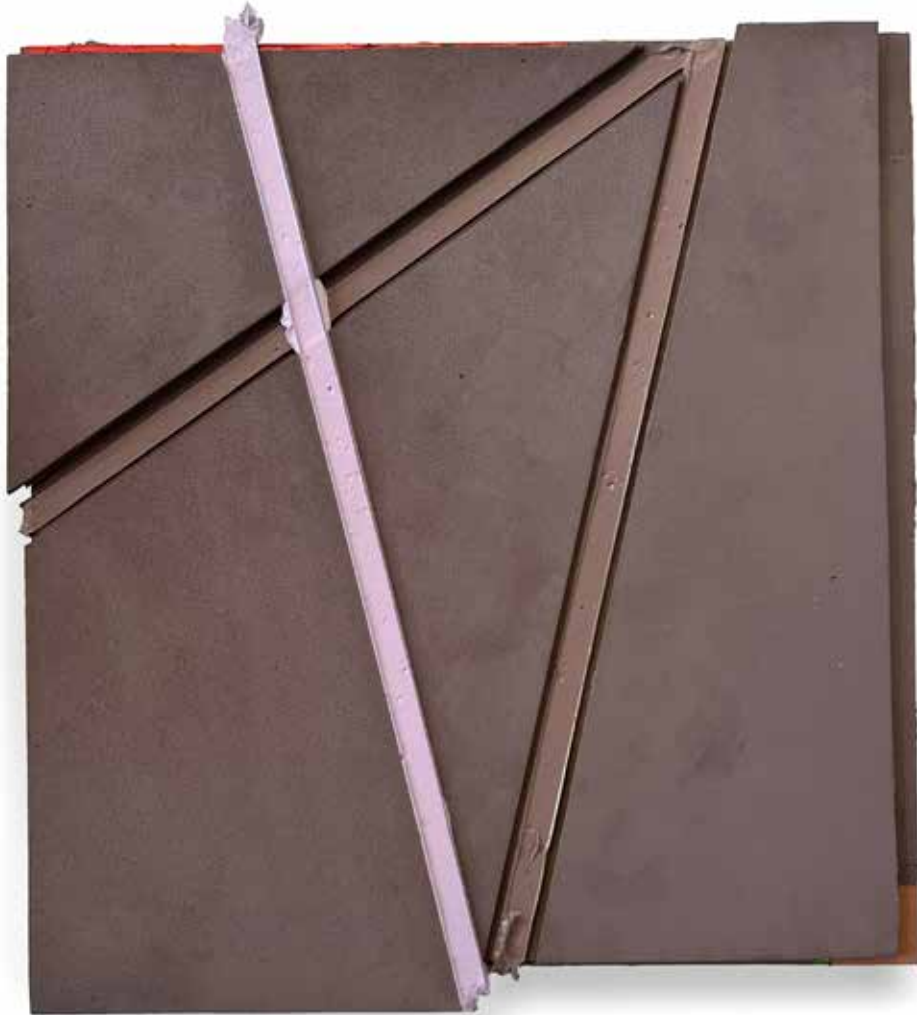


Oily Foam 20, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 8.5 x 5.5 x 1 inches





Oily Foam 8, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 8.5 x 8.5 x 1.5 inches



Oily Foam 27, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 11 x 11.25 x 1.25 inches



Oily Foam 26, 2023, oil and craft foam on panel, 8.5 x 8.5 x 1.5 inches







