

LOS ANGELES



Keith Broadwee

ACE GALLERY

In Keith Broadwee's most recent series, the body is the locus for an investigation into the history of abstract painting. This work continues a project that stems from the beginning of his career when he used himself as a canvas for quasi-Expressionist paintings, taking Yves Klein's technique for painting the female nude one step further—and closer. Increasingly, his paintings have isolated individual body parts, particularly the penis and the anus. While in Broadwee's work the penis has always remained flaccid and uneroticized, the asshole is elaborately decorated, a site of pleasure. Two earlier bodies of work foreshadow the present series. Broadwee's asshole targets—large-format photographs in which the artist painted his own and other anuses and then photographed them in extreme close-up—duplicate the painterliness of Jasper Johns' work in the texture of butt hairs and dimpled skin, but also take the interpretation of Johns' targets as orifices to their most ridiculous extreme. Similarly, in his monochrome assholes Broadwee puts his own spin on the desire of Color Field and Minimalist painters to evacuate the surface of meaning by literally evoking evacuation at their core.

The fifty paintings, four photographs, and two videos that comprise the present installation signal a significant shift in Broadwee's oeuvre from a concentration on specific body parts to a manipulation of corporeal processes in the work's production. The two videos and four photographs document his current working method. One of the videos gives a step-by-step depiction of the making of the paintings. It begins with Broadwee inserting an enema into his asshole and squeezing paint into his anus. He then lies on his back, squirting paint onto a horizontal canvas, or squats on a board to drizzle pigment onto the surface below. The other video acknowledges his work's debt to Jackson Pollock's drip paintings by recreating the famous scene in Hans Namuth's film when Pollock paints on glass. Broadwee seems to be alluding to the contention by a number of critics in the early '50s that Pollock made the drip paintings by ingesting paint and then peeing on the canvas, a notion Andy Warhol took to its logical extreme a generation later in his "piss paintings."

While the unbridled virility at the center of Abstract Expressionism is probably better connected with the process of ejaculation than urination, the focus of heroic abstract painting has always been on the phallus, and usually associated with an aggressive heterosexuality. Broadwee turns this around, locating the site of creativity in an expulsive anus, in a kind of masculinity that valorizes being the bottom. The result of this novel technique is a group of paintings that mimic a number of the signature styles of the '50s and '60s. Sitting atop a vertical canvas, Broadwee made several works that resemble Morris Louis' pours, with ribbons of vibrant aqua, yellow, and orangey-red cascading down the surface. Others evoke the biomorphic shapes typical of Adolph Gottlieb's canvases, while the texture of his blue, red, and green monochromes suggests a Kleinian surface. One coolly white piece could be an early Robert Rauschenberg. The impression that these paintings are meant to function as more than an act of homage is underscored by two large canvases that use Robert Motherwell's reds and blacks, always the fundamental colors of political art. Broadwee has added his own brown, insinuating both abjection and continuing the valorization of the bottom as an assertion of a specific gay identity. These paintings certainly epitomize one aspect of the Freudian anal phase, its expulsive and aggressive tendencies, but they lack the flip side—retention and control. Broadwee could take a lesson from the canonical Modernists he references: a little editing and care in selection would go a long way here. There is something to be said, however, for work that leads a viewer giving into the surreptitious pleasure of touching the surface of a painting in an empty gallery to suddenly hold his hand at arm's length.

—*Andrew Perchuk*

