

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

ARTFORUM

GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT

Dan Colen

BRANT FOUNDATION ART STUDY CENTER

The basics of the Dan Colen story are well known. He emerged as part of a latter-day Rat Pack of hard-partying, skateboarding, incomprehensibly successful New York bad boys (and one girl) who seemed more interested in following the dissolute lifestyle of a Keith Moon or a Darby Crash than in joining the professionalized ranks of earnest MFAs on their long march through the institutions. But the 2009 death by overdose of the scene's central figure, Dash Snow, appears to have marked a turning point; today, in any case, Colen lives quietly in upstate New York. As for me, I might not have been sufficiently curious to make the trip to Connecticut horse country to see Colen's ten-year survey "Help!" if it hadn't been for the fact that so many people still seem so bent out of shape by the idea that he's made paintings out of bird shit; lifestyle be damned, if an artist can still shake people up through his use of materials, then there just might be something interesting in it.

Actually, I didn't find much bird shit on view in "Help!," much as it would have suited the exurban ambience. (In fact, Colen has never used this material in his work.) What I did find was an oeuvre that is more thoughtful and more varied than I was expecting, at times seeming—far from insouciantly rebellious—almost academic in its respect for precedent. A series of blown-glass whoopee cushions could almost be early Koons. Paintings taking off from Disney stills are caught in the wake of Kilimnik, Peyton, et al. *At Least They Died Together (After Dash)*, 2014—an outdoor installation of two trucks partially



Dan Colen, *TBT*, 2014, flowers on bleached Belgian linen, 47 × 37".

oil or acrylic but with crushed flowers. Others, less delicate and with more forceful gestures, are made with chewing gum. The materials may be unconventional but the results hold up formally; Colen is an adept student of styles forged two generations back and the effect is hardly ironic. His skills as a representational painter are considerable, too. At times he indulges in trompe l'oeil effects, most spectacularly in *Secrets and Cymbals, Smoke and Scissors (My Friend Dash's Wall in the Future)*, 2004–2006, a full-scale representation of a studio wall thick with pinned-up clippings and other memoranda. A kind of indirect portrait of its subject, it is also an object lesson in the facticity of memory. The bombastic density of this piece is in striking contrast with the airy insubstantiality of so many others on view here; it is an accumulation of many words and images. And maybe for now the best way to see Colen's work as a whole is in a similar manner. "Help!" suggested that his oeuvre is more than the sum of its parts—and there are many parts I haven't even mentioned, from massive sculptures in the form of boulders to delicate drawings and goofy manipulated thrift-shop paintings—though the insight that would bring out their inner coherence remains elusive.

—Barry Schwabsky

buried upright, their boxy rear halves sticking out of the ground—is obviously one in a long line of efforts to cite Minimalist structures using readymade objects. Its duple format and mournful tenor might recall Felix Gonzalez-Torres—his 1987 pair of clocks, *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)*, for instance. Gonzalez-Torres is also the inevitable reference point for *Love Roses*, 2014, a collaboration with Nate Lowman. This is a vast walk-through curtain made of thousands of glass crack pipes with little artificial flowers inside them—apparently, these are sold in convenience stores in the guise of romantic offerings, a deception not meant to fool anyone: Users merely toss the colorful contents away.

The prettiest of Colen's paintings are lyrical abstractions whose stained-in hues were not made with