

# Convergence:

Jason Karolak and Antoine Lefebvre

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March 6 - April 3, 2014

Essay by Thomas Micchelli

Curated by Matthew Neil Gehring

**Flecker Gallery**

Suffolk County Community College

Ammerman Campus, Selden, NY

## Director's Foreword and Curatorial Statement:

I first met Jason Karolak through an artist friend in 2009. As it turned out, we lived in the same neighborhood and our mutual friend, Arjan Zazueta, brought Jason over to my live/work apartment for a studio visit. After some engaging conversation, we headed about 8 blocks down Manhattan Avenue to visit Jason's studio. I was overwhelmed and caught off guard; I had been admiring Jason's work on-line for some time and hadn't made the connection. So here I was, seeing things I had only seen web versions of, but Jason's paintings have an undeniable presence; a jpeg is no match for the power and velocity of color delivered through pigment saturated in oil and the sensation of space that only scale can provide.

I first met Antoine Lefebvre in 2011 while he was a resident artist at Sculpture Space, an international artist residency in Utica, NY. As it turned out, Antoine also lived in my Brooklyn neighborhood and kept a studio not far away. We have run into each other at the pier, on the ferry, at the market, the subway, and bus stop. After bumping into each other a few times, I visited Antoine's studio in Bushwick. There I saw the work I was so enamored of from his Sculpture Space residency, as well as newer projects. Antoine works in a diverse range of media; fabricated mixed media sculpture, photographs, digital animation, and video. Throughout his work, however, is a focus on geography and our physical relationship to it.

Over time, I started to see a unique shared language between the works of these two artists. While Antoine is engaged in multi-media works that explore the body, identity, and geographical space, Jason is plumbing the depths of painting's ability to relate the corporeal body and mind to pictorial space; the space of the psyche and of human emotions. Both artists arrive at their separate but related concerns through linear and planar means. Expanding and compressing space through linear works like *Frames*, Antoine invites us to explore the infinite, by physically interacting with an object that in fact has an infinite number of possible positions. Jason's large paintings are built on a Cartesian geometry that moves toward the organic and the intuitive as they develop, opening and closing as if they are breathing. The scale of these paintings has everything to do with the body – the sweep and length of an arm, habitable enclosures; they are human-scaled structures that point toward architecture as well as nature. Antoine's work, *Grip Track*, is an angular Mobius strip; inside and outside are one and the same, planar space is twisted towards the infinite. Jason's small paintings similarly fold, twist, and expand planar space, continually flipping themselves around in an eternal reversal of the perceptual space of the painting. Jason's drawings and Antoine's photographs also share a similar use of the linear and both artists' works suggest 3D computer modeling software, the symbols found in the digital realm, and loose references to 1980's video game aesthetics.

With all of this similarity, and much of it abstract, curating this show seems now to have been inevitable. These two artists, coming from different origins both geographically and artistically, who did not know each other, have developed a shared language across diverse media and have arrived at a place of shared aesthetics and philosophy. These are dynamic works by two exciting and ambitious artists, each with a clear and focused vision. I am delighted to know and work with both Jason Karolak and Antoine Lefebvre and to add this exhibition and catalogue to the program at the Flecker Gallery.

-Matthew Neil Gehring, Director

## Convergences: Jason Karolak / Antoine Lefebvre

by Thomas Micchelli

“But, after all, the aim of art is to create space – space that is not compromised by decoration or illustration, space in which the subjects of painting can live.”

– Frank Stella, *Working Space* (1986)

One evening in January, Jason Karolak glanced at a large new painting propped against the storage racks lining the rear wall of his studio and started talking about Frank Stella's take on Caravaggio.

A week earlier in another studio, Antoine Lefebvre, his hands darting like birds, stood between two of his sculptures, explaining the importance of entering a mental space outside the physical dimensions of height, width and depth in order to examine our relationship to the places we occupy.

Karolak's images begin with a gesture, the quick stroke of an ink-dipped brush across a sheet of paper, forming line after line until a shape coheres, evoking a maze, a scaffold or an especially unstable piece of blobitecture.

Lefebvre's sculptures begin with a hypothesis translated into a 3-D modeling program, where he intuitively works out the specifics of the piece. He then begins the laborious process of fabricating it by hand out of aluminum bars or sheets of wood.

It takes a few weeks for Karolak to prepare a large canvas: first he trowels on six layers of oil primer, upon which he paints a preliminary ground of cadmium red, followed by a secondary ground of ivory black. Only then does he make his first mark. This working method creates an inversion of the drawing surface — black instead of white, though a black enlivened by a hidden but very hot red.

On the empty, black expanse he paints a linear, three-dimensional geometric shape in a single color, usually a stack of cubes. The absence of coloristic or tonal variations among its lines allows the shape to project either to the left or the right. Using an ink drawing as a rough guide, Karolak overlays the shape with a similar but considerably expanded geometric form in a different color, and then another and another. If a color or form doesn't mesh, it is scraped and wiped off, sometimes leaving embers of the cadmium red ground smoldering through the scratched surface. As the image grows and mutates, the initial layers sink beneath the picture plane and the latest drift upward until they seem to loom precariously in front of it.

The sculptures Lefebvre creates are as much about the light and movement surrounding them as they are about the objects themselves. In his floor piece, “Frames” (2011), a large aluminum chassis houses two smaller structures, one inside the other, that float in an infinity of permutations on skateboard wheels,

operational by the viewer, who, by accepting the artist's gambit and manipulating the sculpture, becomes a co-author of the work's physical configuration. This extra-dimensional ambiguity, encompassing both movement and time, is heightened by the red, green and blue spotlights that wash the aluminum surfaces with color, obviating the permanence of pigments and changing as the viewer moves from one vantage point to another.

Conversely, "GripTrack" (2011), made from fiberboard, brass hinges and grip tape — the abrasive surfacing used on skateboards — absorbs light into its matte black veneer and implies movement through its twinned allusions to a Möbius strip and a skateboard deck. Here the viewer, unlike the one controlling the limitless reconfigurations of "Frames," feels stuck in place. Lefebvre has opposed the Möbius strip's endlessly circling loop with a material designed to clamp the foot to the floor. It's a contradiction resulting in an uncomfortable, even burdensome pressure — the kind that falls between unbidden desire and uneasy action.

In *Working Space*, Frank Stella writes about Caravaggio's "ovoid delimitation of space" that begins deep in the image's interior and projects off the picture plane to push beyond "the theatrical flatness of Venetian muralism." In modernist terms, he sees Caravaggio's activation of pictorial space as an antidote to "the recent enervation of painterliness" in which "pigment, light and surface have disappeared into Mondrian's black grid."

Stella worked hard, perhaps too hard, to explode that grid. His hybrid painting/sculptures can feel overdetermined and overworked. Now that more than a quarter-century has passed since the writing of *Working Space*, it is possible for younger artists like Karolak and Lefebvre to respond to questions of pictorial and physical space with unselfconscious freedom complemented by a lightness of touch, undercutting the stifling conventions of High Modernism with the visual languages of the streets.

In his two large paintings, "Untitled (P-1109)" (2011) and "Untitled (P-1207)" (2012), selected from an ongoing series of vividly colored abstractions on a black field, which the artist thinks of as "drawings in paint," Karolak combines a funk-expressive rendering of the formalist grid with the eye-grabbing acid color of billboards and comic books. Each of the paintings contain what he calls a "stem" — the remnant of the initial stacked-cube form, still visible below the built-up layers ballooning across the surface of the canvas — an inch or two above the bottom edge. In the earlier painting, a plume of scraped and smeared coppery-green paint half-obscures the violet, blue, bright green and yellow grids beneath it while buoying up the violet-blue shape on top. The 2012 work is more open-form and linearly complex, even sculptural in its cage-like networks-within-networks and the green-to-yellow transition in the color of the topmost layer, tipping its frame outward from the picture plane and toward the viewer, as if from shadow into light.

His markedly differentiated smaller works — the convex/concave "Untitled (P-1315)," the Pop-Mondrian "Untitled (P-1316)," the zigzagging "Untitled (P-1312)" and the chevron-crowned "Untitled (P-1313)" (all 2013) — start off as a multicolored, rigorously sequenced grid. Once the first coat has dried, Karolak riffs on the pattern, layer upon layer, until anomalous shapes and movements emerge. Unlike the large paintings, which rush from deep space toward the viewer, the color in these works flip back and forth in a perceptual game in which the parts that pop up or slip behind are determined solely by the individual eye.

A black plastic garbage bin, a right-angled, freestanding, powder-coated aluminum framework and gallons of water are the components of Lefebvre's "*Une Souris Verte*" ("A Green Mouse") (2012), which takes its name from a French children's song. The mouse, caught by the tail, is dipped in water, then in oil, and turns

into a snail. The yellow metal frame, cantilevered over the water-filled trash bin, enacts the mouse's dousing with a U-shaped section descending into the liquid and then up again. The sense of place in "*Une Souris Verte*" is doubly collapsed: the yellow geometric framework against the very real, very black garbage can, appears to compress the space from three dimensions into two, while the viewer, in order to comprehend the piece, must move right up to it and peer down into the bin's open rim, an inversion of the conventional practice of backing away from a sculpture to obtain a fuller understanding of it. The formal structure of the piece is obvious from the start; the only way to know it, and thus complete it, is to incorporate it into one's personal space.

Two and three dimensions are ultimately united in Lefebvre's large-format digital photographic prints mounted on aluminum, "Non Linear Deformers" (2012). The objects depicted in the photos — rudely cobbled-together geometric constructions hanging on visible wires — are made from cheap materials purchased at hardware stores. A physical interaction with the assemblages can occur only in the viewer's imagination, opening up an avenue of mental space through the shutting down of actual space. The arcs, lines, sine waves and circles making up the hanging configurations allude to the 3-D modeling tools that Lefebvre uses to flesh out his ideas, recapitulating the instrument that will generate the next cycle of works.

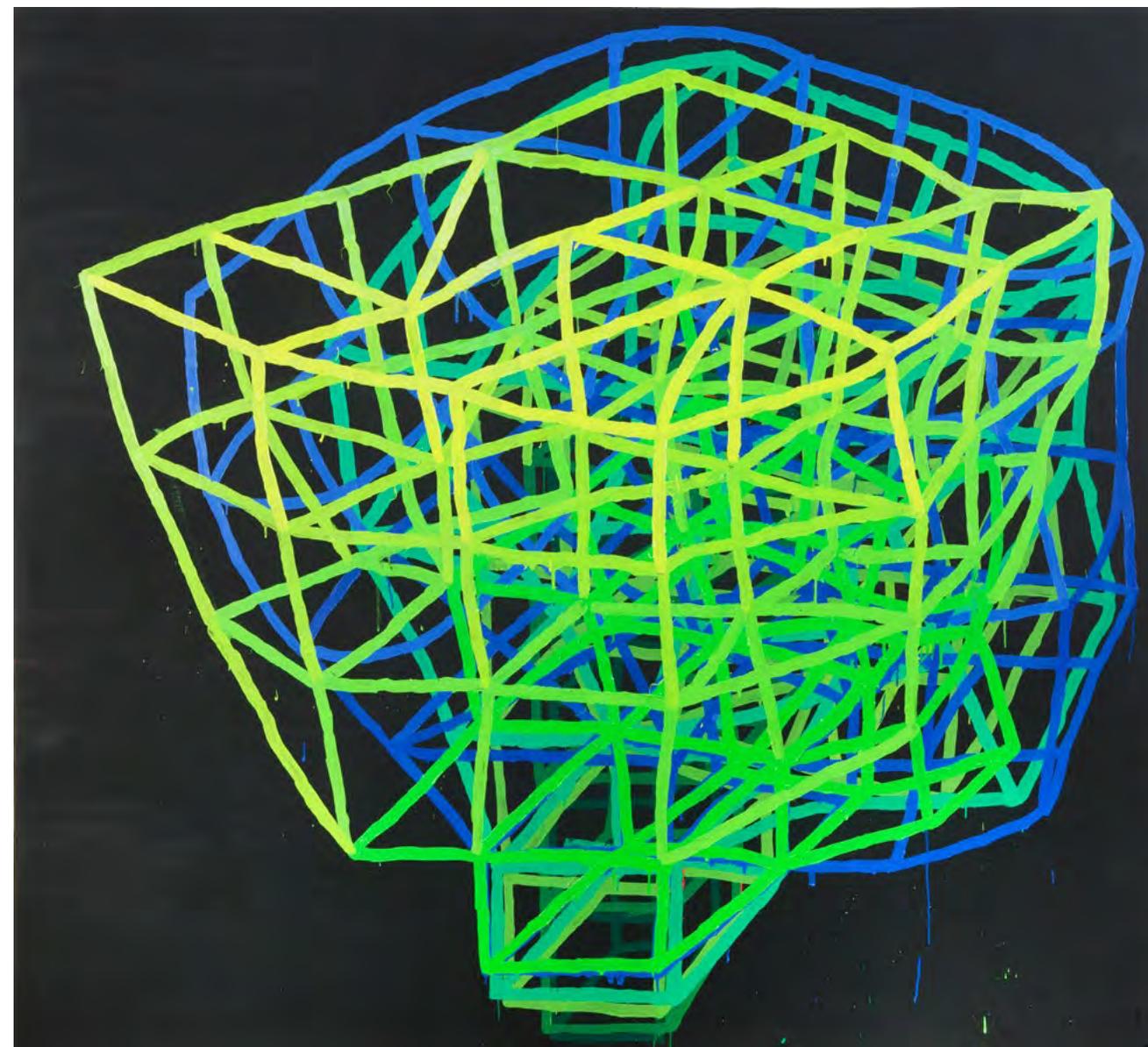
It's not surprising that Lefebvre has a bachelor's degree in geography, studying humankind's physical and social spaces, or that he has directed films — where one could describe the *mise en scène* as another form of mental space — and worked as a location scout, pinpointing places ideal for translation into two dimensions. In fact, the moving parts for "Frames" are based on the riggings and tracks he has built for traveling shots.

It is also not surprising that Karolak looks for kindred spirits among such early 20th-century painters as Stuart Davis, Marsden Hartley and Morgan Russell, who were working at a time when abstraction was an open proposition, when conflicting ideas about color, shape, volume and space were jostling against one another and the codification of materiality and flatness were decades in the future. His fluid sense of pictorial space takes a distant view of the reductive impulse, setting the formal strictures embodied in Stella's late-1950s "pinstripe" paintings into a context of continually expanding and contracting aesthetic possibilities.

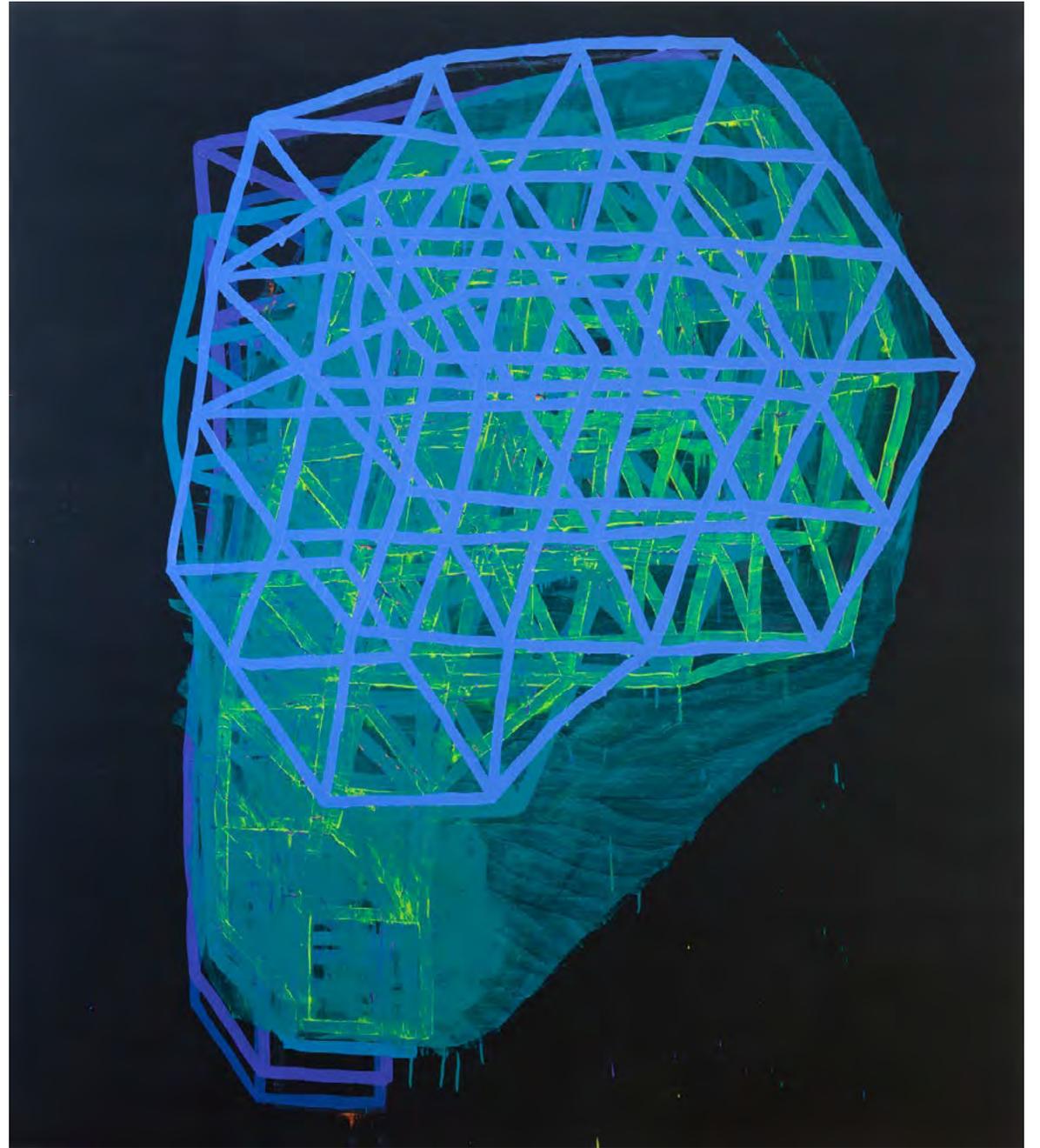
Curator Matthew Neil Gehring's intuitive pairing of Karolak and Lefebvre's divergent practices — idea as paint and structure as idea — underscores the conceptual strength and physicality of each. Lefebvre's sculptures and Karolak's paintings accentuate one another's singularities as they knock apart high-definition ideas with equal measures of openness, rigor, tactility and humor. Setting out from distinct, even alien domains, they glide toward a point of convergence on a current of open-ended inventiveness and self-imposed discipline, picking up what they need from the past as they seize the immediacy of the present. If, as Frank Stella wrote a generation ago, an expansive idea of space is the corrective to a modernist paradigm that, by 1970, "had turned to ashes," the art of Karolak and Lefebvre expands upon that expansiveness, taking formal freedoms for granted while ensnaring the viewer in a heady, mercurial terrain as solid and indeterminate as the one where we live.

Thomas Micchelli is a New York based artist, writer, and co-editor of Hyperallergic Weekend.

Jason Karolak, *Untitled (P-1207)*, 2012, oil on canvas, 79 x 90 inches

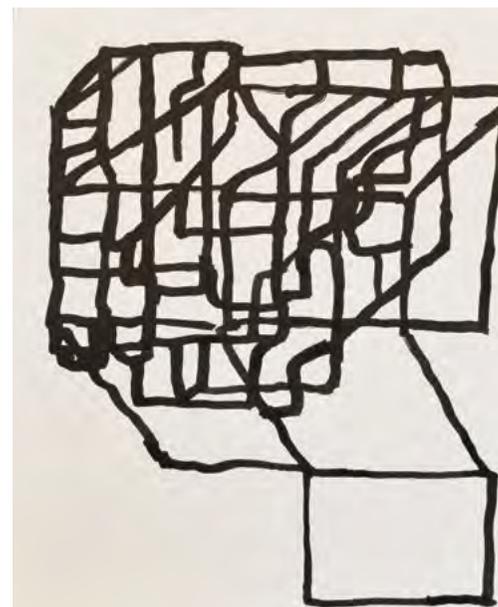
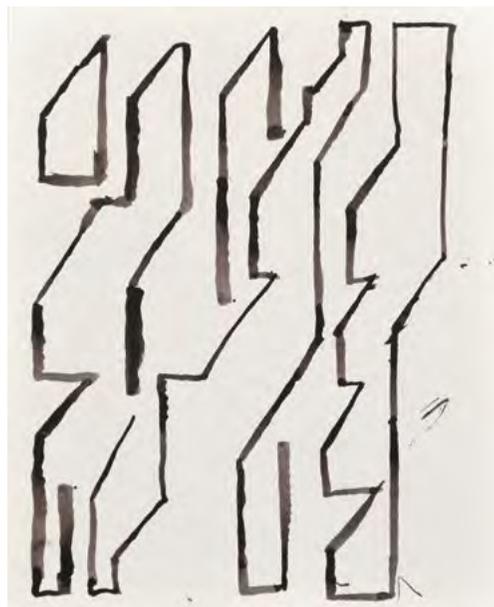
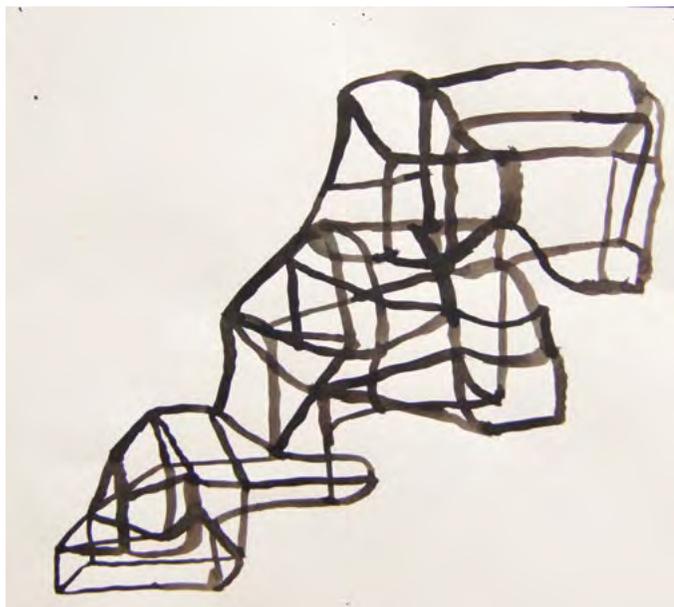


Jason Karolak, *Untitled (P-1109)*, 2011, oil on canvas, 86 x 75 inches





Jason Karolak  
left to right:  
*Untitled (P-1315)*, 2013, oil on canvas, 17 x 14 inches  
*Untitled (P-1316)*, 2013, oil on canvas, 15 x 13 inches  
*Untitled (P-1312)*, 2013, oil on linen, 16 x 14 inches  
*Untitled (P-1313)*, 2013, oil on panel, 15 x 13 inches



Jason Karolak

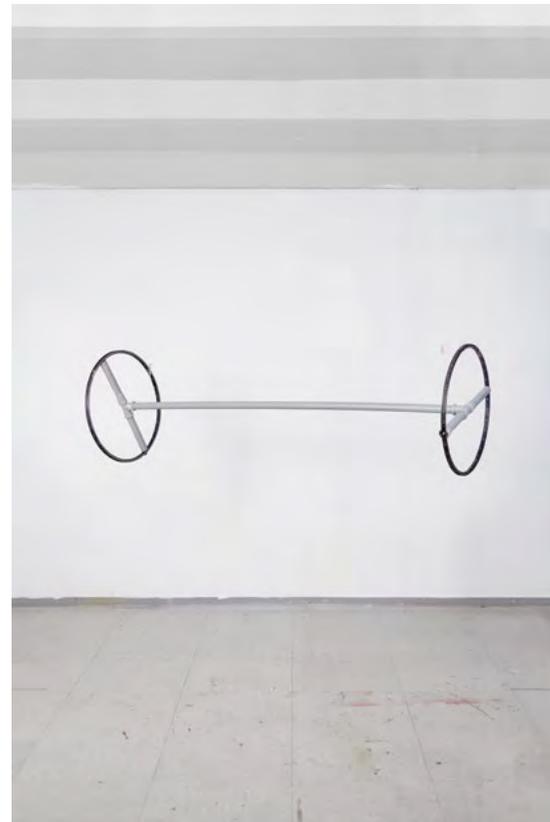
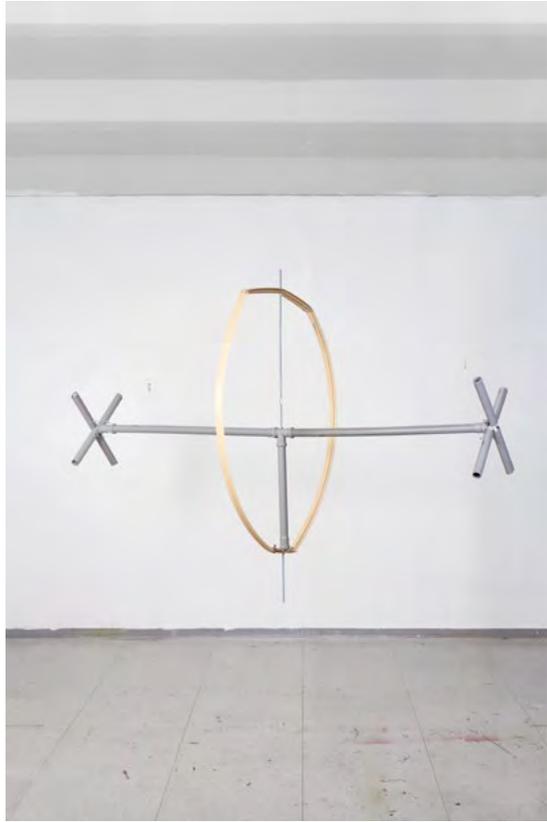
left to right:

*Untitled (D-1265)*, 2012, ink on paper, 11 x 13 inches

*Untitled (D-13165)*, 2013, ink on paper, 13 x 11 inches

*Untitled (D-1336)*, 2013, ink on paper, 11 x 9 inches

*Untitled (D-13172)*, 2013, ink on paper, 11 x 9 inches



Antoine Lefebvre, *Non Linear Deformers*, 2012, digital prints mounted on aluminum, 60 x 43 inches each

Antoine Lefebvre, *Frames*, 2011, aluminum, skateboard wheels, red green and blue spotlights, 72 x 72 x 28 inches



Antoine Lefebvre, *Grip Track*, 2011, MDF, grip tape, hinges, hardware, 84 x 84 x 24 inches



Antoine Lefebvre, *Une Souris Verte*, 2012, Powder coated aluminium, trash bin, water, 48 x 36 x 36 inches



## Jason Karolak

### Education

- 2006 MFA, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
- 1997 BFA, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY

### Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2014 Out of Line, Robischon Gallery, Denver, CO  
Jason Karolak, Harper College, Palatine, IL
- 2013 Jason Karolak, McKenzie Fine Art, New York, NY
- 2012 Night Strainer, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA
- 2011 Jason Karolak, Dolphin Gallery, Kansas City, MO
- 2008 Rivers of the Same Mountain, Massimo Audiello, New York, NY
- 2007 New Paintings and Drawings, Rowland Contemporary, Chicago, IL

### Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2013 Meta Vista, 16 Wilson, Brooklyn, NY  
Reticulate, McKenzie Fine Art, New York, NY  
Future Folk, Brooklyn Fireproof, Brooklyn, NY  
Drawings, Trailer Park Projects, San Juan, PR  
Angular Seduction, TSA, Brooklyn, NY
- 2012 Jason Karolak and Leah Patgorski: Recent Works, Gahlberg Gallery,  
College of Dupage, Chicago, IL
- 2009 Big Youth, Corbett vs Dempsey Gallery, Chicago IL  
Variations on a Theme, Kavi Gupta, Chicago, IL  
Group Exhibition, Lemberg Gallery, Ferndale, MI
- 2008 Paper Love, Devening Projects, Chicago, IL
- 2007 Group Exhibition, curated by Mary Beyer, Thomas McCormick Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 2006 Moreover: Practicing Representation + Abstraction, curated by Michelle Grabner, Beverly Arts Center, Chicago, IL  
Slowness, Heaven Gallery, Chicago, IL

### Selected Bibliography

- James Panero. "Gallery Chronicle," The New Criterion, November 2013
- Thomas Micchelli. "Spinning a Web: When Art Addresses the Infinite," Hyperallergic, July 13, 2013
- Joanne Mattera, "Jason Karolak at McKenzie Fine Art," Joanne Mattera Art Blog, March 8, 2013
- Sharon Butler, "Painting of the Day: Jason Karolak," Two Coats of Paint, February 25, 2013
- Caleb DeJong, "Jason Karolak at McKenzie Fine Art," Thoughts That Cure Radically, February 10, 2013
- Jason Foumberg. "The Phenomenological Unconscious," catalogue essay for Jason Karolak and Leah Patgorski: Recent Works, May 2012
- Valerie Brennan. "Interview: Jason Karolak," Studio Critical, July 16, 2011
- Dana Self. "'Discourse Matters' at the Dolphin Gallery is Magnetic, Immersive," Kansas City Star, July 13, 2011
- Stephen Mueller. "Jason Karolak at Massimo Audiello," Art in America, January 2009
- Roberta Smith. "Chelsea: Art Chockablock with Encyclopedic Range," The New York Times, November 14, 2008
- Michelle Grabner. "Mother Tongue," catalogue essay for Jason Karolak: New Paintings and Drawings, November 2007
- Alan Artner. "Exhibition Review," Chicago Tribune, April 6, 2007
- Terry Myers. "Time Is On Our Side," catalogue essay for Slowness, June 2006



## Antoine Lefebvre

### Education

- 2009 MFA in Fine Arts, Parsons the New School for Design, New York, NY
- 2003 Degree of Postgraduate Study in Motion Pictures and Audiovisual Techniques, specialization in Arts & electronic media, ESEC (Ecole Supérieure D'Etudes Cinématographiques), Paris, France
- 2001 Bachelor's Degree in Geography, specialization in City Planning, University Toulouse-le-Mirail, France

### Selected Exhibitions

- 2013 Urban Interactions, Hillyer Art Space, Washington, D.C.  
There Are No Accents On My Qwerty Keyboard, Nurture Art, Brooklyn, NY (solo show)  
P2V, Antoine Lefebvre and P. Scott Cunningham, Dimensions Variable, Miami, FL  
SPRING/BREAK Art Show, New York, NY
- 2012 Basecamp, Nr. z. P Gallery, Bielefeld, Germany (solo show)
- 2011 Sculpture Space, Utica, NY
- 2010 Design Thinking Is Design Doing, Eyelevel BQE, Brooklyn, NY  
Artists For Haiti, Envoy Gallery, New York, NY
- 2009 MFA Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition curated by Anthony Allen, The Kitchen, New York, NY  
Green Light Go, Gallery 151, New York, NY  
Art Lot (public art space), Brooklyn, NY  
Pulse Art Fair, Parsons Student Booth, curated by Eva Diaz, New York, NY
- 2008 High Five, Parsons Fine Art Gallery, New York, NY

### Awards and Residencies

- 2014 Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha, NE
- 2013 The Fountainhead Residency, Miami, FL
- 2012 Fellowship Award Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, VT  
Artists Unlimited Residency, Bielefeld, Germany
- 2011 Sculpture Space Residency, Utica, NY
- 2008 Joan Mitchell Grant Nominee  
Gross Sculpture Scholarship

### Selected Bibliography

- Jesus Manuel Rojas Torres. "Physical to Virtual: P. Scott Cunningham and Antoine Lefebvre at Dimensions Variable," WUM Journal for the Arts, April 10, 2013
- Jordan Tate. "Antoine LeFebvre," I Like This Art, August 5, 2012
- David Andrew Frey and Tema Stauffer. "New Artist Feature," Culturehall, summer 2011
- Cory Imig. "Antoine LeFebvre," Plug Projects, October 3, 2011



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[www.sunysuffolk.edu](http://www.sunysuffolk.edu)

[www.fleckergallery.org](http://www.fleckergallery.org)

Gallery Director and Curator: Matthew Neil Gehring

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Images for Jason Karolak: courtesy of the artist and McKenzie Fine Art

Photography: Bill Orcutt, Ryan Karolak

Images for Antoine Lefebvre: courtesy of the artist

Photography: *Non Linear Deformers* by Heinrich Holtgreve; *Une Souris Verte* by Jerome d'Almeida;

*Frames* and *Grip Track* by Zachary Skinner

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