**Artists Working Now: Laura Owens**

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Lecture for Art Seminar by Paula Burleigh

Laura Owens (b. 1970, Euclid, OH) was critical to the reemergence of painting in the 21st century art world, and her work continues to challenge the core facets of the medium’s identity. For example, while we might typically think of paintings as autonomous objects, Owens has developed a practice in which paintings both implicate and respond to their sites of production and display. Looking at the development of her work since graduating from CalArts in 1994, we will see how she considers received conventions of taste through engaging with themes of kitsch, cuteness, craft, sincerity, and irony. Owens’ work also opens onto questions of how whether the medium can and should expand in response to new technologies, one of the most pervasive questions for artists working today.

**Key Themes:**

* Hierarchies of taste
* Painting in earnest
* Painting as installation, the space of painting

**Excerpts, Laura Owens on Laura Owens:**

“I guess it is important for me to think: ‘What am I leaving out? What do I think cannot be in a painting?’ and then challenging myself to try to work it in.”

Interview with Laura Owens by Benjamin Weissman, *Cakewalk* 5, Winter 2003.

“So anyway with the idea of edges … I also wanted to play around with the edges of the gallery. Where the work is in the gallery, thinking about the different spaces. Waking up some spaces, putting other spaces to sleep.”

Press release by Laura Owens for her exhibition at Gavin Brown, New York, 2006

“I have asked this question for myself and other artists that I am looking at, by reframing an idea of painting–as then….Where is the painting, and perhaps … When is the painting? Because the painting is both a firm and unbreakable container for the idea of art and also no longer where the art resides. It is a symbolic gesture for the discourse and thoughts it accumulates and produces.”

Email from Laura Owens to Anne Umland (curator, MoMA), 2017. Reproduced in *Laura Owens* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2017), 626.