

# HYPERALLERGIC

Sensitive to Art & its Discontents

## Sculptural Paintings Reveal Toxic and Fictional Landscapes

by [Jonathan Beer](#) on May 28, 2015



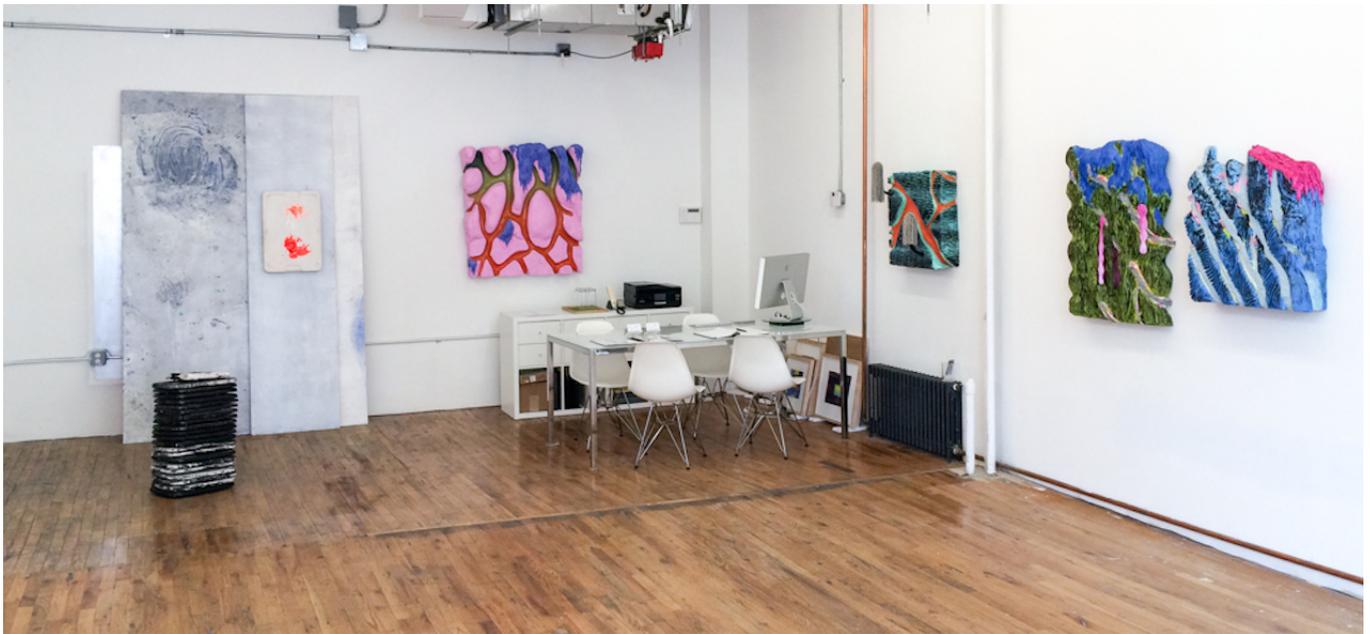
Kyle James Dunn "Lil Daddy," (2014), acrylic paint, plaster, aluminum, and bead chain on polystyrene, 26

x 24 x 11 in. (all images courtesy Los Ojos Gallery, Brooklyn)

The Bushwick gallery scene continues to flourish as galleries flock to the neighborhood and prefer the raw industrial environment as a place to start instead of the more established Chelsea or Lower East Side. Bushwick has an unprocessed energy that lends itself to new gallery formats; more space for less money allows for a less conventional approach to gallery structure and content.

[Los Ojos](#), which opened in the fall of 2014, fits into that category. The gallery is dedicated to showing emerging, experimental work and currently [on view](#) is a two-person show featuring [Kyle James Dunn](#) and [Sarah Elise Hall](#). Both are artists of an innovative temperament mining the gray area between painting and sculpture.

Kyle James Dunn makes hybrid, wall-mounted pieces that look like biological diagrams, bas-relief cross sections of cells that were harvested from organisms in a Dr. Seuss world. The artworks are constructed primarily of rigid foam and caulk, into which the artist works by both carving the material and creating an illusory surface with paint. In his own words, Dunn says: “Their forms rhyme with elements of the body, landscape, or naturalia, but never slavishly depict them. They are often in a space between landscape and plant life — topographic maps are an entry point into my work.”



Installation view of 'Kyle Dunn & Sarah Elise Hall' at Los Ojos, Brooklyn

In “Lil Daddy” polyp-like growths, crowned with tassels of steel beaded chains, shoot upward from within the teal and black sculpture/painting. Horizontal gouges pattern the work’s surface, divided by bright orange veins. Each of Dunn’s pieces is unique in color and texture, but obviously ‘biologically’ related. The handmade aspect of his artwork is clearly necessary; it allows the objects to be more than just cross sections of alien flesh but expressions in their own right. Here his practice connects to a myriad of sources from [Fabian Marcaccio](#) and [Jean Dubuffet](#) to the historic artwork from Papua New Guinea.

Sarah Elise Hall creates sculptures and paintings that explore themes of decay and mortality. She uses materials like plaster, plywood, molded acrylic paint, geodes, and powdered pigment to

create works that reference contaminated landscapes, geologic forms, and minimalist art.



Sarah Elise Hall, “Gray Aggregate from System 2 (carbon black)” (2015), hydrocal, pigment, acrylic paint skins, enamel floor paint, spray paint, spray paint transfer, dimensions variable (click to enlarge)

Hall divides her investigation of those themes into three distinct but related categories: slabs, stacks, and cavities. The slabs are upright works of stone or wood, which lean like a gravestones. They are close to human size and minimal in composition, often divided into top and bottom sections, one pale and the other intensely pigmented. The primitive, vertical plaster columns are cast from the lids of discarded storage bins. The plaster itself is cast directly onto piles of powdered pigment (usually Ultramarine blue or deep black) and acrylic paint skins, which leave behind intriguing traces of the mineral and the man-made. Hall’s “cavities” are holes that recede in the wall, containing an embedded object, usually a geode or crystal formation.

“Gray Aggregate from System 2” collects a combination of forms: two pearlescent silver slabs lean against a wall with a silver painted backdrop, and affixed to a slab’s surface is a white lid with a flesh-like remnant of neon orange acrylic. The layers of paint and plaster reveal Hall’s lengthy and involved practice. Each of her works is a history of action; marks made by the artist are as evident as those resulting from the sculptural processes, a true record of something brought into being.

In this way Hall allows elements of chance and randomness to take a large role in her practice. She achieves the memento mori effect she is after, evoking the imagery and evidence left behind

in mankind's wastelands. We could be seeing the crumbling debris after some calamity, painstakingly recreated in a lab that is her studio. Hall generates a fiction that is self-sustaining.

Underneath it all the artist leaves a subtle but profound environmental message. She makes no attempt to hide the fact that the lids are discarded storage bins. What was once a disposable piece of plastic destined to live forever in a landfill becomes a window into a future where the inhabitants make art from the discarded remains of a previous culture. While this statement is tinged with wry humor it is also one Hall cares deeply about. For her, each piece needs to have a purpose and a reason to exist. At the same time, it is important that her works have a lifespan; the materials themselves are biodegradable and will eventually disappear.



Sarah Elise Hall, "Ruptured Slab" (2015), hydrocal, pigment, spray paint transfer, geode 10 x 10 x 6 in.

While Dunn and Hall create work that differs aesthetically, they build very specific narratives

about environmental decay and science fiction. They draw on the language of sculpture and painting to bring those narratives to life, jump-starting a conversation within the viewer about mankind's future and what that future might look like. The art on view at Los Ojos not only challenges the traditional boundaries of the discipline, but also, most importantly, fosters ideas that reflect and shape our current world.

[Kyle Dunn & Sarah Elise Hall](#) continues at Los Ojos (12 Cypress Avenue, Bushwick, Brooklyn) through May 31.



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