

INMAN GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 20, 2021

Inman Gallery is pleased to present

Robert Ruello *Angry Garden Salad*

May 22 – July 2, 2021

Open house, Saturday, May 22

Artist will be present 12-2pm

Open by appointment Tues-Thurs

Open 11-6 without appointment Fri-Sat

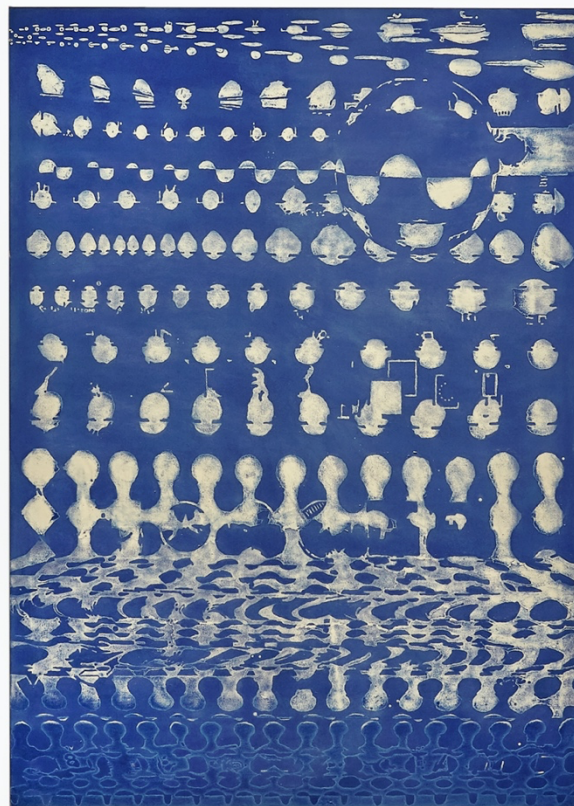
Masks required and social distancing enforced

Maximum 8 visitors at one time

image: Robert Ruello, *Artifact #1*, 2020

Flashe and acrylic on canvas

84 x 60 x 1½ inches



Inman Gallery is pleased to present **Robert Ruello: *Angry Garden Salad***, the seventh solo exhibition for the artist at Inman Gallery since 1992. The show will include six new large-scale paintings, all completed in the past year. The exhibition will open Saturday, May 22, with an all-day open house; the artist will be present from 12-2pm. Houston based writer Betsy Huete has contributed an essay about Ruello's new body of work, and an excerpt from her text is below.

Angry Garden Salad is a subtle yet staunch departure from Ruello's previous work. It follows the same modus operandi he normally employs in that he uses technology as a starting point, deconstructing it into a set of formal, painterly engagements. However, this grouping feels vastly more contemplative, introverted, stark, saturated, and quietly gut-wrenching. Also of note: the pieces may be quieter, but they're curiously as, if not more, loquacious than ever before. But the chatter is more self-directed and internally devoted this time—more of a mutter—shards of text and fractured information churning in on itself to the point of oblivion.

This simultaneity of creation and destruction has been omnipresent in Ruello's work: he's always explored the deconstructing of a digital image and reifying it into a formally dynamic object. This time, however, Ruello's oblitative impulse is more multi-directional, its tendrils feeling more precarious and pervasive. With ***Angry Garden Salad***, Ruello's classic push/pull extends beyond the technological into a garbled, sensorial conversation between modernism and postmodernism, between language as a carrier of content versus an oblitative tool for formal play and discovery.

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Angry Garden Salad remains on view at Inman Gallery through Friday, July 2.

Robert Ruello (born 1958, New Orleans, LA) received a BA in Psychology from Loyola University, New Orleans, LA (1982), a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (1987), and an MFA from Columbia University (1997). From 1987-89 he was an artist-in-residence at the Core Program, Glassell School of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX. His recent exhibitions include solo shows at Galveston Artist Residency, Galveston, TX; Lone Star College, Woodlands, TX; Texas A&M University, Commerce, TX; and the group exhibitions *Mapping Galveston*, Galveston Artist Residency, Galveston, TX, and *In Plain Sight*, McClain Gallery, Houston, TX. Ruello is the recipient of a Gottlieb Foundation Grant (2010) and a Dora Maar Residency Fellowship (2009). His work was recently featured in *New American Paintings, West #102*. Ruello was the subject of a survey exhibition at the Galveston Arts Center in 2015, which included works from a 2013-2015 body of work called *The Noise of the Stars*. His most recent exhibition, *Fuzzy Models*, was at Inman Gallery in 2017. Ruello lives and works in Houston, TX.



Robert Ruello, *Artifact: Changing the Wind (detail)*, 2021
Flashe and acrylic on canvas, 71 5/8 x 48 x 1 1/2 inches

Robert Ruello: *Angry Garden Salad*

If this past year has been anything, it has been ripe for contemplation and introspection. We've hunkered down in our homes, watching the world face the realities of Covid 19, racism, our mortality, solitude and silence, and our complicity. Although Robert Ruello's latest exhibition *Angry Garden Salad* is not specifically *about* the current state of our world, it is impossible to experience this work without feeling the weight of the world in it.

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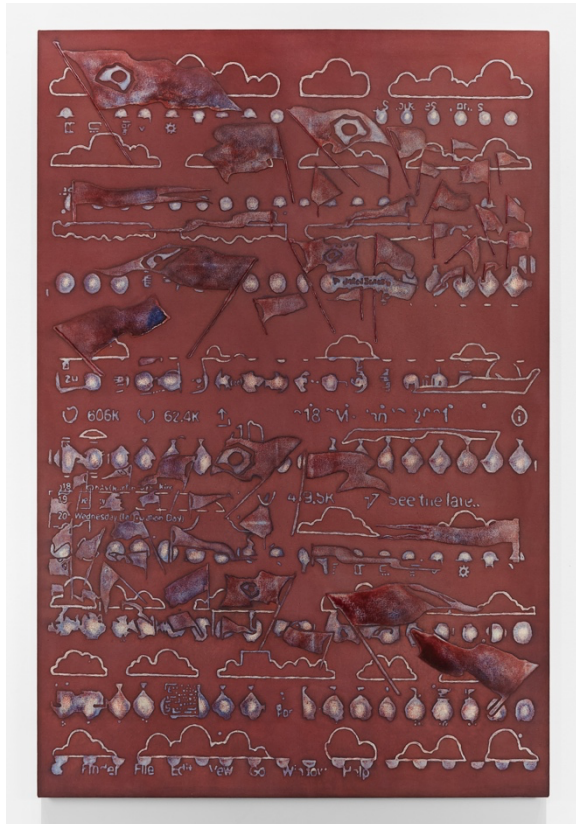


Robert Ruello, *A Sudden Gust*, 2021
 Flashe and acrylic on canvas
 84 x 60 x 1 1/2 in (213.4 x 152.4 x 3.8 cm)

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Works like *A Sudden Gust* and *Artifact: Blue Screen* (both 2021) harbor a Rothko-esque level of saturation within their canvases. While much flatter, Ruello does employ similar layering and depth, infusing the paintings with an opacity that somehow feels deadened, yet pulsating with force by layering it with deadpan, reflective, evasive mark-making on top. Using acrylic medium as a kind of relief as well as a drawing mechanism, he disrupts their meditative surfaces with indecipherable glyphs, interrupting the conversation with the kind of cacophonous chatter and information overload that is now ingrained into our daily lives.

These glyphs show us a marked turn in Ruello's work, a preference for the all-over mark making evocative of the Abstract Expressionists over the more cohesive, semi-figural abstractions he has been known for in the past. His penchant for the linguistic is nothing new: he has been employing what reads as a type of binary, SOS dot system for years. What differs now is the degree in which Ruello manipulates the surface plane for the sake of formal dynamism; these works read much more so as semiotic devices than linguistic play as a formalist tool. It is important that the works in *Angry Garden Salad* are talking, and doing so emphatically and voraciously.



Robert Ruello, *Artifact: Changing the Wind*, 2021
 Flashe and acrylic on canvas
 71 5/8 x 48 x 1 1/2 in (181.9 x 121.9 x 3.8 cm)

This isn't to say that Ruello has abandoned all manipulation of the surface. While much more subtle, there are still many moments of him playing with perspective, and we see this most clearly with *Artifact: Capitol Hill Storm* (2021). But, whereas this kind of use of perspective felt playful and dynamic in exhibitions past, here it feels eerie and disorienting.

In another new move, Ruello incorporates (somewhat) legible text which is present in much of the work, but most pronounced in *Artifact: Changing the Wind* (2021). But it becomes apparent quickly that we are to be suspicious of its content in its deterioration and deconstruction, and rather acknowledge and consider its formalist properties.

With that being said, even amidst all this heaviness it is important to note that Ruello hasn't abandoned his signature sense of play and borderline self-deprecation. Again in *Artifact: Changing the Wind* we are able to pore over moments of delightful poolings of watered-down

acrylic atop the sheen of acrylic medium, performing more like watercolor than acrylic. The term *Angry Garden Salad* is a self-deprecatory IT reference about poorly coded websites. All of the work, while abstracted, refers to Ruello's internal life and website search history, acting as artifacts and bearing witness to his curiosity about, say, the Capitol Hill riots or a saag paneer recipe. The job of Robert Ruello's work is not to pass judgement or make assertions, but to simply reflect back, to reconcile the complexities of our world exactly as they are.

--Betsy Huete , May 2021