



Jen Mazza, *Le Repos*, 2012, Oil on canvas, 10" x 12"

September 5th – October 14th— Opening September 5th, 6 – 9 pm

"if I combined the words cleverly, the subject was floundering in the signs."
Jean-Paul Sartre

Stephan Stoyanov Gallery is pleased to present *The Words* by Jen Mazza, her first solo exhibition in New York. The exhibition offers a selection of exquisite small-scale oil paintings of books, each text chosen for its personal and conceptual resonances; a sort of "object biography" playing with the idea of narrative on many levels. For Mazza, the book is the place where the world of ideas and the physical world of objects merge. She comments, "As in painting where form becomes the vehicle for content, the book serves as the support for the text: both visible and invisible, it mediates the experience of reading." And certainly, reading her work is a possibility in the paintings of books opened to reveal minutely painted text or illustrations, while her other book paintings must be judged simply by their covers. The subtle, muted colors echo those in Morandi's oeuvre; the compositions are emblematic -- are these paintings meditations on the text or perhaps a eulogy for the book as object?

Jen Mazza (born 1972, Washington D.C.) received her MFA from Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University. She has exhibited in solo shows at the Jersey City Museum, Aljira Center for Contemporary Art, and John Davis Gallery in Hudson, NY, as well as in multiple group exhibitions which include: *Komposition des Zufalls* at Galerie Edgar Frei (Bern, Switzerland), *Personal Effects* at Gallery Affero (Newark, NJ), and *Small is Beautiful* at Flowers Gallery in New York. Honors include residencies at Yaddo, VCCA and Jentel. Mazza was also chosen as Artist in Residence at the Newark Museum in 2008. Jen Mazza lives and works in New York.



Installation shots of *The Words* exhibition at Stephan Stoyanov Gallery (images by Jen Mazza)



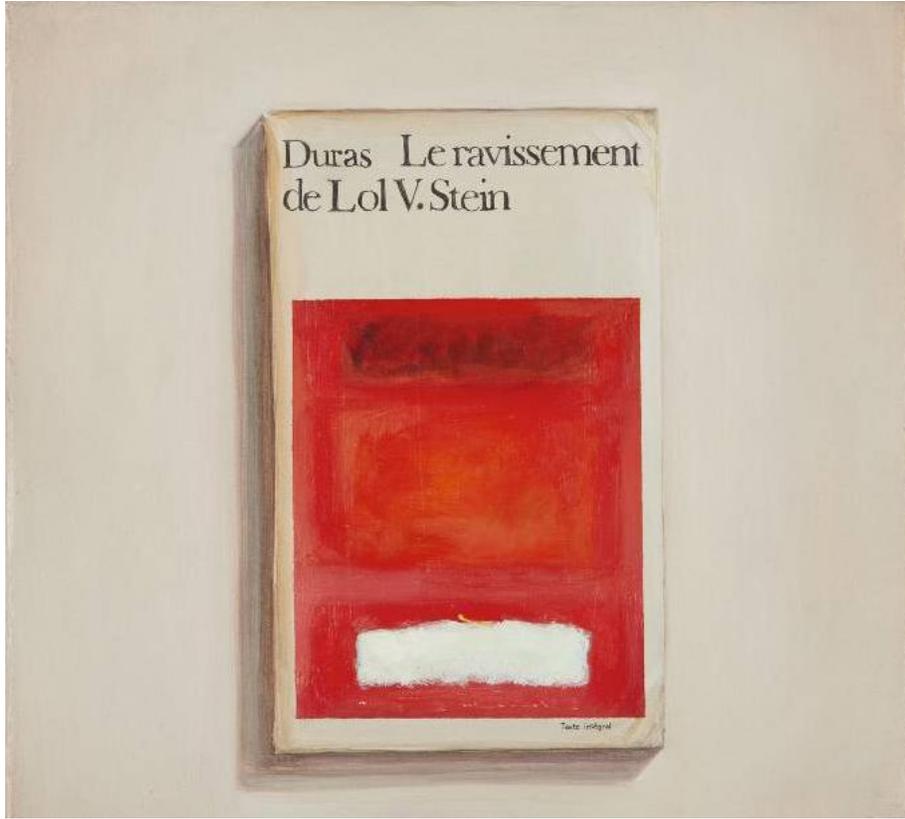
Similar in the dissimilar (Proust), 2011

13 x 15"



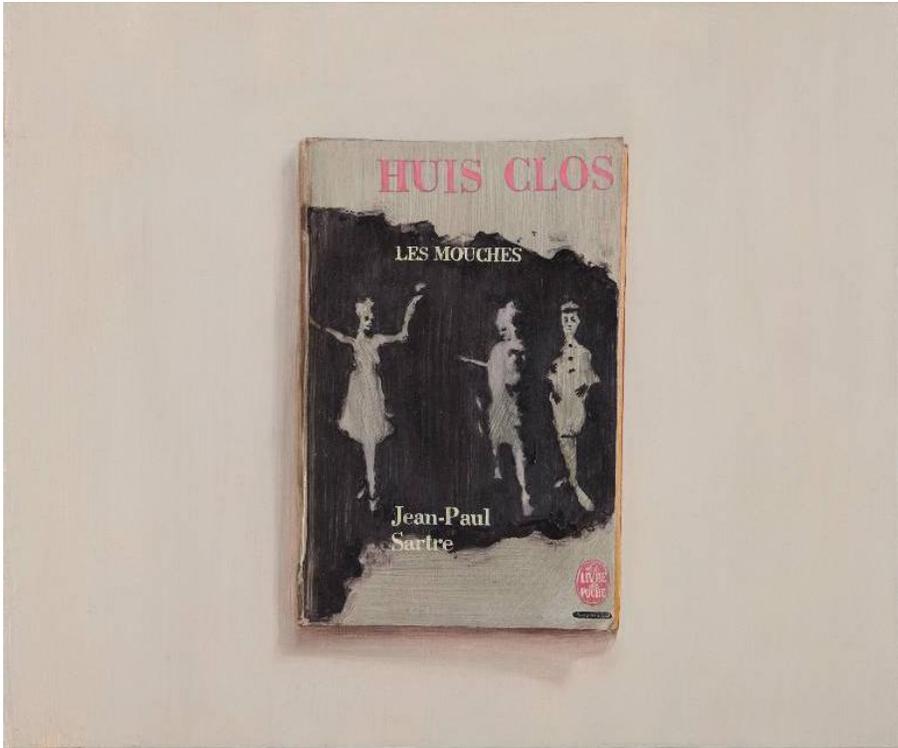
Similar in the dissimilar are a series of pages from Proust's *Swann's Way* and the title comes from the quote: "Love is the power to see similarity in the dissimilar." T. W. Adorno

Jen Mazza [_jenmazza.com](http://jenmazza.com)



Le ravissement, 2012

9 x 10"

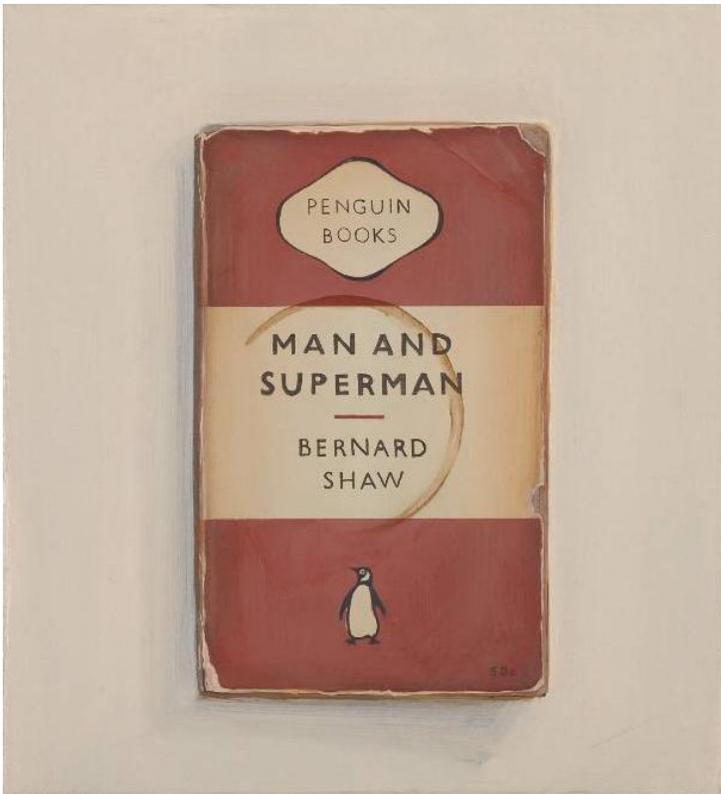


HuisClos, 2012

10 x 12"



Hiroshima Mon Amour, 2012, 10 x13"



Man And Superman, 2012 10 x 9"



Le Repos, 2012, Oil on canvas, 10" x 12"

Artist Statement:

Process and Language: *The book and its image in The Words*

I have always privileged written above visual language for its precision. As a painter I have envied words their success in communication, their clarity, their universality, their common resonance. Thus I have only lately discovered the beauty of misunderstanding. I am fascinated by the translation of ideas from one language into another, one form into another, while gaining or losing in the process. This process, this "translation" becomes more and more the focus of my attention.

Because much of my work has taken inspiration from language and reading, the idea of painting the book seemed a natural progression. There also seem to be formal parallels; as in a painting, where form becomes the vehicle for content, the book serves as the support the text — both visible and invisible it mediates the experience of reading. The book is a place where the world of ideas and the physical world of objects merge.

In the process of selecting the subjects for my paintings, I find I have compiled a sort of "object biography" which reflects a great deal of my own personal history without limiting the possible readings and resonances. It was my particular experience of reading Proust, perhaps because of its sheer length – and indeed Proust said the same thing of his experience of reading – that life begins to overlap a text, and to a certain degree the moment a book is read becomes fused with the book itself. The book is a container for much more than the single story which peppers its pages. This is especially apparent with the passing of time, merely by seeing the cover of familiar book or reading a paragraph we are transported into our own past.

"Are you writing now?"
Maurice Blanchot

"at all times translating"
Jacques Roubaud

The process of creating the paintings is also a dialogue with form and ideas. Though the finished images are representational, the paintings remain “open”, literally blank, through a great deal of the process. Each image begins as a near abstraction, the book is reduced to its rectangular form placed so as to be somewhat antagonistic to its support (not unlike Malevich’s *White on White*) with images and text only appearing later in the process. The supports themselves (the stretched canvases) are often subtly rough around the edges, or just slightly askew, allowing for the objectness of the canvas to both support and undermine the illusion of the objectness of the book.

To me the paintings seem “purer” in this quasi-abstract state, even if they are already slightly verging on the heretical to notions of true abstraction. Even so, I feel compelled to further compromise or subvert this formal purity with subsequent layers of content. Agnes Martin once said that her work was “about perfection as we are aware of it in our minds but that the paintings are very far from being perfect – completely removed in fact – even as we ourselves are.” Through the use of overlapping layers of content and form I desire to “tie the paintings down, burden them so as to bring them down to life’s level; to bring them into the clutter of dailyness and see if they still keep something of that nebulous sense of truth.”

Influences and Process: *Painting and the Everyday*

“My intention (is) to describe what remains: that which we generally don’t notice, which doesn’t call attention to itself, which is of no importance: what happens when nothing happens, what passes when nothing passes, except time, people, cars, and clouds.” Georges Perec

At present the most discernable influences on my work are the writings of Queneau, Perec and the Oulipo, who were interested in puzzles, imposing constraints, instructions, clues... in a sense drawing both the writer’s and the reader’s attention to form and its ability to succeed or to fail to translate one’s ideas.

Here I am reminded of the “rules” of painting and visual expression but find myself swayed to be “bad”, to express “badly” as Beckett said: *“ill seen ill said”*.

And following along this train of thought – I have found nothing more freeing than the suggestion that I may, within my own work, choose to be completely opaque. And I don’t mean a sort of Joycean strategy of knotting up language, where each reference may be unraveled, but instead a puzzle, whose lengthy solution may prove that there is no solution, or may prove nothing. And so I am interested in offering up misreadings, in espousing fallacies, in positing false truths and using these “truths” as constraints. I begin to wonder whether my subject matter exists within the process or with the relic of the process, that being the finished painting.

I paint within a realist tradition as I enjoy the disjunction of resisting or thwarting literal expectations: my paintings always give back something other than that which would be offered by the object in person or its photographic likeness. What realism allows me to do is feign reality, and I mentioned above: to imply truths, and to lie. There is within representation the illusion of reality; it draws on the system of beliefs which defines what we experience as reality. I am making paintings that while presenting the real (i.e.: "truth") still consistently draw attention to their form: within each painting there is a reminder of its contrivance (painting as vehicle of contrivance, painting as device, as translation) and in so doing I create friction between the image and the means by which the image is substantiated.

Once upon a time I would have claimed that I used the language of painting as a tool, but now I will admit that the tool is vying with the image as the subject, and through this insistence the formal tools do much to control the outcome. The process has become the subject, the finished product its artifact. And how is this apparent? I am not sure it needs to be. To me it seems enough that the process propels and supports the product, leave it to temporal mediums to reveal themselves in progression. What interests me is the potential of removing the romantic quality of inspiration and replacing it with something everyday. *"What happens when nothing happens?"*

My goal is that by following the process, my process, I will have recorded something of what was there in the moment, perhaps an unseen, unrealized truth floating nebulous in the air, or perhaps I may mark a moment in time before having the knowledge of its importance, and know something of *what is* by not closing down the possibilities too soon, by not judging: creating a structure for progress that is both scientific and reflexive, a process which exists in time and makes a relic of that time, that will mark that day, that moment: not necessarily a train wreck or an earthquake, but the slow erosion of the hours.

"How can we speak of these "common things", how rather, can we stalk them, how can we flush them out, rescue them from the mire in which they remain stuck, how can we give them a meaning, a tongue, so that they are at last able to speak of the way things are, the way we are?" Georges Perec

Jen Mazza, 2012