



Anthony Caro and Clement Greenberg, 1981

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## A Forearm Amidst a Frame ••• Ellis Sam

**Damian Moppett**

*'Salute'*

*Catriona Jeffries  
274 East 1st Avenue  
Through Nov. 2*

The poster for Damian Moppett's 2013 solo exhibition *Salute* at Catriona Jeffries advertises a virtual situation. It looks like a post-painterly abstraction in digitally rendered red, blue, and peach. The image is like a flag for the exhibition where red and blue appear explicitly in various paintings that are housed in peach frames. The image of the painting has been peeled, eroded and cut away exposing an underlying photograph of two men having a conversation. I look at the photograph and venture that the figure on the right who is balding and wearing glasses is most likely the art critic Clement Greenberg. The figure on the left is most likely the artist. The topic of conversation is most likely about his artwork, which is eschewed in the poster by

the overlying post-painterly abstraction. The conversation appears to be taking place in a studio that has scraps of cut-up paper on the floor and a drawing on the wall that is out of the camera's focus. The photograph is sideways, positioning the forearm of the artist vertically in the centre of the image. I like to think that the artist is lifting his arm out of passion; mimicking and speaking through the same gesture he would make when making an artwork. But who knows? Greenberg appears docile with his arms at



his side while staring at this guy's forearm. I imagine that this photograph documents an important moment in art history where Greenberg distinguishes that the medium of painting is distinctive for its quality of flatness, and that the art critic's impetus for this is what has always been a flat thing for a painter at work on a canvas: the form of their own forearm. I like to think of this picture as counter-narrative



to a moment a few months later when Greenberg is watching Jackson Pollock lay a canvas on the floor, and his inspiration for noting this innovative technique is illuminated by seeing Pollock's forearms cut through the air faster than the paint flying from his bucket. Maybe after a round through the gallery, I have become too overloaded with images to fully recognize the references occurring in the poster. Do paintings even count as images when their subject is abstracted from the picture plane? Does the poster aggress references differently from the allegory in the sculptures and paintings? Where a series of strokes occur similar to the one made by the forearm of the man on the poster, the references attached to Moppett's salute are wrecked to abstraction.

The poster advertises that there is always a conversation that informs the form of an abstraction. Within the milieu of works in *Salute*, allegory occurs through strokes produced by Moppett's forearm, pushing reference across the flatness of a picture plane to the point of abstraction.

**Ellis Sam**