



## **Jonathan Casella**

Solo presentation — "Under a Big Sky"

MARFA INVITATIONAL / Spring Edition, 2023

Saint George Hall | Marfa, TX.

May 04th— May 07th, 2023

F2T Gallery is pleased to present "*Under a Big Sky*", a solo presentation by Los Angeles based artist Jonathan Casella. This exhibition is the artist's second with the gallery.

In *Under a Big Sky*, Jonathan Casella brings us further into his ever-expanding lexiconic playground. To play in such a realm, is to be confronted by vivid color, robust patterns, soft edges, and images sifted from the artist's collection of details from his personal relationships, iconography, and environment. Through his signature layering of painting techniques, Casella presents a suite of paintings that under the guise of abstraction suggest portraiture and landscape painting to carry forward his address of the simultaneity of the ubiquitous and the personal. This stance is echoed in the show's title, which at the same time holds universal and colloquial meaning. In Casella's works the familiarity of the shape of a head or a sky above a ground, gives us an entry point to investigate their details, causing our focus to oscillate between the overall implied image, its intricate layered components, and their relationship to one another.

At the core of Casella's practice is the ability for shape, color, and image acting in unison to hold us still while vibrating our focus in and out of the deliberations in the paintings — to reckon with our sense of totality and particle. Casella's ability to equalize the hierarchy of the types of marks used in his practice, leads to a type of painting that makes it less about genre and more about the viewer's canonic subjectivity or rather the rubric one uses to evaluate a work of art. In counterpoint to Rauschenberg's gift that an image can stand-in for a brushstroke, Casella recapitulates and reinterprets his own version of pre-existing jargons by utilizing image alongside shape, color, and pattern, as his own syntax.

Casella's "head" and "landscape" painting vernacular plays with image as fact, and moreover these images become reference points for the marks and gestures abound. Each "head" is populated by both the pattern that exists outside of its complex delineation and the introduction of imagery that connotes the anatomy of a head or face: a moon as in the face on the moon, a cigarette longing for a mouth, a flower wanting to be sniffed, the sun in my eye, etc. The screen-printed inclusions of images that the artist has collected create a sense of repetition, and while personal to Casella, remain universally accessible to the viewer. The titles of the landscape paintings, after which the show is aptly named, share the preamble "Big Sky", referencing both the inferred sky-like expanses in the work, and the enormity of the Texas sky – under which this show is set.

Edging towards narrativity, Casella's recurring polka-dotted pattern overtakes more than half of the painting's upper region in an instance where pattern alone starts to become an image and to give instruction. Each dot is sprayed onto the surface of the painting with varying degrees of sharpness and diffusion, creating tension between the colors of the dots and its surrounding area – a vat of color that seems to create a horizon line when it meets the ground. The pattern of the sky can be found at times on the ground in the paintings, like a reflection on water, but moreover as a guide for the eye to find rest from the pulsating sky among more concise marks and images.

Casella's paintings, while maximalist in appearance, will, like our thoughts, crescendo and wane. Our eyes will glide over the landscape that is not just the image he semi-conjures, but the terrain of paint itself. The stratification of paint that occurs as Casella gradually and intuitively adds paint to his paintings distills time as material itself competes with hard and diffuse edges of color. The lack of hierarchy between the visual coding advancing from Casella's almost-perfect squares of paint is stunning to the viewer, making us consider that there is an evolved language just beyond the painting's initial proposal – kind of a portrait; kind of a landscape. Casella's destabilizing of our focus suspends us somewhere between image and mark, like a word that can exist within or outside of a sentence and mean the same thing, but also mean nothing.

Text by Edwin Arzeta

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