

David Salle Tests the Weather at Skarstedt Gallery

BY SCOTT INDRISEK | APRIL 14, 2016



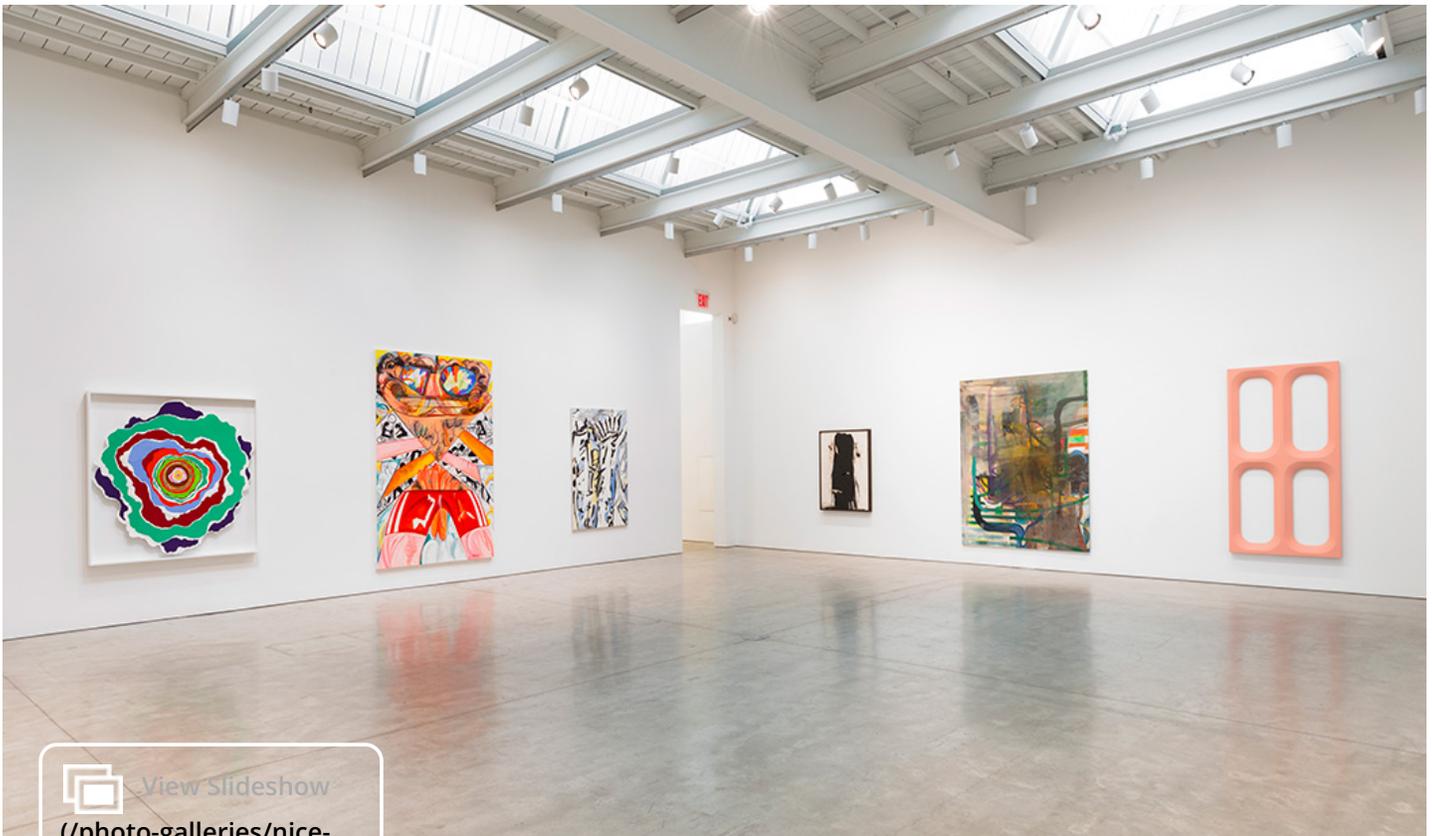
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"Nice Weather" at Skarstedt Chelsea (installation view)
(Skarstedt)

"We wanted to see what would happen if all these things we like were mixed up together," mused (/artists/5556-david-salle)David Salle (/artists/5556-david-salle) last night during a roundtable discussion in Chelsea of "Nice Weather (http://www.skarstedt.com/exhibitions/2016-02-25_nice-

weather/),” a two-part show he has curated at Skarstedt Gallery in New York, up through April 16. The likeable things in question were paintings, most of them very large, from artists including (/artists/dana-schutz-165799)[Dana Schutz](#) (/artists/dana-schutz-165799), (/artists/225275-rashid-johnson)[Rashid Johnson](#) (/artists/225275-rashid-johnson), and (/artists/4007-sterling-ruby)[Sterling Ruby](#) (/artists/4007-sterling-ruby). Salle was flanked by other participants: (/artists/gary-stephan-175176)[Gary Stephan](#) (/artists/gary-stephan-175176), Nicole Wittenberg, and (/artists/patricia-treib-1287800)[Patricia Treib](#) (/artists/patricia-treib-1287800). All of their work, along with Salle’s own, hangs in Skarstedt’s *uptown* space. The curator-painter clearly voiced his preference for the rarified, cozier ambience of that East 79th Street outpost, Chelsea itself being a “brutal, abysmal environment” to put a show on in.

But the evening wasn’t too brutal, or abysmal. It was a crowded house, and a crowded room, full of both people and paintings. “I think of a group show like a party,” where everyone’s dance skills need to be up to par, said Wittenberg. “And then someone gets too drunk and they piss on the floor.” (Later, she theorized the archetypal group show as being akin to an eclectic Sophia Coppola soundtrack, and — unless I misheard — a form of visual Tinder in which one is free to swipe right or left on possible painting-mates.)

Much of the conversation, moderated by Hunter Braithwaite, revolved around what Salle was thinking when he conceived “Nice Weather.” (The show’s title is taken from a book of poetry by Frederick Seidel.) It was a hard question. One thing was for certain: “In this show, there are no bores.” This evolved into a discussion of freshness, in painting, and what it entails. “Some things are never fresh, and some things are *still* fresh,” the painter stated. Freshness also isn’t about youth, he stressed — 88-year-old Alex Katz is in the show, and definitely still fresh — but this elusive quality “*feels* like youth.”

Salle turned to a ripped-paper construction by (/artists/piotr-uklanski-185431)[Piotr Uklanski](#) (/artists/piotr-uklanski-185431) on the nearby wall, noting that this piece (“it’s really about form in a very deliberate, procedural way”) was something of a foundation that the show was built upon. He and Wittenberg embarked on an upbeat appreciation of the not-really-painted painting, briefly sounding like they might go ahead and buy it. Then they turned to the hulking (/artists/4007-sterling-ruby)[Sterling Ruby](#) (/artists/4007-sterling-ruby), which resembles nothing so much as an offset scan of denim jeans, jarring and pink and definitely adding to the tightly hung gallery’s vibe of pleasant claustrophobia. Salle wanted to talk about a little sliver of fabric affixed to the canvas at upper-left. “It’s the right disruption,” he adjudicated. Referring to the happily brash (/artists/chris-martin-750619)[CHRIS MARTIN](#) (/artists/chris-martin-1104673) behind him, with its “wacky styrofoam discs,” he said, “He’s a good

example of an *all-in* painter.” Albert Oehlen’s mixed-media “Music Always,” 1994, came in for special acclaim. “I’m going to be everything and nothing all at once,” Salle said, speaking in the painting’s imagined voice. “And fuck you, I’m outta here.”

But what is “Nice Weather” *about*? “What binds this work is that it’s grounded in what Magritte called *visuality*. It’s how they *look*,” interjected Stephan. “If there’s one anarchic act, it’s that David’s returning to the pleasure of *visuality*.” Salle followed up with something verging on the koanesque: “It’s taking the painting on its own terms. But its terms have to be takeable.”

Things got punchy when a visitor at the back of the room asked a convoluted question that had something to do with Guy Debord, the society of the spectacle, and about whether art is meant to resist the world. “It’s so grandiose and self-flattering” to think painting could, or should, do that, Salle responded. “The idea of resistance is so abstract. That claim seems kind of fishy to me.” Wittenberg, being a sport, chimed in: “You resist *boredom*, as much as you can.”

The conversation turned to MoMA’s much-maligned “Forever Now” painting survey. Yes, admitted Salle — who [reviewed](http://www.artnews.com/2015/02/23/structure-rising-forever-now-at-moma/) (<http://www.artnews.com/2015/02/23/structure-rising-forever-now-at-moma/>) that exhibition for ArtNews — there were many overlaps between that show and his own ((/artists/4903-mary-weatherford) [Mary Weatherford](#) (/artists/4903-mary-weatherford), (/artists/4899-amy-sillman) [Amy Sillman](#) (/artists/4899-amy-sillman), Richard Aldrich, et. al.). “It would be disingenuous to say it’s a critique” of MoMA’s offering, he ventured, before abandoning any pretense of politeness: “Yes,” Salle said of his curatorial effort, “this is the *good* version.”