

Alexis M. Teplin

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AUTHOR: [SHERMAN SAM](#)

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Oscar Wilde's 1891 play *Salome*, as well as Richard Strauss's subsequent operatic interpretation of it, is at the heart of Alexis M. Teplin's current exhibition. The show includes four paintings that are notable for their patches of flat color—a look that Clement Greenberg would have lauded in his search for formal purism. However, with the show's literary basis (illustrations of *Salome* by Aubrey Beardsley are also collaged onto some of her paintings), Teplin counters Greenberg's notion of abstraction's drive toward purity as a move away from literature.

At the crux of each work is the suture—both in a literal and metaphorical sense. In each painting, pieces of canvas and French metis (a vintage fabric used for French bed linen) are stitched together and then painted on with oil. The titles of three of the works, *sss*, *T*, and *!!*, (all works cited, 2012), are outlined and collaged with fabric and paint, which, coupled with Teplin's daubed-on patches of paint, creates a camouflage effect—each letter is barely visible. This causes letter and image to become practically synchronous—that is, the image (letter) represents the sound (pronunciation).

Although Teplin's paintings are evocative of early modes of abstraction—notably, her aesthetic citation of music seems to gesture toward Kandinsky—they also bring to mind Jasper Johns, an artist whose infatuation with text put him decidedly outside of Greenberg's canon. Teplin's drive to connect reading with simply viewing mirrors the impulse of the American painter, and yet her works retain the painterly nature that Greenberg so famously extolled.