

ARTFORUM

Charles Mayton

by Allese Thomson Baker
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Charles Mayton, *The Long Exposure*, 2011, oil on canvas, 66 x 51".

Charles Mayton's first solo show in New York begins with a doormat placed directly outside the gallery entrance proclaiming the title of the exhibition: "THE DIFFICULT CROSSING." The door is propped open to reveal two vivacious, brushy abstract paintings, dotted with words in a style of cursive we've come to associate largely with the artist René Magritte (think *The Treachery of Images*, 1928–29). Dozens upon dozens of lemons, limes, and oranges are scattered over the floor, which likewise recalls the Surrealist's fixation with fruit. In the center of the room sits a coatrack with two paper eyes dangling by a piece of string. Magritte is not an unconscious inspiration here (as Breton might have had it) but a decidedly conscious one: "The Difficult Crossing" is a three-dimensional realization of his 1926 painting of the same title, which depicts an artist's studio.

By plunging the viewer into the center of Magritte's canvas, Mayton conjures a world that demands that one consider the role of the unconscious within the artist's studio, a place where ideas take material shape. This is ironic, as Magritte cared little for the literal; but then again, not much is literal these days. Given that our daily experience increasingly plays out against a digital wasteland of information, it's worth pausing for a moment to remember the ethos of the Surrealists. Mayton builds on the group's pursuit of psychic freedom, stimulating a dialogue about the importance of artistic creation and its relationship to consciousness, which, in an age when the creative mind often finds itself pacing restlessly within a cell of LCD screens, is more salient than ever. Mayton's works, particularly his paintings, are tantalizingly beautiful—vivid hues of paint swept across canvases featuring bright semiotic symbols, including question marks, quotations, and clouds—this quality places a premium on the tangible, thus reminding us that the best way to incite the unconscious, to release the imagination, is to begin with the overtly physical.