

The theme of a “maximalist” painting exhibition has been brewing in my mind for over a decade. In the ‘90s, I often wondered why most contemporary critiques, reviewers, books and shows dealt with minimal or “reductivist” works (which focused on one or a few of the many exciting things that could happen in a painting) and none seemed to tackle what I felt were the more interesting and more maximal works being produced at the same time.

Even as an art student in the ‘80s I always questioned the “less is more” adage that was thrown about the classroom as if some absolute truth. Instinctively, I understood what I felt was the true message (i.e., that it is easier to properly handle fewer elements in a work), but I also believed that if one could handle more elements, especially ones that often negate or undermine one another, then one could truly have “more be more”...it was just difficult to do so.



Lilian Garcia-Roig, Detail from *Triumph of Fall*, 2006, oil on canvas, 48 x 60 inches. Courtesy of Valley House, Dallas.

Why were critics not automatically drawn to those artists who could make more of more? Was it that the simpler the work, the more it cried out for explanation and thus the art was in the writing as much as in the work? As a visual artist, I ultimately decided that someone should curate the plethora of exciting contemporary maximalist painting being produced today. Luckily, I did not have to go far to discover that Florida State University had an enthusiastic expert in contemporary theory, Dr. Tatiana Flores, who happened to have a great interest in the growing contemporary trend of maximalist work. When I mentioned the idea of curating, she was very excited to take it on.

The most challenging part was not finding works (we had an initial list of over 200 artists) but rather defining where maximalism stopped. Defining “maximalism” proved to be not unlike Supreme Court Justice Stewart’s famous 1964 non-definition of pornography: “I know what it is when I see it.”

This quotation (the intent behind it) summarizes the irony and difficulty of trying to define complexity, density and perceptual or conceptual layered meaning. One aspect of maximalism that was particularly tricky to define was the type of work that was so maximal in one way that it became minimal in another. For example, a painting that was composed of repetitive, thickly-squeezed, colorful blobs of pigment was excessive in a maximal way, but only at one level, and so we found that we had to qualify our working definition of *maximalist*: a painting had to be complex on many fronts and in a multilevel way.

It is our goal that for visitors of this exhibition, the works selected create a compelling sense of *overwhelmingness*. They are works that cannot be immediately absorbed; they unfold over time even if they seem to scream at first. A great image is worth (at least) 1000 words and the best works can never fully be explained because they are a true visual language that is beyond the realm of words. I believe this exhibition will show how relevant and exciting maximalist tendencies in painting can be. It is my hope that the viewer comes away believing that *more* information, *more* square footage, *more* complexity, *more* layers, *more* abstraction, *more* representation, *more* paint, *more everything* in even a single painting, can add up to a more powerful and rewarding visual experience.

—Lilian Garcia-Roig