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## LI DAIYUN: The Grid

Ethan Cohen New York presents **LI DAIYUN: The Grid** featuring Beijing based painter Li Daiyun in her first solo exhibition in the United States. The exhibition will run from September 18 to November 1, 2014.



*Skin*, acrylic on linen canvas, 56.7 x 75.6 in (144 x 192 cm)

Li Daiyun's work occupies the bleed zone between representation and abstraction where the image blurs and morphs before your eyes: what you're certain of seeing becomes a projection of what you imagine. In portraits like the *Drop* series and *Come To My Side*, the faces shapeshift, losing definition while acquiring a heightened expressionist suggestiveness. The onlooker's eye is challenged, forced into feats of interpretation, into a primal struggle for familiarity and coherence. The artist seems to be saying, since you cannot accept dissolution as real, you must do the work of imposing sense. Therefore, the work is partly your creation.

These effects she achieves in part through experimentation in technique, staying within anthropomorphic constants, while freeing the paint to flow and distort from the norm. Eyes, ears, hair, skin never quite break their mutual equation but seem to obey other forces of harmony. The paint dictates and finds its own balance. The artist's highly crafted product then evolves from there, with additional layers, a thick impasto, a selective eroding of surface texture, a counterpoint of brush and drip and scrape, an orchestrated whole forged into

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recognition. Between chaos and artifice, the paintings arrive. They represent the images we see and the process of creation itself.

In the ghostly, skeletal, self-portrait *Me*, the artist makes it explicit. Her face is a skull, re-  
visioned in blue, with hollow round eye sockets. Li is seeing the bone beneath the skin, seeing  
herself seeing, until the intensity of perception and process – a kind of torture – deprives her of  
human layers. She has deconstructed her face, so caustic is the struggle of composing and  
decomposing, of creating, of portraying the act of self-portraying. And atop her skull there's a  
splatter, a paint effect like a solar flare but also a psychological comment. It all gets so  
involved, she seems to say, so much a kneading of intransigent dough that the skull can  
explode from the tortuous séance. The splatter is the paint blowing free. If you let the paint let  
loose, it can set you free.

In the end, though, the work is not wholly, not even mainly, about paint or form or process.  
These are au fond psychological portraits. They never cease to be about the human condition.  
They emanate pathos, sadness, unease, the interstitial moods in the process of becoming. In a  
portrait like *Little Soldier II*, a military hat atop a boy's face, perhaps windblown, perhaps  
anxious about the future, you can sense the boy's feelings and you feel for the boy. In *Oga &  
Zorro*, a diptych of a swim suited boy and his dog in a wasteland beachscape of squiggly lines  
and dripping acrylic, set in dun and sepia colors, bleak vulnerability somehow ineffably gets  
conveyed. In these and other works, all the painterly techniques, the expressionistic distortions  
and self-referential forays into process, you never lose sight of the central idea, as dominant as  
in a Renaissance masterpiece, that the focus is the human and all the artistry tends towards  
deepening our vision of it.

Li Daiyun graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) Beijing, China, and  
received her BA in oil painting in 2001. She comes from a family of renowned painters with a  
Chinese military upbringing which instilled in her discipline and focus.

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Gallery hours: Tuesday – Saturday 11am – 6pm

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