

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

New York

Mark Grotjahn

ANTON KERN GALLERY

532 West 20th Street

September 10–October 29

The vibrant weaves and prisms of splintering, bundled lines in Mark Grotjahn's well-known "Butterfly" and "Face" paintings are matched in complexity only by their art-historical lineages. In the artist's latest sculptures, finger-painting, drips and throws of paint, and hole-punched visages tease at Grotjahn's indelible formal awareness, as does the long, skinny tube that he has pierced into a nose's position in each work, evoking breath, death, erection, and deception alike. While earlier exhibitions presented more varied shapes, here the artist prefers repeated forms: tall, slender bronze slabs, with proportions near that of the monolith in 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (1968), cast from cardboard boxes. If the African and Oceanic masks that have long inspired Grotjahn still come to mind, so do stelae, megaliths, and dual-sided altarpiece panels. These hand-hewn monuments feel both contrarian and pleasingly familiar, not least owing to their echo of smartphone silhouettes.



Mark Grotjahn, Untitled (Expressed Dated Exposed, Cosco Mask M40.b), 2015, oil paint on bronze, 59 1/2 x 33 1/4 x 26 1/2".

Besides multiplying paintable planes, the works in this exhibition up the ante for Grotjahn's preoccupation with the face. Sculpture's specialties of forgoing frontality and reciprocating presence dramatize what the artist's paintings already allegorized: Anything in the world can be understood to have a face, requiring our gaze. In so bluntly marking the frontal view, and lavishing attention on flat surfaces, Grotjahn may be curious to see what happens when sculptures are pulled toward painting rather than the well-rehearsed reverse. Many slabs here are scrawled just like walls; others could pass for 3D sections of splashy light and color sliced from Impressionist landscapes or postwar abstractions. The sculptures' bronze base intensifies their pigments' faintly oxidized look of museified Modernism—Van Gogh blues, Guston pinks—even as it cherishes cardboard's original traits of ribbed corrugation and skirting flaps

— Chinnie Ding