

# BROOKLYN RAIL

## APRIL 2021

### ROBERT GROSVENOR AND DAVID NOVROS

by Amanda Gluibizzi



Robert Grosvenor, *Untitled*, 2019. Sheet metal, auto body filler, spray paint, 41 x 60 x 28 inches. © Robert Grosvenor. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. Photo: Steven Probert.

Taking advantage of Paula Cooper Gallery's West 26th Street double storefront windows, Robert Grosvenor has placed a floor-bound sculpture in each space. The westernmost gallery features *Untitled* (2019), a boat-like lacquered aluminum structure balanced on a significantly smaller plinth. Despite the fact that it faces us squarely through the window, it suggests speed, with its sleek cadet-blue finish and its tapering tail echoed in the wedge cut out of the back. The eastern room houses another *Untitled* (2019), this one a pea-green trapezoid that recalls the screen and bulbous end of an early 2000s iMac. Unlike its counterpart, it is placed on the diagonal but refutes the idea of easy locomotion, its dinged surface oddly tempered by the addition of auto body filler under its paint job. One wants to pat it like a good boy, though it's sheet metal.

Surprisingly soft, too, is David Novros's monumental (10 by 13 feet) five-panel painting *Untitled* from 1971. From the gallery's front doors, the canvases could read as hard edge, but the right-angled forms within them are anything but, as the artist pulls shape out of miasmatic layers of color, the edges somehow finding themselves. Novros's nuanced palette points to his previous work in fresco, the nub of the canvas standing in for the ground of a rough wall. Watercolor, ink, and pencil works on paper surround *Untitled*, with color and shapes overlapping and, in one instance (an untitled suite of studies from 2015), strips of cloth collaged perpendicularly over one another to yield increasingly subtle shifts in tonality. Novros has said in an interview with Phong Bui that "I keep working till the painting gives me permission to move on." Standing in front of *Untitled*, I felt I understood that sentiment, the painting drawing me back and forth, and in and out, until it released me, a bit stupefied by its vertiginous chromatic plunges.

The middle galleries for both artists were my favorites in the show. One large room showcases Novros's notebooks, sketches, accordion books, and sculptural or architectural maquettes for paintings on canvas, wall paintings, stained glass windows, and other site-specific works. One shelf held a notebook that opened to different pages on different days. The first time I visited, the page revealed a sketch for a wall with three blind niches and a quote from the New York Times's coverage of the 2014 World Cup final match: "The Germans were merciless, playing with grace and unity and a raw power that saw them rip open the Brazilian defense as if it were a can of soup." Particularly striking to me were two small gatefolded boards from 1992, both painted in gestural strokes and stains, one in oils and ink and the other watercolors and ink. The former, nearly monochrome, brings together three different images affixed to the boards, the latter is a single painting stretched across the folds, dappled in the rich hues of an early fall day.

Grosvenor's room in the middle of the gallery features two works: Untitled (2019), mounted on a wall, and Untitled (2020), installed on the floor in the center of the room. The 2020 work is a brilliant orange sculpture in the round, a "Valmobile scooter circa 1961 with Nason acrylic enamel paint, rabbit's foot keychain, key." The Valmobile scooter, the handlebars of which folded down into its seat to become a manageable, portable suitcase size, becomes the star in a truly wonderful readymade visual pun: a scooter in a valise, to be started with a Dürer good-luck charm. And on the wall hangs a metal-and-wood construction painted white and yellow featuring the words "USUAL SNARL" written in white paint with partial black outlining. Ordinarily, that would be a work of art that stared me right in the eye, like looking in a mirror. But not with this show: I left serene, nourished by good painting and a supremely satisfying art historical joke.