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## John Cushnie: Greying the Grey

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# **INTERSECTIONS**

The background of the cover is composed of several horizontal stripes. At the top is a solid green stripe. Below it is a thin white stripe, followed by a wide grey stripe. A thin yellow stripe runs horizontally across the middle of the grey stripe. Below the yellow stripe is another thin white stripe, and at the bottom is a solid green stripe. The text is placed on the green stripes.

**JOHN CUSHNIE**  
**SOHEILA K. ESFAHANI**  
**KELLY O'DETTE**  
**JAMIE Q**

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Essays by Jason Hallows, Trista E. Mallory,  
Jennifer Orpana, and Matthew Ryan Smith

Introduction by David Merritt

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# SECTION 1: JOHN CUSHNIE

## *Greying the Grey*

Paintings are not talking heads. They can produce a conversation, an interaction, an exchange. They ask us to listen with our eyes, to feel the space between us, to project ourselves. The paintings in *Eidolon Prospects* aim for a mutual exchange, a reciprocal relationship—they push us to face our uncertainty, to work at them, to reconsider their visuality, to tap into their manipulation of materials. Their material and pigment are rendered as voices, and in their silent speech, the paintings come to haunt us. John Cushnie's paintings disturb, incite and ambiguate. In the face of these morsels of representation and abstraction we may work at understanding them or we may simply take them as they are: the former as ethereal conceptions that terrorize, the latter as loosened, fascinating abstractions that appease—perhaps merely a 'calm' in the eye of a storm.

Painting is not just a two-dimensional means of manifesting an image, but is more akin to an interactive relationship between the viewer and the picture. Cushnie's work addresses the liminality existing therein, sponsoring a meaningful discussion between bodies in space. Indeed, we can relate to the materials as we relate to each other in space—canvas as flesh, stretcher as bone, pigment as

Left: *Orange Tarpaulin* 2010  
Oil on canvas  
22" x 34"

Right: *Untitled*  
2010 Oil on  
canvas 43" x  
48"



blood made external. Our exchanges with painting have the potential to be not unlike our own inter-human exchanges. Cushnie argues that the materials of painting are largely visceral. This material relation is known to us as natural beings that occupy the other half of this painterly expanse. What could be more natural to us then, but to paint; to meet a painting and hold it in view?

We understand from Barthes and others that images are intricately coded and that their meaning derives from a variety of educational, cultural and experiential sources. Cushnie's work seems to circumvent the propensity for coding, instead pointing to the uncertainty of signifiers. Inherent to *Eidolon Prospects* is a tension, a quiet menace. Illicit in this tension is a mischievous engagement with





Left: *The Blue  
House* 2010  
Oil on canvas  
24" x 20"

image and material. In a traditional sense, the material of a painting supports its image. Cushnie actively works against this impulse, creating an ambiguity that hangs heavily over his project. His work seeks to subdue the call for explicit meaning, to embed it in the subterranean. By further greying the grey area between image and material, he tussles with liminal states of representation and toys with coded meanings.

The spectres that haunt Cushnie's paintings lurk in the ambiguity at play between image and material. The feelings of unease one encounters in looking is a result of a misidentification, a confusion of content. Riffing off tropes of familiarity, this drift in recognition reveals a roguish indifference to set modes of representation which adds a depth to Cushnie's project. By further greying the liminal space between viewer and picture, image and material, Cushnie digs up ghostly superstitions, conceiving paintings that make us work at their meaning while he continues to push us away.

Matthew Ryan Smith