

Meliksetian MB Briggs

# ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS  
NEW YORK

## Dave Muller

Blum & Poe | New York | 19 East 66th Street  
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By Sylvie Fortin



Dave Muller, *Red, Yellow, Blue (Sixth, Ninth and First Most Sampled Songs According to whosampled.com)*, 2018, acrylic on gessoed plywood, 58 1/2 x 58 1/2".

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In Dave Muller’s current solo exhibition, multicolored drips trickle down the wall from part of a mural (*w+m*, all works cited, 2018) that reads: “WORDS and MUSIC.” Above it hovers *Red, Yellow, Blue (Sixth, Ninth and First Most Sampled Songs According to whosampled.com)*, a three-part tondo painting based on record labels that references the foundations of art, pop music, and politics. The artist orchestrates the show into four themed sections: “Sex,” “Death,” “Rock & Roll,” and “Ampersand.” Each area combines murals, paintings, and sculptures to build on the two-story gallery’s architecture (only the “Sex” section, however, contains sound). With their circular, and at times concentric, compositions—such as the tripartite record painting *S&D&RnR*, which marries Prince and the Revolution’s single “Erotic City” with Ian Dury’s “Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll” and Skeeter Davis’s “The End of the World”—the works introduce a welcome meditation on Jasper Johns’s targets.

The “Rock & Roll” section’s terrace evokes a stage beyond the *musicmakers* mural, a subjective timeline of musical instruments from prehistory to Mike Kelley’s drum set and Muller’s own bass. The two-wall mural *The 6 1/6 Yard Stare* anchors the “Death” section with a faceoff between a pair of giant skulls: one keenly drawn, the other nearly invisible. On an adjoining wall, the white-on-white painting *White Ghosts* channels Robert Ryman and the dead white legends Led Zeppelin, Elvis Presley, and Nirvana. These apparitions whisper critiques of contemporary art’s entanglements with cultural capital and social reproduction: A “Stairway to Heaven” promo reminds, in an all caps, that it is “NOT FOR SALE” (“Mystery Train” and “Smells Like Teen Spirit” also call for nonmonetary transaction). References to music’s alternative economies recur in many paintings, especially with classifications including “Promotional Copy,” “Special Disc Jockey Record,” or “Radio Station Copy.”