

## ARTFORUM

### New York Reviews

#### Andy Piedilato

DANESE/COREY



Andy Piedilato, *Scroll Waves*, 2011, alkyd and acrylic on canvas, 108 × 120".

There's something all too calculated, hyperarticulate, and luminously cold about Brooklyn-based artist Andy Piedilato's paintings. The seven canvases that were on view in this exhibition were inspired by a friend's new hobby: boatbuilding. But rather than honor this activity with something inspiring or warm—images of boats triumphantly setting out to sea, for example—Piedilato took a darker route, painting quasi-abstract scenes of seafaring disaster.

*Scroll Waves*, 2011, was the earliest painting in the exhibition; *Endurance* and *Pinched Red Sail*, both 2016, the most recent; *Sea Snail*, 2013, *Pillars*, 2014,

and *Wake* and *Ice Spine*, both 2015, were made in-between. Piedilato trained as a medical illustrator, and his paintings have the meticulousness and descriptive precision that characterize that genre. They're anatomically correct, as it were, reading as intricate drawings of body parts—but now the body parts are the parts of the body of a ship. He clearly delineates contours, the parts filled in with vivid colors and often dramatically entangled in a bizarre Gordian knot. The artist's use of commercial house paint and alkyd medium contributes to the works' sterile look.

Abrupt contrasts of red and black tend to predominate, although in *Sea Snail*, blue, black, and yellow are also intricately united. The turbulence of the scenes evokes AbEx—indeed, the works have an anxious intensity, as befits images of the wreckage of a ship. And wreckage is where Piedilato excels: In Théodore Géricault's rather hot-blooded, romantically morbid *Raft of the Medusa*, 1818–19, the French artist depicts the raft and its desperate passengers about to be rescued but still in despair; Piedilato, by contrast, shows us only the remnants of the destroyed

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## C O R E Y

ship; there are no survivors in sight. The swells in *Scroll Waves* are like steamrollers, ready to crush anything in their path, any ship that dares to ride them. Curved grids carry us off the canvas, suggesting that we, too, will be swamped and destroyed by an ocean.

In the ironically titled *Endurance*, nothing remains but a few shards of the ship: a series of colorful curvilinear forms anchoring the angular left corner of the painting; a series of black-and-white rectangular forms jutting to the horizon; a flat void that could be the space the raft of the *Medusa* once inhabited. It has sunk with all the survivors of the shipwreck. The *Medusa* has become a ghost ship. The icy look of the catastrophic scene carries Caspar David Friedrich's *Wreck of the Hope*, 1823–24, to a nihilistic extreme. Piedilato and Friedrich paint with the same cold accuracy, as though they were dissecting a corpse: They share the same fatalistic awareness of—and fascination with—death.

Piedilato's paintings are abstract narratives of disaster, a more complete disaster than the one the *Medusa* suffered, for there are no human beings left to tell their tale. Piedilato prophesies a post-apocalyptic future, while Géricault addresses an actual happening, a pre-apocalyptic moment in the past.

—Donald Kuspit