

# Art in America

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## NICHOLAS NYLAND

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PROLE DRIFT

by matthew kangas

SEATTLE



Nicholas Nyland's third solo show in Seattle, "Physical Speculations on a Future State," was his best yet. The 36-year-old artist, who has appeared in numerous regional exhibitions, previously worked with art historical sources that somewhat obscured his individual talent. His early mixed-medium works were influenced, he says in the show's press release, by such things as "Chinese scholar's stones, Japanese gardens, Early American decorative traditions or 1970s design." Now a more specific artistic identity has emerged.

However, Nyland still references art history in his deliberately klutzy new works made of plywood, ceramic, canvas and yarn. The sculptures' fresh, provisional look is intensified by the addition of oil paint in a bright but limited palette of primary colors with a few complementaries.

The show's largest piece, *Moth* (65½ by 68 by 13 inches; all works 2012), was the most historicist. Robert Morris's large felt wall hangings of the 1960s and early '70s are evoked by a painted canvas draped from grommets and visually anchored by two multicolored disks that recall a moth's wing pattern. Eschewing the macho presence of Morris's work, *Moth* is more like a welcoming abbess's habit than a threatening Batman hulk.

*ChairTablePainting* attempts to be all things to all people. Its flat hinged tabletop has been swung upright to serve as a chair back, on the outer side of which is an abstract painting. The chair's woven rope seat features a yellow sun-disk emblem. But the loose weaving could never support a sitter; we are left with a remarkable abstract sculpture. The sinuous lines of the painting on the chair back exemplify one of Nyland's stylistic impulses—dynamic, colorful, enigmatic linear movement that recurred throughout the show.

All the other pieces reiterate questions that obsessed artists in the 1970s. When does a painting become a sculpture (*Canvas*

*Plank*, bowed and leaning against a wall)? Where does a repetitive composition end and a decorative pattern begin (*Soft Painting [Nocturne]*)? Can a sculpture have an inner void and still be art, or is it just pottery (*Openwork Vase*)? What is the proper relationship between a sculpture and its support (*Patent Decoy [Yellow]*)? The latter, a lump of stuffed yellow vinyl, sat on a square, chartreuse-painted Ikea end table. The scale of Nyland's work is never monumental but always domestic and homey. Three handbuilt glazed earthenware sculptures in the shapes of a candelabra, a bedaubed moonshine jug and an inverted bucket plopped on a three-legged stool allude to utility, yet ridicule it at the same time. As with the other works in this show, the viewer was swept up in Nyland's attempt to create a fantasy world of unique, handmade objects whose purpose is not immediately apparent.

*Photo: Nicholas Nyland: Moth, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 65½ by 68 by 13 inches; at Prole Drift.*

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