

BROADWAY

John Riepenhoff
Milwaukee Nights and Decoys
June 9– July 15, 2022
Opening Reception Thursday June 9, 6-9pm

Like many of us over the past few years, John Riepenhoff curtailed his wanderings to spend more nights standing still. This was an especially peculiar condition for an artist whose practice is rooted in complex social networks and in creating opportunities for disparate communities to overlap. Broadly, his work has been committed to the collaborative. Through the production, preparation and consumption of food and beer, hand-built ovens and outdoor grills sited for community use, as well as organizing of contemporary art exhibitions, screenings and performances in his Green Gallery spaces, Riepenhoff is a multi-directional conduit for his beloved hometown of Milwaukee continuously importing and exporting cultural production of his own and by others.

As an ongoing component of this production, the artist has simultaneously maintained a more conventional studio practice focused on painting and ceramic sculpture. The *Skies* paintings originate in an ongoing series of *plein air* works initially conceived as direct, earnest impressions of the night sky. Made outdoors under impairment of the dark, cold and often awkward conditions on a rooftop, a beach or a frozen field, the paintings have evolved into a more durational, meditative investigation of place and the act of painting. Earlier works in this series were made swiftly in a single midnight frenzy, as a record of a peripatetic existence and befitting the artist's hunger for the unknown. They were painted in far-flung locales from Scotland to Japan to remote areas of Northern Wisconsin. The new paintings, by contrast, are notably more fastidiously worked and reflect a newfound stasis. They are intensified by the hybrid impressions of multiple nights outside in Milwaukee's light-filled urban density. The result is a group of complexly layered compositions of limited palette and expansive imagination. Dense clusters of repeated marks—dots, orbs, staccato stripes—occupy the center of the works and fan out to the perimeter of the linen like haloed frames or a screenspace that demarcates the eye's limitation in apprehending a vast and variable emptiness.

Fittingly, the two sculptures, hand-built from coil-constructed ceramic and splashed with glaze, depict owls. Called *Decoys*, these silent unseen denizens of the night sky watch over the exhibition mirroring the artist and viewer's gaze conjuring the inky conditions of the work's creation. As a perceptual device, the *Decoys* emphatically remind us that the paintings are something more complicated than pure abstraction and invite us to transcend our familiar vantage.