



## Bold Play

At 24, with a freshly minted MFA, Bret Slater's making art waves from here to Brussels. | *By Steve Carter* |

Enter Bret Slater—elated, exhausted and somewhat dazed. At a recent meeting, he hadn't slept at all following the 2AM phone call from Elaine Lévy Project, the gallery that represents him in Brussels. Hours earlier, Lévy reported, his work was the buzz of the Art Brussels Art Fair opening day, and sales were happening. That, plus his opening in a group show that very night in New York, plus the excitement of learning of a newborn niece he'd yet to meet, made for a big week.

Although Slater is himself a newbie, having completed his MFA at SMU last year, indications are he's on the fast track to international acclaim: *Modern Painters* magazine cited him as one of its "Top 100 Artists to Watch," and in another issue deemed his October solo exhibition at Chicago's Thomas Robertello Gallery among the "Top 100 Best Shows of the Fall 2011." Marty Walker Gallery is currently presenting his first local solo show, and you'd better get there fast ([martywalkergallery.com](http://martywalkergallery.com)).

While he doesn't bristle at being perceived as a minimalist or color field painter, and he does admire many artists associated with both, Slater doesn't see the connection. "I'm not even thinking about my painting as a composition anymore," he declares. "My work is about painting as object, and it can embody the essence of life, of a living being somehow. It's a living, nonliving inanimate being... You don't need a valid reason to make something that just needs to be made." The artist's acrylic-on-canvas works exhibit an uncanny sensuousness and Slater's bold abstraction has attained the level of the absolute. "My work is very anti-spectacular," he concedes. "I'm not about trying to 'wow' people."

Originally from the Bronx and later Westchester County, 24-year-old Slater's most significant artistic epiphany was encountering Piet Mondrian's canvases at the The Museum of Modern Art in his freshman year at School of Art+Design at Purchase College, SUNY. "It wasn't just lines, squares and rectangles: It was thick and very handmade," he recalls. "I realized that a painting can be an object that exists on a wall—it doesn't have to be an image of something; it can be a thing." He also credits Robert Ryman, Kenneth Noland, Blinky Palermo, Otis Jones and Ron Gorchov, among others, as influential. Slater's recent paintings have a playful, almost anthropomorphized sense to them, like multiple inner portraits of the psyche that channeled them to canvas. "Now it's almost like the work is telling me what to do," he says. "It's so broken down to its bare essentials that the potential is infinite." ■



**PIGMENTS OF IMAGINATION**  
Clockwise from top left:  
"One Big Room, Full of Bad Bitches," "Edo," "Fraya" and "Manoverz," all 2012 and acrylic on canvas