



Jason Galbut, *Ivy*, 2023-2026

Material Logic: A Review of Jason Galbut's Exhibition, *Ivy*

By Anna Vickers

Published February 17, 2026

Jason Galbut's large-scale works approach painting through a lens of materially grounded yet seemingly incoherent logics. They register both painting's past and present, with constructed surfaces employing purposeful action through deliberate, methodical processes while also navigating a maze of contradictions and uncertainties.

Throughout the four works in the exhibition, there is a tension between material rigor and perceptual ambiguity. Intricate surfaces, resolute in their deployment, cover earlier decisions that remain partially visible, reflecting decisive uncertainty—an uncertainty also evident in procedural contradictions: order and cacophony; precision and excess; vast scale versus detailed gesture. Through the push and pull of methodical and disjunctive processes, the works resist linear engagement.

Galbut's paintings are enacted through deliberative procedure and embodied perception—holding clarity of construction in tension with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion: "The world is not what I think, but what I live through." Here, procedure does not resolve into lived experience, nor does embodiment resolve into structure; instead, each complicates the other. Present in the works are confident procedural action, sustained labor, weighty physicality, and reinforcement through elaborate construction; yet the perceptual field remains indeterminate.

David Joselit's notion of "painting beside itself," in which a painting's meaning unfolds through networks of material, social, and institutional relations that typically extend beyond the work, is folded back into the picture plane of Galbut's *Ivy* through its internal material and structural interdependencies. The work negotiates multiple discrete parts to form a single structure, signaling a drive toward stabilization and cohesion. Galbut's procedures physically support the work's fractured fragility with deliberation and certainty, yet its internal networks invite engagement; they do not need to be fully deciphered to be experienced. *Ivy* raises epistemological questions not only through depiction but also through presence—

what is this, why is it here, and what is it doing? Meaning emerges through the work's accumulated material decisions: construction, revision, fastening, and layering.

In Galbut's works, the presence of the body is implied through its absence. His paintings *Parade*, *Season*, and *Medal* become visually electrified costume dramas, with structure functioning like tailoring—shaping and containing expressive gestures that radiate with color, texture, and materiality. *Parade* comprises brightly colored straps harnessed around a reflective, platinum-leaf grid reminiscent of Alexander McQueen's metallic couture. Here, Galbut stages a material rebellion from within the constraints of the grid, a characteristic prevalent in all the works. Unlike the reductive, self-reflexive strategy of the early modernist grid, *Parade* re-coutures the grid as a site of affect. *Season*, composed of yellow, red, and orange painted straps intersected by 24-karat gold leaf arranged in diagonal lines, evokes McQueen's opulent imagining of the seasons. In *Medal*, interlocking pink and blue straps are laid over 24-karat gold leaf. Here, couture tips into gilded, saccharine excess. These strategies foreground the felt dimension of experience—emphasizing both the embodied impulse behind the work and the gap between language and painting.

Galbut's one-word titles are deliberate and direct, projecting confidence and certainty that mirror the boldness and coherence of his material processes. Despite an obsessive drive to construct and configure with meticulous attention and diligence, the paintings remain elusive. Through layers of uncertainty, what remains are the paintings themselves, a presence to be grappled with. As T. S. Eliot asks, "Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?" This question is uncannily present in paintings whose material logic accumulates without resolving, layering sense until synthesis becomes impossible. Knowledge here does not arrive at clarity but expands only to reveal its own limits.

In a moment defined by the erosion of physical contact, Galbut's insistence on material engagement resonates. The emphasis on care and precision in each work reflects a striving for resolution amid the turbulence of the human condition. Although demanding to make, Galbut's paintings do not impose demands on the viewer. Rather, they embody the understanding that painting is a slow medium—one that does not need to be fully understood.

© 2026 Anna Vickers. All rights reserved.