By Holly Myers
September 25, 2013, 3:12 p.m.

View as an ever-expanding aggregate, Joshua Aster’s paintings have the feel of so many pictorial Petri dishes, in which constituent elements of painting’s DNA – color, tone, shape, pattern, texture – are assembled in varying combinations and ratios and left to reproduce of their own accord. The result is a nuanced, playful abstraction that grows ever more complex as its genes continue to splinter and stew. In “Little Conversations,” Aster’s first exhibition with Sam Lee Gallery, he seems to have taken a step or two back. He’s shifted from acrylic and watercolor to oils, reduced his canvases to a modest, domestic scale not exceeding 24 inches, and introduced a range of new shapes, made by tracing the outlines of common objects found around the studio. Where many of the earlier works appeared layered and translucent, these are flat and opaque, heavier of step.

A similar air of curiosity prevails, however. They’re simpler paintings, but paintings that shimmer with promise of a new acquaintance – appealing “little conversations,” in other words, that leave one eager to see where Aster goes from here.

Sam Lee Gallery, 990 N. Hill St., #190, Los Angeles, (323) 788-3535, through Oct. 6. Close Sunday through Tuesday. www.samleegallery.com