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DAVID DIAO
LYDIA DONA
CHRISTIAN ECKART
STEPHEN ELLIS
PETER HALLEY
MARY HEILMANN
VALERIE JAUDON
RICHARD KALINA
SHIRLEY KANEDA
BILL KOMOSKI
JONATHAN LASKER
SHERRIE LEVINE
THOMAS NOZKOWSKI
DAVID REED
DAVID ROW
PETER SCHUYFF
PHILIP TAAFFE
STEPHEN WESTFALL
JOHN ZINSSER

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Curated by Pepe Karmel and Joachim Pissarro

Hunter College/Times Square Gallery
October 5 – November 10, 2012

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CURATED BY PEPE KARMEL & JOACHIM PISSARRO

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450 West 41st Street, New York, NY 10036

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1991 EXHIBITION

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

An exhibition like *Conceptual Abstraction* would normally be several years in the making; instead, it has been organized in several months. The fact that it has happened at all is due to the amazing generosity and the extraordinary hard work of many people.

This exhibition was proposed by the artist Valerie Jaudon, who had been a participant in the original 1991 *Conceptual Abstraction* at the Sidney Janis Gallery. She realized that this historic show would have a special resonance at this moment in time, when abstraction is once again front-page news in the art world. As a teacher in the Hunter MFA program and an important member of the Hunter arts community, Jaudon also identified Hunter's Times Square Gallery as the perfect venue for a new show of large-scale abstraction. She brought the exhibition idea to us and we immediately recognized the importance of the project, which promised, not just to revive a critical chapter in the history of recent abstraction, but also to play a catalytic role in the ongoing development of abstract art.

Great ideas alone don't make exhibitions. The realization of the exhibition and catalogue required the heroic support and effort of three distinct groups of people.

First, there are the artists involved, their studio managers and gallerists, and the collectors and curators who generously agreed to let us borrow their pictures. At a period of the year when most New Yorkers would rather be in the Hamptons or on a Greek island, a large number of people found the time to locate appropriate works for us and to arrange loans. We are tremendously grateful to Ross Bleckner, his studio assistant Nathan Dilworth, and Ron Warren at the Mary Boone Gallery; to David Diao and Postmasters Gallery; to Lydia Dona, Elga Wimmer PCC, and collectors Barbara and Howard Morse and Thomas Bark and Phillip Battaglia; to Christian Eckart, the Trépanier Baer Gallery, and the McClain Gallery; to Stephen Ellis and Dana Greenidge at the Von Lintel Gallery; to Peter Halley, Scott Dixon, his studio assistant, Ron Warren (again) at Mary Boone, collectors Celso Gonzalez-Falla and Sondra Gilman, and Scott and Margot Ziegler, and Carter Foster and Nicholas Robbins at The Whitney Museum of American Art; to Mary Heilmann and Cristian Alexa at 303 Gallery; to Valerie Jaudon and (again) Dana Greenidge at Von Lintel Gallery; to Richard Kalina and Jill Weinberg Adams at Lennon, Weinberg Inc.; to Shirley Kaneda; to Bill Komoski and Feature, Inc.; to Jonathan Lasker and Cheim & Read Gallery; to Sherrie Levine and to Anthony Allen, Steve Henry, and Joelle Te Paske at Paula Cooper Gallery; to Thomas Nozkowski and David Goerk at Pace Gallery; to David Reed and collectors Daniel K. Cantor and Michael Weinstein; to David Row and the Portland Museum of Art, Maine; to Peter Schuyff, Jim Schmidt, and Taylor Trabulus at the Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery; to Philip Taaffe, his studio manager Raymond Foye, and Georges Armaos at the Gagosian Gallery; to Stephen Westfall and (again) Jill Weinberg Adams at Lennon, Weinberg Inc.; and to John Zinsser and James Graham & Sons Gallery.

Even with the assistance of these artists, gallerists, and lenders, a large, ambitious exhibition like this one would have been impossible without the support of a group of wonderful

donors who share our enthusiasm for abstract art. We are extremely grateful for the generous support of Thomas Ammann Fine Art AG, Zurich; The Bershad Exhibitions Fund; The Broad Art Foundation; The Steven A. and Alexandra M. Cohen Foundation; Dorothy Lichtenstein; Ninah and Michael Lynne; Robert Mnuchin, L&M Arts; Tracey and Phillip Riese; Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin M. Rosen; and YoungArts. This exhibition would also not have been possible without the passionate support of Hunter College President Jennifer R. Raab, as well as Daphne Halpern and Eve Levy, who championed the project with energetic enthusiasm.

Finally, the organization of the exhibition and the production of the catalogue have depended on an extended effort by the staff of the Hunter College Art Galleries and their colleagues that truly qualifies as above and beyond the call of duty. Michelle Yun, Curator of the Hunter College Art Galleries, played an essential role in planning the exhibition and in arranging the first round of loans. Midway through work on the exhibition, Michelle accepted a well-deserved invitation to join the Asia Society as curator for modern and contemporary art, a new position for which she is ideally suited. We wish her well, and look forward to enjoying her exhibitions up the street from Hunter. Fortunately for us, Michelle had recently been joined at Hunter by Assistant Curator Annie Wischmeyer, who then took on the main burden of organizing this exhibition. Despite having only recently arrived from St. Louis, Annie quickly proved herself expert in the ways of the New York art world, and kept the project moving forward. Grace under pressure doesn't *begin* to describe her performance. More recently, Sarah Watson has arrived as the new Curator of the Hunter College Art Galleries. Miraculously, Sarah and Annie have produced not one but two major exhibitions in their first weeks on the job: both *Conceptual Abstraction*, at the Times Square Gallery, and the *Times Square Show Revisited*, at the Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Gallery. Without their extraordinary, non-stop work this show would never have happened.

The physical presentation of the exhibition has also depended on the hard work of Tim Laun, MFA Building Manager and Senior Lab Technician, Phi Nguyen, and Jake Hanitschak, who have overseen the reconstruction of the galleries and the installation of the works of art. Jessica Gumora, Curatorial Assistant to the Director, has helped us keep the project organized, funded, and on schedule.

This catalogue has been laid out by the extraordinary team of Natalie Wedeking and Tim Laun (wearing yet another hat). They came up with the remarkably elegant design, and have tirelessly responded to our endless requests for further tweaks to the layout. They deserve all credit for the outrageous DayGlo cover. Sarah S. King, Diane Armitage, and Christofer Degré at SNAP Editions have meticulously edited the text despite working on an impossible production schedule.

Finally, we would like, once again, to acknowledge the essential role played by our colleague Valerie Jaudon, who not only suggested the theme of the exhibition but has also advised us throughout, complementing our curatorial perspective with the point of view of an artist who has been a key participant in the history of abstraction for over thirty years.

Joachim Pissarro

Bershad Professor of Art History
Director, Hunter College Art Galleries

Pepe Karmel

Associate Professor
New York University

FOREWORD

JOACHIM PISSARRO

In November of 1991, the Sidney Janis Gallery opened the groundbreaking *Conceptual Abstraction* exhibition under the auspices of Carroll Janis, with the collaboration of the painter Valerie Jaudon who coined its title. This was, in effect, one of the last shows at a gallery long associated with the rise of post-war art in New York. Founded in 1948 by the intrepid dealer Sidney Janis, the gallery played a major role in the development of Abstract Expressionism; in 1962, it showcased the first major Pop Art show, and by the nineties it had become synonymous with blue chip Modernism. *Conceptual Abstraction*, however, was a radical departure for a gallery better known for representing a roster of established artists that included such luminaries as Fernand Léger, Piet Mondrian, Jackson Pollock, and Claes Oldenburg. Organized at a time when abstraction had fallen into disfavor, the original exhibition included a new generation of painters who strayed from modernist notions of non-figurative painting and instead built their abstracted visions on fresh aspects of a newly surfaced reality—be it decorative patterning, direct appropriation, geometric constructions, or language. This initiative by the Janis Gallery spurred a plethora of similar group exhibitions around the New York art world, serving as a lively platform for debate on the state of painting at the end of the twentieth century. Moreover, *Conceptual Abstraction* demonstrated that abstract painting remained a vital and progressive option for contemporary art, and it could be argued that the current renaissance of abstract painting began with this 1991 exhibition.

Some twenty years later, the Hunter College Art Galleries have undertaken the task of revisiting this turning point in abstract painting's history. The Janis exhibition was prescient in identifying the members of a core group of young artists who have evolved to become leaders within the contemporary painting scene. Through the lens of these diverse and exciting individuals, the exhibition offers a unique opportunity to trace the trajectory of abstraction from the nineties to today. This reassessment brings back to life a crucial, though largely uncharted, passage in recent art history, and will help artists, critics, curators, collectors, and historians evaluate the survival of abstract painting beyond Modernism, and in the wake of the digital revolution.

It is a testament to the strength of the exhibition that all twenty artists from the original exhibition—Ross Bleckner, David Diao, Lydia Dona, Christian Eckart, Stephen Ellis, Peter Halley, Mary Heilmann, Valerie Jaudon, Richard Kalina, Shirley Kaneda, Bill Komoski, Jonathan Lasker, Sherrie Levine, Thomas Nozkowski, David Reed, David Row, Peter Schuyff, Philip Taaffe, Stephen Westfall, and John Zinsser—heartily agreed to participate in Hunter College's examination of this critical moment in their careers. We are grateful to them for their generous collaboration as well as to guest Curator, Pepe Karmel, Associate Professor in the Department of Art History at New York University, for undertaking the heroic task of recontextualizing this rich subject. Valerie Jaudon, Professor of Art at Hunter College, should also be thanked for her foresight in proposing the project for consideration, and for her invaluable contributions to the organization of the exhibition.

Conceptual Abstraction was motivated by Hunter College's stellar MFA painting program, whose talented faculty and students have allowed the Department of Painting to consistently excel as one of the top ten programs in the country. As the cyclical viability of painting continues to ebb and flow, this exhibition comes at a timely moment to reconsider painting's dynamic history and to further this dialogue in order to inspire a new generation of emerging painters.



Installation views of the 1991 exhibition *Conceptual Abstraction* at the Sidney Janis Gallery.

Top, from left to right: works by Jonathan Lasker, Thomas Nozkowski, and Shirley Kaneda.

Center: works by Valerie Jaudon, David Reed, and David Diao.

Bottom: works by Philip Taaffe, Bill Komoski, and Stephen Ellis.

Photos courtesy of Carroll Janis.

STILL CONCEPTUAL AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

PEPE KARMELE

The original *Conceptual Abstraction* exhibition opened at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York in the fall of 1991. Abstract art was out of fashion, and the news that a blue-chip gallery like Janis was doing a show of new abstract painting stirred up excitement in the community of abstract artists, inspiring competing surveys at other galleries and a raft of articles by artists and critics. When the show opened, the reaction was ... well, no one was quite sure what to say about it. Today, more than twenty years later, new abstract art turns up regularly in galleries and museums. It gets a lot of buzz, but, even now, no one is quite sure what to say about it.

It seems like a good moment to take stock. To see how far we've come, the Hunter College Art Galleries are presenting a new iteration of *Conceptual Abstraction*, reuniting the original group of twenty painters: Ross Bleckner, David Diao, Lydia Dona, Christian Eckart, Stephen Ellis, Peter Halley, Mary Heilmann, Valerie Jaudon, Richard Kalina, Shirley Kaneda, Bill Komoski, Jonathan Lasker, Sherrie Levine, Thomas Nozkowski, David Reed, David Row, Peter Schuyff, Philip Taaffe, Stephen Westfall, and John Zinsser. The exhibition includes twenty paintings from the era of the original show and twenty paintings from the last few years, juxtaposing them to show how each artist has evolved and grown; it demonstrates the continuing vitality of each of these remarkable artists, and also the vitality of abstract painting as a medium. The time has come to stop thinking of abstraction as something found in the history books, and to recognize it instead as an art that speaks to our experience of the here and now.

Let's begin, all the same, with some history. The Sidney Janis Gallery was legendary as a platform for abstract art. From its foundation in 1948 to its closing in 1998, the gallery showed Europeans such as Piet Mondrian, Josef Albers, and Jean Arp; and Americans such as Arshile Gorky, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko, and Adolph Gottlieb. (This was in addition to non-abstract masters such as Pablo Picasso, Fernand Léger, Jean Dubuffet, and Alberto Giacometti, all of whom strongly influenced abstract art.) Beginning in the early 1960s, Janis also showed Pop artists such as Claes Oldenburg, George Segal, and Tom Wesselmann, causing some of the Abstract Expressionists to depart. After Sidney Janis retired in 1986 (at the age of ninety), his son Carroll Janis assumed full direction of the gallery. By this time, Segal and Wesselmann were the mainstays of the exhibition program, but the gallery continued to show younger abstract artists such as Valerie Jaudon. It was Jaudon who, in 1991, suggested to Carroll Janis that the gallery do a survey of new abstract painting.

Of course abstract painting had never actually disappeared. Second-generation Abstract Expressionists such as Helen Frankenthaler, Michael Goldberg, and Nicolas Carone were still hard

at work at the start of the 1990s, often making some of the best pictures of their careers. So were minimalist painters such as Brice Marden, Robert Ryman, and Robert Mangold. However, it seemed to Jaudon and to Janis that these artists belonged to a modernist tradition that saw abstraction as a struggle to get down to the “essence” of painting, stripping away everything related to figuration and the outside world. Jaudon had been a participant in the Pattern and Decoration and Feminist movements of the 1970s and early '80s, which saw abstraction as an inherently referential aesthetic, linked to age-old traditions of ornamental craftsmanship. Similarly, the Neo-Geo painters of the mid-1980s—including Bleckner, Halley, Levine, Taaffe, and other painters such as Peter Nagy and Gary Stephan—looked to the histories of art and ornament as readymade sources of imagery and meaning. What interested Jaudon and Janis were these new movements that treated abstraction as a way of talking about the world, not a way of escaping from it.

News that Janis was preparing a survey of new abstract painting percolated quickly through the art world, provoking other galleries to offer their own assessments of the state of abstraction. *Conceptual Abstraction*, curated by Jaudon and Janis, opened in November 1991, accompanied by *La Metafisica della Luce* at John Good, organized by art world impresario Demetrio Paparoni. Work by Ross Bleckner, Lydia Dona, Stephen Ellis, Peter Halley, Jonathan Lasker, David Reed, and David Row appeared in both exhibitions. Later that fall and winter there were more exhibitions: *Aesthetic Abstraction* at Tibor de Nagy; *Stubborn Painting: Then and Now* at Max Protetch; *There is a Light that Never Goes Out* at Amy Lipton; *Shades of Difference: The Feminine in Abstract Painting* at Sandra Gering; and *Abstract Painting: The '90s* at André Emmerich, curated by Barbara Rose.

Confronted with this tidal wave of new abstraction, the critics in the mainstream press were lukewarm: they felt that many of the artists were making good pictures, but that the varied surveys did not reveal a coherent movement or a radically new approach to abstraction.¹ The most interesting responses came from the artists themselves. The catalogue of *Conceptual Abstraction* included important statements by the artists in the exhibition (reprinted later in the present catalogue). Shirley Kaneda seemed to speak for all of the artists in declaring that “the period of reductivist modernism is over.” Noting the irrelevance of Abstract Expressionism, Stephen Westfall dryly commented, “It’s hard to find too many painters of my generation who make the existential act of painting a foregrounded theme of their work.” The formalism that dominated the discussion of abstraction in the 1960s seemed equally out of date. Valerie Jaudon observed that, “To have an exclusively visual experience in the presence of an abstract painting is now understood to be an impossibility...[the] autonomy of painting is not dependent on self-reference.” Rather, she insisted, “Abstract painting is being transformed by an expanded discourse that acknowledges the significance of language.” Bill Komoski also invoked a linguistic metaphor, stating that, “...in my own work I am interested in the simultaneous appearance and disappearance of codes of abstraction and representation.” Stephen Ellis insisted that painters needed to learn to move freely within an “intricate web of allusion” to earlier artistic styles. Similarly, Westfall argued that:

The expanded visual field of reference, the crushing omnipresence of the market, and the permeation of mass production and reproduction have created an ongoing cultural condition of hyper-contextualization. Whatever incantatory frontier of expression awaits individual painters may lie in the act of embracing, rather than rejecting this condition.

Many of the artists in *Conceptual Abstraction* also contributed to the discussion of “The New Forms of Abstraction” in *Tema Celeste*, an art magazine edited by Demetrio Paparoni, who had curated *La Metafisica della Luce*. The three special issues that Paparoni devoted to this topic included texts by

dozens of artists, critics, and art historians. Among the artists, Halley and Ellis addressed the situation of contemporary abstraction in general, rather than discussing their own work. Like Jaudon, Halley rejected conventional formalism, which denied the relationship between abstract painting and “larger historical and cultural forces.” If abstract art before World War II was shaped by the utopian ideologies of the era, he argued, later abstraction responded to the collapse of these ideologies, with the result that alienation became “the guiding impulse behind abstraction.” Contemporary abstraction reflected the “essentially abstract” character of the American landscape, where people live in planned communities, work in office parks, and relax in shopping malls.² Ellis argued, as had Kaneda, that the modernist “logic of depletion and negation” no longer provided a model for abstract art. It had been replaced by a new style of “syntactical abstraction,” making pictures whose meaning derived from “relationships between fragments of previously existing units (historical idioms originally conceived as complete in themselves).”³

The critics who participated in the *Tema Celeste* debate offered a more skeptical view of contemporary abstraction. Reprising his influential 1984 lecture on “the end of art,” Arthur Danto argued that earlier abstraction had mattered deeply because it was unfolding according to laws of historical necessity dictating the kind of abstract painting that *had* to be made at a certain moment. In contrast, in the pluralist 1990s, many kinds of abstraction were possible, but none of them mattered much.⁴ David Carrier, another philosophically trained critic, questioned whether the history of art had truly come to an end: perhaps it was merely one particular narrative about the history of art that had concluded, leaving the door open to other narratives.⁵ Donald Kuspit contrasted the “spiritual inwardness” of earlier abstract painters, from Mondrian to Rothko, to the “profound intentionlessness” and “narcissistic quagmire” of the new abstract artists. Taking up swords against Peter Halley and Stephen Ellis, he denounced artists who wrote “intellectually hyped articles justifying their appropriation and manipulation of the abstract look of the past, liberated from the investment in inwardness it once signified.”⁶ Saul Ostrow compared the new abstract aesthetic of juxtaposition to the mix-and-match sensibility of Postmodernism. Like Kuspit, Ostrow was generally suspicious of postmodern art, which he felt merely “reiterated and reconfirmed” the alienated imagery of commodity culture. Postmodern abstraction escaped this stricture, however, because of its “intuitive, arbitrarily illogical and impetuous structure.” Its “confusion and indeterminacy” allowed it to resist commodification.⁷

Looking back at the debates over abstraction in the early nineties, several broad areas of consensus stand out. Everyone agreed that canonical Modernism was dead, and that the new abstraction was characterized by heterogeneity and allusiveness. Some critics saw these qualities as defects while others saw them as virtues. But even the champions of the new abstraction seemed to feel that something was missing. As David Row stated in the *Conceptual Abstraction* catalogue, there was no “Grand Unified Theory” of the new abstraction. Each of these issues deserves closer examination.

The “death of modernism” did not mean that the new abstract painters had any less admiration for modernist artists. What they opposed were the critical theories summed up in Shirley Kaneda’s phrase, “reductivist modernism,” a compound of Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried, Rosalind Krauss, and Yve-Alain Bois, along with artist/critics such as Robert Morris and Donald Judd. All of these writers made different arguments, but they seemed to share the belief that what defined the avant-garde was the struggle to uncover the essential qualities of art. The simplicity and clarity of the reductivist model gave it tremendous authority. Furthermore, it privileged abstract art: abstraction was what was left after you eliminated everything else. But it turned out this privileged position was actually a prison cell.

Danto acknowledged that this “modernist” theory of art derived from Hegel’s philosophy of history, which tried to pierce the veil of the historical record and perceive its inner logic, replacing a

dizzying chronicle of random events with a coherent narrative of significant actions.⁸ From Hegel, the modernist theory of art inherited four key assumptions:

1. *Necessity*. In the closed world of Hegelian narrative, nothing ever happens by chance. The path of history is predetermined, although for the abstract consciousness that both makes and experiences history, this path is not known in advance.

2. *Hermeticism*. As a corollary, in Hegelian narratives, nothing happens because of interactions with characters outside of the original cast. In the reductivist model of the avant-garde, once abstract art has liberated itself from figuration, its development is determined by a process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis entirely internal to the history of abstraction.⁹ Jackson Pollock is the thesis, Barnett Newman the antithesis, and Frank Stella the synthesis. The actual history, in which Jasper Johns played a catalytic role in Stella's development, must be ignored.

3. *Exclusivity*. The reductivist model whittles history down to a concentrated drama with a small cast of characters. For Hegel, Napoleon Bonaparte was a "world-historical figure," embodying the triumph of modern rationality over feudal particularism. The other participants in the French Revolution were just supporting players. Similarly, for reductivist art history, Pollock was important because he invented all-over-painting; Newman, because he got rid of brushwork. The other Abstract Expressionists were just footnotes.

4. *Finality*. Hegelian models imply that history will come to an end. For Hegel, the evolution of society culminated in the Prussian bureaucratic monarchy; for Marx, in the triumph of communism over capitalism.* Greenberg and his followers applied this model to art history. Eventually, reductivist modernism would get down to the "essence" of painting, and then there simply wouldn't be anything more to do or say. This didn't mean that painters would hang up their brushes. But whatever they did wouldn't be historically or philosophically important.

A non-reductive history of abstract art would replace each of these assumptions with its opposite:

1. *Contingency*. The evolution of abstract art has no hidden, predetermined logic.

2. *Responsiveness*. The development of abstract art constantly responds to external factors. The most important of these is figurative art. Far from being internally generated, most of the important features of abstract art derive from non-abstract models. Mondrian's grid came from Cubism. The biomorphic forms of 1930s abstraction came from Arp, Miró, and Picasso, all of them figurative painters. The compositional structure of Pollock's drip paintings came from Picasso's interlace pictures of the 1920s. What allowed Pollock to break through into his own style was reworking his "Picassos" with poured paint—a technique he learned in the studio of the Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros. The rigid bands of Stella's black paintings of 1959 were inspired by the regular stripes of Johns' 1954-55 *Flag*; the soft folds of Robert Morris' "anti-form" sculptures; and by the drooping fabric of Oldenburg's *Giant Soft Fan*.

3. *Inclusivity*. At any given moment, there are many kinds of abstract art being made. There is no *a priori* way to decide which are important and which are not. A given critic will favor some kinds of art and neglect others, but History does not play favorites. On the contrary, the history of taste reveals a constant process of revision, in which "major" artists are demoted, "minor" artists are promoted, and the list of "important" movements frequently changes. The historian's job should be to understand how the history of art has actually developed, not to arbitrarily privilege some parts of it and ignore others.¹⁰

* Norman Cohn suggests in *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (1957) that the belief in the end of history is a holdover from millenarian Christianity.

4. *Open-Endedness*. There is no pre-determined conclusion to the history of art, or of abstraction. At certain moments, abstract art will appear to have exhausted its possibilities. This seemed to be the case in 1936, when the editor of *Art News* responded to Alfred Barr's historic exhibition of *Cubism and Abstract Art* with the observation that, "The bone carvings of the Scythians and the hair-locks of the Victorians" were "arts no deader than the stony corpses of cubism and non-objectivism."¹¹ Ten years later, geometric abstraction experienced a renaissance in Latin America, and Abstract Expressionism emerged in the United States. By 1959, Abstract Expressionism was widely seen to have deteriorated into a new academy, but Color Field painting and Minimalism revealed unforeseen new possibilities for abstraction. There are pauses and transformations in the history of art; there are no conclusions.

What would a non-reductive history of abstraction look like?¹² To begin with, it would survey the different formal languages used by abstract artists without trying to fit them into the Procrustean bed of a "necessary" evolution. For abstraction since 1970, this would mean reviewing the ways in which abstract art has incorporated the visual qualities of photography, documentation, architectural plans, textiles, and industrial waste; and how it has explored the expressive possibilities of the heap and the spill, the carpet and the cave, the simulated gesture and the brush-painted drip.

Second, a non-reductive history of abstraction would acknowledge the porous border between abstraction and figuration. As a rule, critics of abstraction are remarkably nostalgic. They see the era of Vassily Kandinsky, Piet Mondrian, and Kazimir Malevich as a golden age, followed by the silver age of Abstract Expressionism, the bronze age of Minimalism, and the leaden age of Postmodernism. Modernist abstraction is "pure," homogenous, original, and sincere. Postmodern abstraction has been contaminated by figuration: it is "impure," heterogenous, appropriated, and ironic, the unholy love child of Minimalism and Pop. Actual history tells a very different story. "Modern" and "postmodern," defined in these terms, do not correspond to successive eras in the history of art. Rather, they are contrasting sensibilities that have coexisted within Modernism since its inception. Claude Monet was "modern," Édouard Manet "postmodern"—similarly El Lissitzky and Kurt Schwitters, Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, Ad Reinhardt and Jasper Johns, Donald Judd and Robert Morris, Kenneth Noland and Frank Stella.

Third, art history needs to look seriously at the subject matters of abstract art. Sometimes abstraction offers a generalized or thinly veiled image of a recognizable motif, as with Theo van Doesburg's famous cow, transformed step by step into an arrangement of colored rectangles. More often, however, abstract images only allude to their subject matter, evoking some feature of it, while suppressing any kind of resemblance, even the most generalized. The "realism" of Malevich's *Pictorial Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions* lies in the fact that it presents a real color and a real shape on a flat surface. The red square does not look anything like a peasant woman. However, its redness alludes to the red garments typically worn by Russian peasant women, as in Malevich's 1911 canvas *Taking in the Harvest*. Whether the reference occurs by generalization or by allusion, abstraction always has some kind of subject matter. What is striking, given the tumultuous history of abstract art, is how relatively constant the list of subject matters has remained. They fall into six basic categories: anatomies, landscapes, cosmologies, architectures, fabrics, and signs. These persist in contemporary abstraction, although they are sometimes hard to recognize.

Anatomies. Early abstract artists, such as Van Doesburg or Morgan Russell, were often obsessed with the challenge of evoking the human body by geometric forms. By 1925, this problem had effectively been solved. But the invention of a new, biomorphic vocabulary by Arp, Miró, and Picasso launched a new series of abstract anatomies. The biomorphic "blob" proved equally apt for representing a human body, a primitive micro-organism, or an internal organ, and was used for all three purposes in the abstract art of the mid-century. Because so much contemporary art traffics



Fig.1. Philip Taaffe. *Yellow Painting*, 1984. Linoprint collage, acrylic, and enamel on canvas, 76 x 76 in. (193 x 193 cm).



Fig.2. Ross Bleckner. *Wreath*, 1986. Oil on canvas, 108 x 72 in. (274.3 x 182.9 cm).

in very literal images of the human body, abstract artists have shied away from it, evoking the presence of the body by using skin-colored pigments or by resurrecting the blob in a cartoon style that simultaneously mocks and plays homage to mid-century modernism. In the present exhibition, Christian Eckart's early work looks back to Malevich's *Red Square*, evoking the body through color, while his more recent *Circuits Painting-Diptych* offers an understated, non-ironic reference to biomorphism. Although Thomas Nozkowski's materials and textures are completely different from Eckart's, the sausage-like forms in his earlier canvas are also biomorphic in character.

Landscapes. As Robert Rosenblum observed in *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (1975), the idea of the landscape as an image of natural divinity translated easily from realistic painting to abstraction. It is particularly notable in works from the 1920s and '30s by artists such as Paul Klee and Otto Freundlich. The sublime cloudscapes of Augustus Vincent Tack [1870-1949] return at mid-century in the abstractions of Clyfford Still.* Contemporary painters like Helen Frankenthaler and Gerhard Richter have continued to evoke the light and color of land, sea, and sky. In the present exhibition, the luminous brushstrokes of David Reed, expanding and contracting like the lobes of a cumulonimbus, offer a discreet allusion to the tradition of the Romantic landscape. The scumbled pigment of John Zinsser's *After Nature* provides a non-figurative equivalent to the hazy shimmer of the air on a summer afternoon while Nozkowski's recent painting offers a map-like view of a furrowed terrain.

Other painters, both realistic and abstract, have focused on the spectacle of the urban landscape.

* When I was a graduate student in the 1980s studying with William Rubin, then Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, he gave a "pop quiz" on Abstract Expressionism including a slide of an Augustus Vincent Tack. As I recall, every student in the class, myself included, replied that it was a Clyfford Still.



Fig.3. Vladimir Tatlin. 1919–20 maquette for *Monument to the Third International*.



Fig.4. Robert Smithson. *Spiral Jetty*, 1970. Mud, salt crystals, rocks, and water, 1500 ft. long and 15 ft. wide (457.2 x 4.6 m), Great Salt Lake, Utah. Collection of DIA Center for the Arts, New York.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, realist painters like Monet, Adolph von Menzel, and John Sloan captured the dynamism of crowds surging along avenues and boulevards. Umberto Boccioni and the Italian Futurists evoked the dynamism of city life in a quasi-abstract style combining the latticework of early Cubism with the sinuous curves of Art Nouveau. In 1942, Mondrian began work on *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* and Mark Tobey painted his own *Broadway Boogie* in an all-over, calligraphic style. Pollock's all-over compositions have also been interpreted as allegories of urban experience.¹³ A similar pulsating rhythm runs through Bridget Riley's paintings of the 1960s, and through the 1980s canvases by Philip Taaffe and Ross Bleckner that pay homage to her work [Figs. 1,2]. Although such repetitive patterns are usually seen as demonstrations of purely optical phenomena, they might also be read as representations of the hypnotic power of the mass media, whose pounding rhythms and overwhelming imagery compel us all to think and feel the same way.¹⁴

Cosmologies. The early history of abstraction is bound up to an embarrassing degree with spiritualist doctrines such as Theosophy, and with utopian dreams of space travel. Together and separately, these themes found visual expression in abstracted images of stars, planets, orbits, constellations, and galaxies. The spiral as a symbol of spiritual ascent took sculptural form in Vladimir Tatlin's maquette for *Monument to the Third International* in 1919-20, a moment when it was still possible to believe that communism was an expression of spiritual progress [Fig. 3]. Tatlin's structure was intended to house the new Soviet government, and to put it in harmony with the universe: the lower chamber of the parliament was to revolve once a year, the middle chamber with the executive offices once a month, and the upper chamber with the propaganda bureau once a day. The spiral returns as a symbol for entropy in Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* of 1970, allowing visitors to establish a new harmony between themselves and the universe [Fig. 4]. It reappears in David Row's paintings in the present exhibition. Another cosmological motif, the star chart, emerges in Picasso's drawings



Fig. 5. Helmut Federle. *New York Painting II*, 1980. Oil on canvas, 92 x 134 in. (233.7 x 340.4 cm). Courtesy Collection Peter Blum, New York.

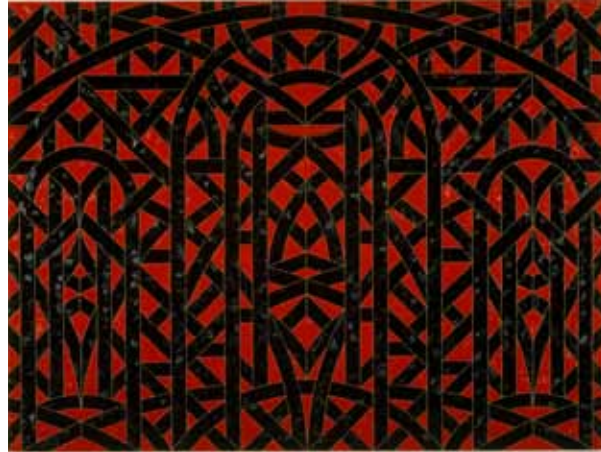


Fig. 6. Valerie Jaudon. *Aberdeen*, 1981. Oil on canvas, 102 x 136 in. (259.1 x 345.4 cm). Collection of Volvo, Gothenburg, Sweden.

of 1924, and returns in Miró's *Constellations* of 1941: random fields of stars coalesce briefly into meaningful configurations, and then dissolve back into randomness. After World War II, fields of stars appear in Lucio Fontana's relief paintings of *Spatial Concepts*, inspired by the imminent reality of space travel. More recently, quasi-photographic stellar fields have appeared in the drawings of Vija Celmins and the paintings of Bleckner, where they seem to serve as symbols of unstable meaning and hoped-for transcendence. Richard Kalina's most recent work, in the present exhibition, transforms the traditional star chart into a colorful, ecstatic image of a well-ordered universe.

Architectures. Here, we shift from the realm of the natural to the realm of the manmade. Architectures, fabrics, and signs are abstractions that become significant because of the purposes for which we use them. As early as 1914, Mondrian was making drawings of architectural facades and half-demolished buildings, whose abstract, "cubist" structures were imbued with meaning by the lives of their inhabitants. More recently, Helmut Federle has painted simple, haunting arrangements of rectangular shapes that seem like flattened versions of Giorgio de Chirico's shadowy streets [Fig. 5]. Row's shaped canvases, in the present exhibition, remind us that personal experience takes place within an architectural frame. Lydia Dona exposes the beauty of urban decay, while Halley's cheerfully colored images of cells and conduits evoke a neo-totalitarian architecture of seduction and surveillance.

Fabrics. As Joseph Masheck argued in "The Carpet Paradigm," published over thirty years ago, many of our ideas about abstract composition derive from nineteenth century decorative theory. The physical grid of warp and woof is the prototype for the visual grid of abstract art.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, then, abstract artists have often turned to carpets, fabrics, wallpapers, and wickerwork as models for abstract composition. If the women artists at the Bauhaus were relegated to the weaving workshop, they exerted an important influence on the male artists around them. In the 1970s and '80s, a new reevaluation of pattern and decoration was initiated by feminist artists like Miriam Schapiro and Jaudon [Fig. 6]. Many of the artists in the current exhibition, such as Kaneda, Taafe, Westfall, and Jaudon herself, continue to be engaged with patterning as a compositional device.

Signs. Writing and other forms of sign language provide rich material for abstract art. A written sign can function simultaneously as shape and signifier. It can be a personal mark or a conventional icon. Furthermore, the practice of signification includes not only the signs themselves but also the formal conventions for their presentation and arrangement. Ideographic and alphabet signs may be



Fig.7. Brice Marden. *Cold Mountain Series, Zen Studies #6*, 1991. Etching, spitbite aquatint, sugarlift aquatint, and aquatint, 27 1/2 x 35 1/4 in. (69.9 x 89.5 cm).



Fig.8. Glenn Ligon. *Untitled ("I am an invisible man")*, 1991. Oilstick on paper, 30 x 17 1/4 in (76.2 x 43.8 cm). Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of the Bohen Foundation.

arranged in rows or columns, weighted or unweighted, punctuated or unpunctuated. Iconic signs may be framed or unframed, arranged on a two-dimensional surface or layered within a three-dimensional space, which may or may not resemble the stage-set space of Renaissance painting. From 1912 onward, artists such as Braque, Picasso, Schwitters, and Klee have explored the expressive potential of signs and frames. In contemporary art, the handmade, expressive mark has provided material for abstract artists such as Cy Twombly and Brice Marden [Fig. 7]. Other artists, from Jasper Johns to Glenn Ligon [Fig. 8], have incorporated the distinctive patterns of printed and stenciled lettering. Allan McCollum has emphasized the signifying power of the frame, even in the absence of individual signs.

In the Hunter College Art Galleries exhibition, Jonathan Lasker, David Diao, and Valerie Jaudon question the border between the gestural mark and the conventional sign, focusing the viewer's attention on the sign's material presence. Other artists focus on questions of framing. Christian Eckart uses his metallic frames as integral elements of his compositions, while Bill Komoski's paintings are haunted by the iconic presence of ghostly, painted frames. Stephen Westfall and Mary Heilmann emphasize and disrupt frames within the frame. Richard Kalina and Stephen Ellis open up gaps within the tabular structure of the grid, teasing the viewer with glimpses of sensuous brushwork.

All the artists in this exhibition make impure, conceptual abstractions. It should be clear, by now, that being impure and conceptual places them in the vital tradition of abstract art.

STILL CONCEPTUAL AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

NOTES

- 1 For a sampling of reviews, see Roberta Smith, "Art in Review," *New York Times*, December 27, 1991; Smith, "Abstraction: A Trend That May be Coming Back," January 10, 1992; David Carrier, "Afterlight: Exhibiting Abstract Painting in the Era of Its Belatedness," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 66, no. 7, March 1992, 60-61; Steven Henry Madoff, "New Lost Generation," *Art News*, vol. 91, no. 4, April 1992, 72-77; Mary Murphy, "Consciousness in the Abstract," *New Art Examiner*, June/Summer 1992, 16-20.
- 2 Peter Halley, "Abstraction and Culture," *Tema Celeste* (Siracusa, Italy, and New York), no. 32-33, Autumn 1991, 57-60.
- 3 Stephen Ellis, "After the Fall," *Tema Celeste*, no. 34, January-March 1992, 56-59.
- 4 Arthur Danto, "Post-Historical Abstract Painting," *Tema Celeste*, no. 32-33, Autumn 1991, 54-55. Danto's 1984 lecture, "The End of Art," is reprinted in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 81-115. Danto's argument that post-historical abstraction does not matter in the same way as earlier abstraction echoes Philip Roth's famous aphorism about the difference between culture in the communist East and in the capitalist West: in the East, nothing is permitted and everything matters; in the West, everything is permitted and nothing matters.
- 5 David Carrier, "Abstract Painting and its Discontents," *Tema Celeste*, no. 32-33, Autumn 1991, 77-79.
- 6 Donald Kuspit, "Fin de Siècle Abstraction: The Ambiguous Re-Turn Inwards," *Tema Celeste*, no. 34, January-March 1992, 53-55.
- 7 Saul Ostrow, "Strategies for a New Abstraction," *Tema Celeste*, no. 32-33, Autumn 1991, 66-71.
- 8 Danto, "The End of Art," 83-85.
- 9 As late as 1991, Peter Halley writes that, "most of the current discussion of abstraction continues to focus on the idea of abstraction as a stylistic device or invention, born out of artists' formal concerns; it treats abstraction as a phenomenon whose history can still be traced as a series of stylistic changes within the language of modernist art itself." "Abstraction and Culture," 57.
- 10 Lawrence Alloway, the English critic who coined the term "Pop Art," and an early proponent of a more inclusive view of the history of modern art, was much discussed by abstract artists of the early 1990s. See Richard Kalina, ed., *Imagining the Present: Essays by Lawrence Alloway* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).
- 11 Alfred M. Frankfurter, "The Cubists Go 'Round and 'Round: Two Abstract Shows," *Art News*, vol. 34, no. 23, March 7, 1936, 5.
- 12 The new approach to abstraction presented here comes from my book in progress, *Abstract Art: A Global History, 1910-2010*.
- 13 Rudolph Arnheim described Pollock's drip paintings as "the visual embodiment...of a life situation in which social, economical, political, and psychological forces have become so complex that at superficial inspection nothing predictable seems to remain but the meaningless routine of daily activities, the undirected milling of anonymous crowds." See Arnheim, "Accident and the Necessity of Art," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (Baltimore), vol. 16, no. 1, September 1957, 18-22.
- 14 For a more comprehensive survey of art from the 1980s and '90s responding to the Op Art of the 1960s, see Barry Blinderman, with Tom Moody, *Post-Hypnotic*, exh. cat. (Normal, IL: Illinois University Galleries, 1999).
- 15 Joseph Masheck, "The Carpet Paradigm: Critical Prolegomena to a Theory of Flatness," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 51, no. 1, September 1976, 82-109. In 2010, this seminal text was reprinted in book form by Edgewise Press.

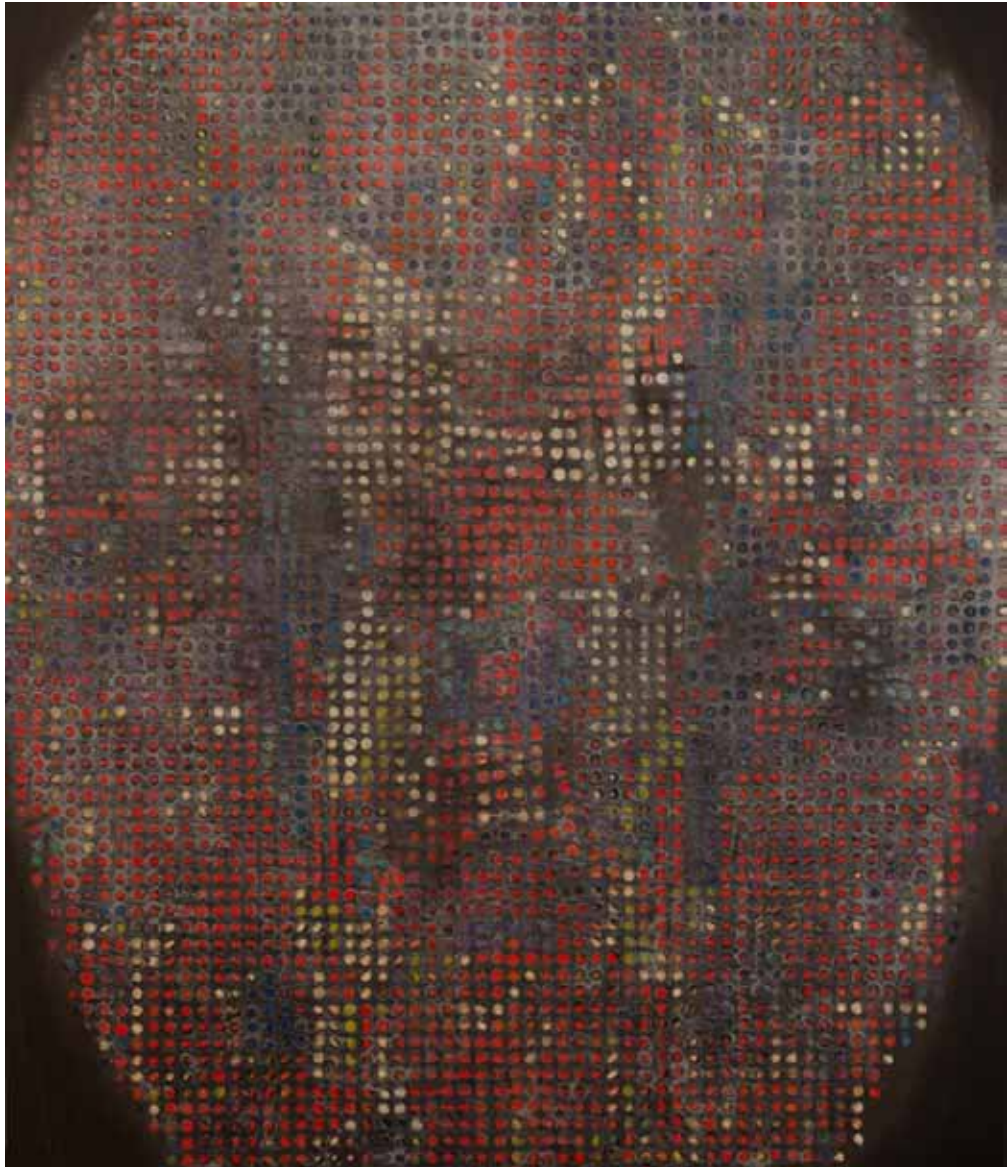
WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION
PEPE KARMEL

ROSS BLECKNER



Ross Bleckner. *Wind II*, 1991.
Oil and wax on canvas, 72 x 108 in.
(182.9 x 274.3 cm). Courtesy of
the artist and Mary Boone Gallery,
New York.

The black, white, and dun disks in *Wind II* could be particles of pollen floating in the air, or suns and planets jostling in the heart of a galaxy. Like Leonardo da Vinci's drawings of deluges or Vincent Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, Ross Bleckner's disks are charged with energy, expanding and compressing into clumps and whorls before the viewer's eyes. Bleckner introduces blurs and overlaps, the telltale signs of our fallible vision, so that the abstract image feels real—because it feels *seen*. His dark grounds, careful sequencing of layers, and use of white paint—simultaneously an encrustation and a dematerialized shimmer—evoke the sleight of hand of Old Masters like Tintoretto and Jacopo Bassano: now you don't see it, now you do.



Ross Bleckner. *A Brain in the Room*, 2012. Oil on linen, 84 x 72 in. (213.4 x 182.9 cm).
Courtesy of the artist and
Mary Boone Gallery, New York.

The galaxy of colored disks in Bleckner's 2012 painting resolves, upon inspection, into a transverse section of brain activity as captured by functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). Active regions deplete the oxygen in the blood they draw on, changing its magnetic charge and allowing the fMRI to record mental activity in real time. Science promises—or threatens—to reduce all thought and feeling to patterns of cells that flicker to life or remain darkly silent. And yet, dimly visible in the painting, amid the cauliflower folds of the cerebrum, and the globular masses of the thalamus and the caudate nucleus, there's a suggestion of eyes, mouth, and nose: the image of the human face, the ancient emblem of the soul.

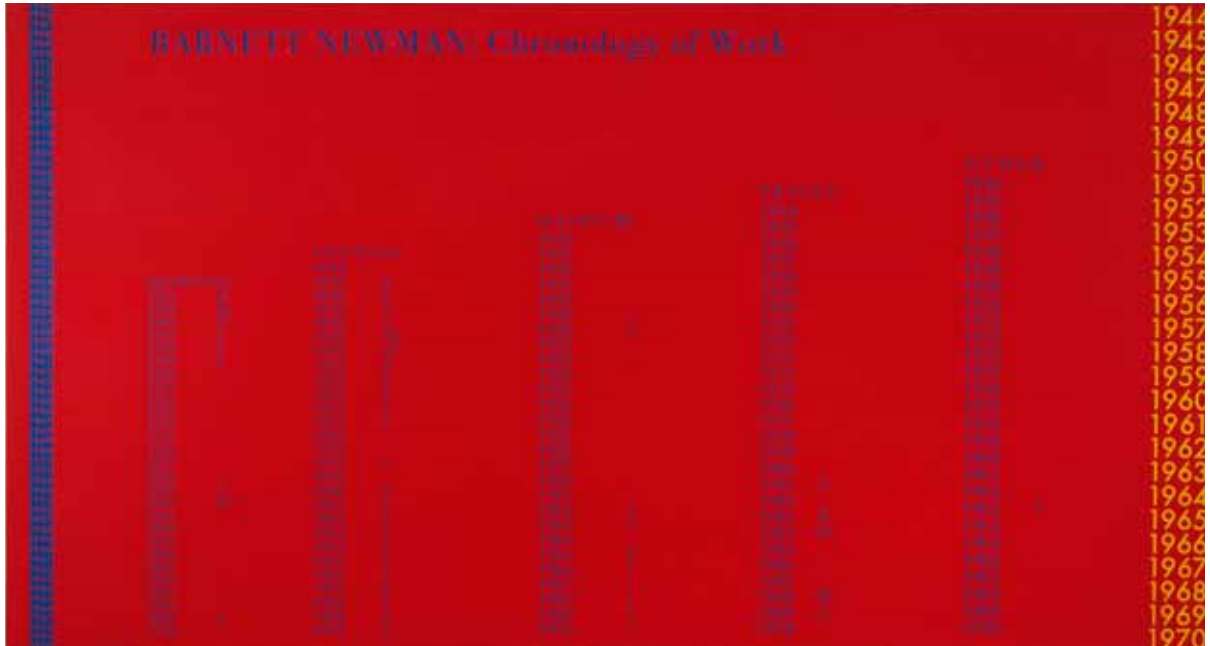
DAVID DIAO



David Diao. *Plus and Minus*, 1991. Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas, each panel: 79 x 127 in. (200.7 x 322.6 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Postmasters Gallery, New York.

Plus has silkscreens added 1991 to *Chinatown*, 1975. *Minus* has silkscreens added 1991 to *The Navigator*, 1978.

David Diao's work confronts a paradox. Figurative art invites us to look *through* the canvas at an imaginary scene, seeing something that isn't actually there. In contrast, abstract art demands that we pay attention to what is actually on the canvas—right in front of us. And yet we always end up relating abstract painting to something else that isn't there: to other paintings, to a theory of art, to history or biography. The two panels of *Plus and Minus* were begun in the 1970s as strictly geometric, high modernist images. In 1991, Diao reworked them, superimposing positive art reviews of his work onto *Plus*, negative reviews onto *Minus*. The viewer must alternate between the here-and-now of the beautifully painted surfaces and the mental space of the printed texts.



David Diao. *Barnett Newman: Chronology of Work (Updated)*, 2010. Acrylic and vinyl on canvas, 84 x 156 in. (213.4 x 396.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Postmasters Gallery, New York.

A chart in Brenda Richardson's 1979 catalogue *Barnett Newman: The Complete Drawings* inspired the first version of this picture, painted in 1990 (and included in the first *Conceptual Abstraction* exhibition). The publication of a definitive catalogue raisonné of Newman's work twenty-five years later moved Diao to paint an updated version in 2007. The starting point for both works is Diao's recognition that the stripes and bands of Newman's painting could be seen as translations of the underlying grids of printed texts and charts. In fact, Diao heavily revised Richardson's chart to make it into a simulacrum of Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, 1950-51. The column with the years of Newman's productive career appears just once in the original chart, but is repeated across the width of Diao's canvas, growing larger every time.

LYDIA DONA



Lydia Dona. *Biochemical Topographies and the Gaps of Dislocation*, 1992. Oil, acrylic, and enamel on canvas, 84 x 64 in. (213.5 x 162.5 cm). Collection of Barbara and Howard Morse.

Lydia Dona's paintings are reports from the front lines of America's decaying urban infrastructure. You can't look at *Biochemical Topographies and the Gaps of Dislocation* from a safe distance. You have to climb inside the painting, slide between the rusting girders and the blank concrete walls, and read the writing on the wall. The diagrams: are they sketches for construction, or for demolition? The olive-drab haze that fills the air: is it the glow after a summer storm, or the soot from burning tires? Dona's pictorial architecture descends from the grid of utopian modernism. But this ain't Ocean Park. Be sure you lock your car. Dona's drips are not joyous ejaculations—more like spastic flings of rage. Save your anger. You'll need it to get out.



Lydia Dona. *Urban Injuries*, 2010-11.
Oil, acrylic, and enamel on canvas,
60 x 66 in. (152.5 x 167.5 cm).
Collection of Thomas Bark and Philip
Battaglia. Courtesy of the artist and
Elga Wimmer PCC, New York.

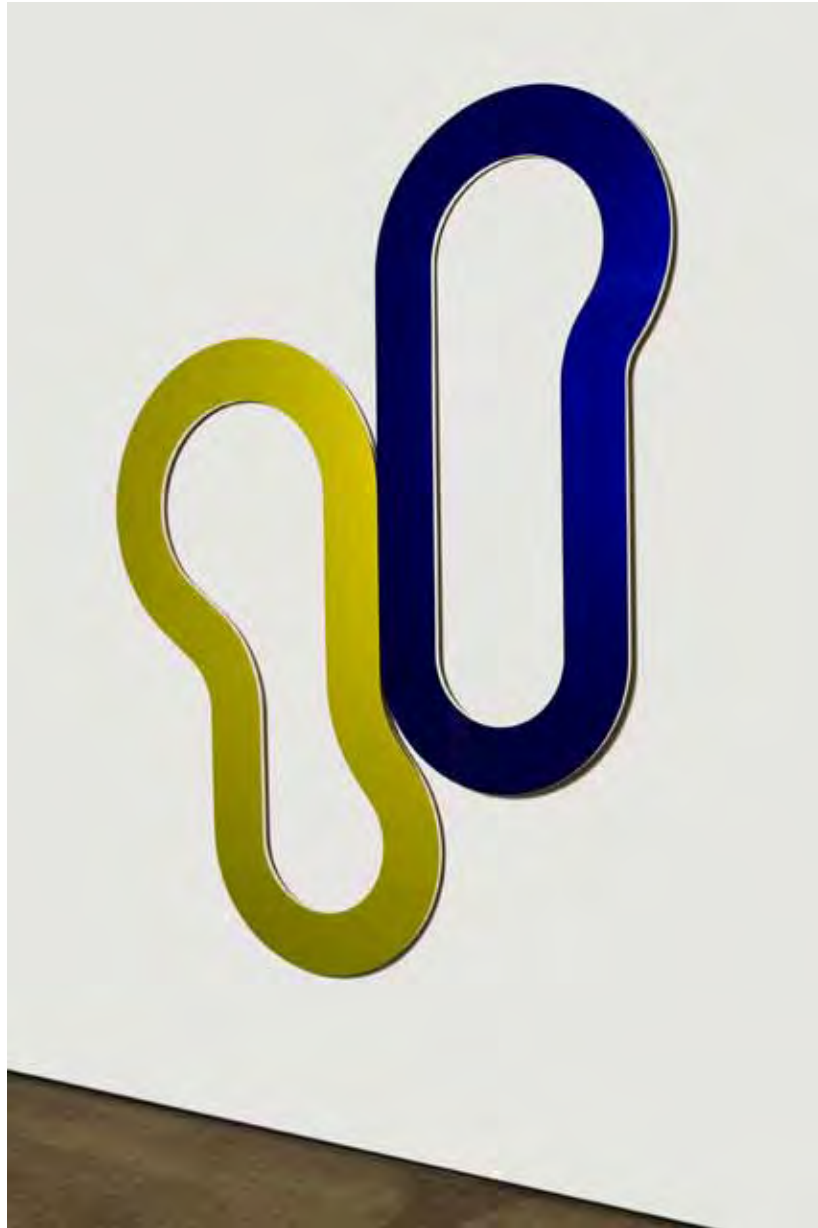
Fifteen years later, flames seem to leap from Dona's painting of *Urban Injuries*, but they look more like a celebratory bonfire than a general conflagration. Olive drab has given way to orange and gray, with unexpected touches of pink, white, and blue. Jackson Pollock, thumbs in his belt, is still hanging around the corners of the composition, but the wet-into-wet drips suggest mutual pleasure. Light-gray lines trace an off-kilter frame within the frame, like Mondrian on Prozac, trying not to be so OCD. The layered composition—transparent outlines over fields of modulated color—recalls David Salle's stunning paintings of the early 1980s, but the apple-bobbing children have turned into desiring-machines: pumps, valves, and pulleys, things you could fix with a wrench and a screwdriver.

CHRISTIAN ECKART



Christian Eckart. *Square Monochrome Painting*, 1991. Acrylic urethane on aluminum, 60 x 60 x 4 in. (152.4 x 152.4 x 10 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Trépanier Baer Gallery, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

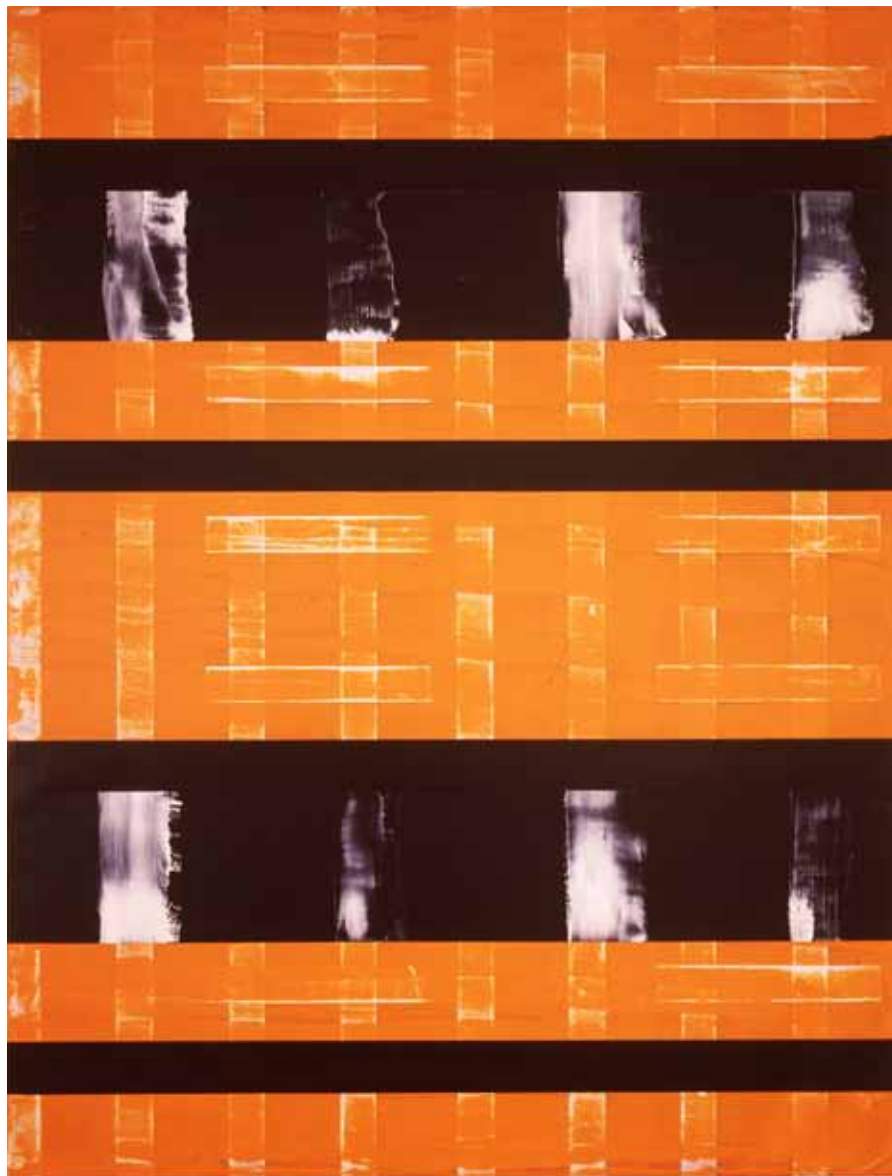
The materials of *Square Monochrome Painting* look back to Minimalism and Russian Constructivism. These movements rejected not only the illusionistic space of traditional painting but also traditional materials such as canvas and oil paint. They used sheet metal, house paint, and automobile lacquer to create an art of “real materials in real space.” For Christian Eckart, such materials are imbedded in a long history. The hand-polished layers of lacquer in his red square allude to the gleaming bodies of classic cars. But they are also meant to evoke the colored robes of the saints in early Renaissance paintings while the shining aluminum square recalls those paintings’ gilded frames and panels. The sacred is always with us, even if we sometimes fail to see it.



Christian Eckart. *Circuit Painting-Diptych*, 2006. Candy acrylic urethane on ½ in. aluminum plate, 84 x 54 in. (213.5 x 137 cm). Courtesy of the artist and the McClain Gallery, Houston.

In the more recent *Circuit Paintings* series, the center has been vacated, leaving us to stare into a void. Eckart says these paintings are “meant to be apprehended as a literal expression of the liminal ... turning the form we understand as a painting ... inside out.” Like Salvador Dalí’s watches, the frames have melted into disturbing curves, resembling the contours of cellular organisms, half alive and half inert. The odd shapes, and the title, *Circuit Painting-Diptych*, recall the tracks used for car races, where the basic oval circuits are often enhanced with turns and bulges to add difficulty and excitement. But they may also be intended to suggest the paths of pilgrims, circumambulating a holy shrine, prolonging their sojourn in the liminal space between everyday life and the divine.

STEPHEN ELLIS



Stephen Ellis. *Untitled*, 1991.
Oil and alkyd on linen, 96 x 72 in.
(243.8 x 182.9 cm). Courtesy of
the artist and Von Lintel Gallery,
New York.

Working within the “intricate web of allusion,” as he described it in the catalogue for the first *Conceptual Abstraction* exhibition, Stephen Ellis deploys familiar elements of abstract painting but recombines them in unfamiliar ways. The syntactic structure of his 1991 composition—a broad dark band paired with a narrow dark band, repeated twice—recalls Barnett Newman’s *The Name I*, of 1949. But Ellis’ composition has been rotated 90°, replacing the narrative progression of Newman’s painting with iconic symmetry. White stripes scumbled over the orange field suggest a grid without actually creating one. Where they cross the broad dark bands, every other stripe momentarily thickens, blurs, and disappears, like an unidentifiable detail in an old snapshot, or an X-ray of a stress fracture. In place of the utopian geometry of high Modernism, Ellis evokes a geometry of loss.



Stephen Ellis, *Untitled*, 2006.
Oil and alkyd on linen, 60 x 72 in.
(152.4 x 182.9 cm). Courtesy of the
artist and Von Lintel Gallery,
New York.

In Ellis' 2006 canvas, yellows and whites are pushed and pulled into swirling curves like the patterned endpapers of an old book. A menacing grid of dark bars is visible through the translucent color. Five red rectangles seem to float atop the yellow layer, marbled with strokes that almost, but don't quite match up with the yellow undulations. If Action Painting proposed an existential universe where a single brushstroke could mean the difference between life and death, Ellis' canvas reminds us that paintings are rarely made by single brushstrokes, and lives are rarely defined by single actions. We keep starting over, leaving behind an irregular trail of decisions and revisions, triumphs and fiascos. Remember: comedy can be more profound than tragedy.

PETER HALLEY



Peter Halley. *Sylvester*, 1991. Acrylic, Day-Glo acrylic, and Roll-a-Tex on canvas, 87 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 91 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (222.9 x 232.4 cm). Collection of Sondra Gilman and Celso Gonzalez-Falla, New York.

The rectangular cell in Peter Halley's pictures offers an image of the postmodern self: isolated, immobilized, and under surveillance. Sometimes it is furnished with prison bars, sometimes with a tiny chimney, or with conduits bringing in air, light, and sound. In Halley's early work, the conduits run underground, and enter the cell from below. Starting in 1985, they run through the air, and enter the cell from every direction. The painting could be a diagram of a microprocessor plugged into a circuit board; a hospital patient attached to drips and monitors; a swinger seeking polymorphous satisfaction. In another 1991 painting, *Superdream*, the central cell is hot orange while the ground beneath it is green; in *Sylvester* the cell itself is green, a natural refuge from the artificial energies pulsing around it.



Peter Halley. *Rainbow Six*, 2010. Acrylic, Day-Glo acrylic, and Roll-a-TeX on canvas, 73 x 75 in. (185.4 x 190.5 cm). Collection of Scott and Margot Ziegler, New York.

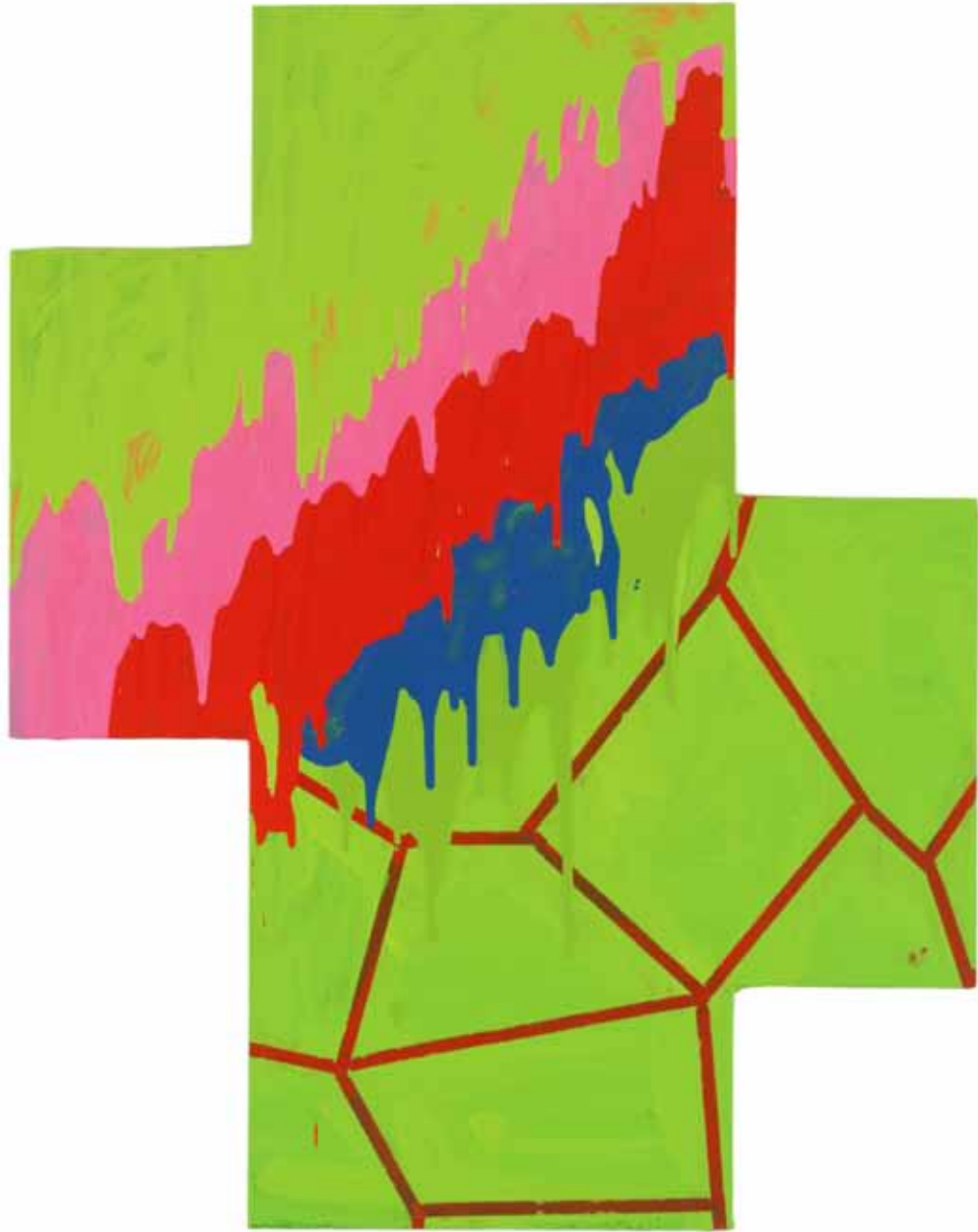
When two cells appeared in Halley's paintings of the 1980s and '90s, they were typically placed side-by-side, like two houses on a street or two warehouses in an industrial park. In his recent pictures, Halley often stacks cells vertically like mechanical units in a high-tech factory. The internal frames of textured Roll-a-TeX (Halley's ready-made parody of painterly impasto) enclose horizontal rather than vertical bars, so that the rectangles resemble voltaic piles (primitive batteries), with their alternating plates of zinc and copper. *Rainbow Six* was a 1998 novel by Tom Clancy (and a video game), in which an elite paramilitary team battles eco-terrorists who want to save Nature by wiping out the human race. Shock and awe in a box: soon coming to a country near you.

MARY HEILMANN



Mary Heilmann. *Violette*, 1991. Oil on canvas, 54 x 54 in. (137.2 x 137.2 cm). Courtesy of the artist.

People sometimes refer admiringly to the “slacker” quality of Mary Heilmann’s work: the way her pictures can seem like loose, casual sketches for other, more finished paintings she never bothers to make. But the easygoing, born-in-California charm of the work conceals a ferocious pictorial intelligence. Her distinctive notched canvases, one seeming to merge into the next, recall the overlapping views of Chinese landscape painting, or the sequential frames of a filmstrip. The two squares of *Violette* are joined by a glowing double spiral, like a designer hurricane, or a galaxy being born, or a reminiscence of Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty*. (Heilmann used to see him at Max’s Kansas City when she moved to New York in the late 1960s.)



Mary Heilmann. *Firey Pour*, 2011.
Oil on wood panel, 40 x 31 ¾ in.
(101.6 x 80.6 cm). Courtesy of
the artist.

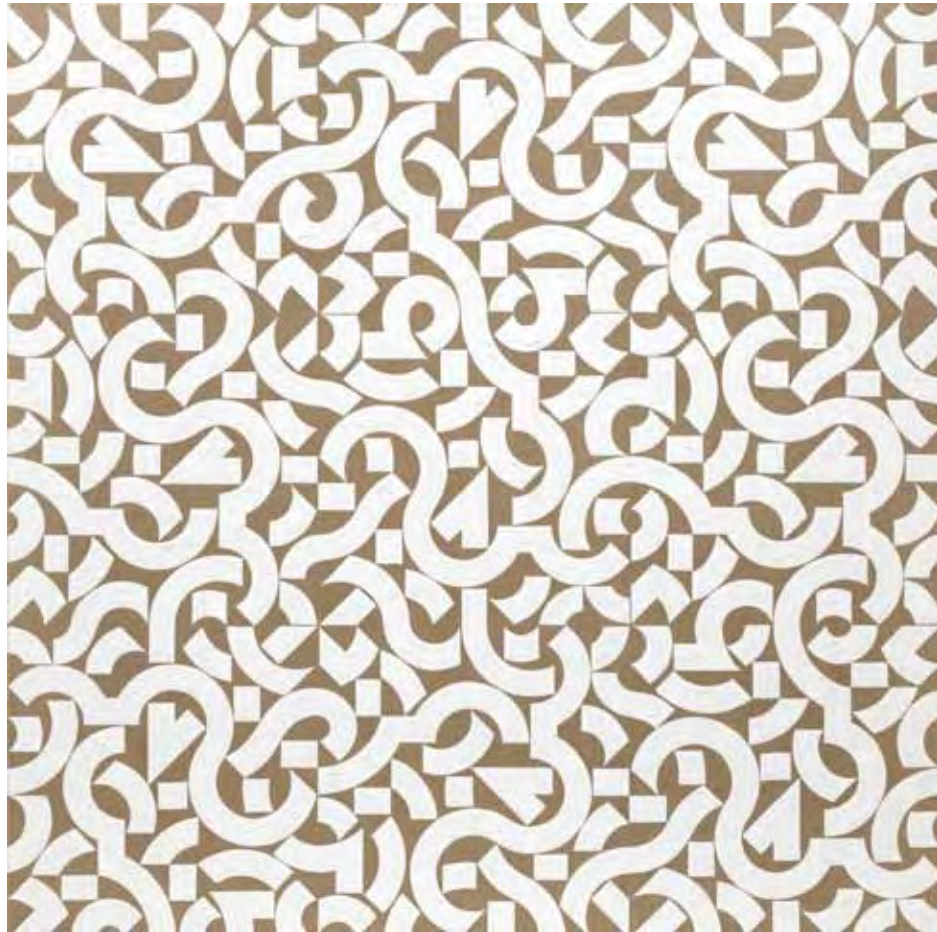
The elements of Heilmann's paintings all tend to have their own histories. The network of lines at the bottom and at right of *Firey Pour*, from 2011, turns up way back in 1991, in pictures like *Mode O'Day*—the canvas shown in the original *Conceptual Abstraction* exhibition. Later, Heilmann started juxtaposing the networks with fields of colored horizontal stripes that recalled Paul Klee's abstract seascapes of the 1920s. Beginning in 2004, in pictures like *Surfing on Acid* and *Winter Surf, San Francisco*, she reworked the seascape image, translating the rows of oncoming breakers into bands of curved, agitated brushstrokes. In *Firey Pour*, the Day-Glo breakers move implacably downward to flood the green landscape. It's the end of the world as we know it, and we feel fine.

VALERIE JAUDON



Valerie Jaudon. *Social Contract*, 1992. Oil on canvas, 90 x 90 in. (228.6 x 228.6 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Von Lintel Gallery, New York.

Take the number 6 downtown and get off at 23rd Street. The platform is divided by an iron screen of interlacing curves and angles: a 1988 design by Valerie Jaudon that translates her early paintings—simultaneously formalist and feminist—into a magical element of the city’s public space. In *Social Contract*, she deconstructs the interlace and reassembles its fragments into columns of cryptic ideographs. Their spreading and converging arcs evoke the movements of the human body: sometimes symmetrical and at rest, sometimes asymmetrical and in motion, sometimes repeated, and sometimes varied. The black bars dance in front of a checkerboard of white and tinted squares, falling in and out of alignment, offering, in their freedom and coordination, an image of the social contract.



Valerie Jaudon. *Topos*, 2009.
Oil on linen, 78 x 78 in. (198.1 x
198.1 cm). Courtesy of the artist
and Von Lintel Gallery, New York.

A palette of painful austerity: white paint on brown canvas. An overwhelming profusion of pattern, numbing and teasing the mind like a carved panel from the Alhambra. It *feels* as if the curves and angles in Jaudon's *Topos* reappear at regular intervals. You look for the pattern—the way you study the wallpaper in an old-fashioned bed-and-breakfast—but it isn't there. You find a few recognizable elements, like the pair of semicircles linked by a bar, extending at one end into a reverse S-curve. But when they do reappear, it's in different combinations and different orientations: there's no pattern there to grasp. *Topos* offers a parable: there is no language so impoverished that it can't describe the world, and none so rich that it can define it.

RICHARD KALINA



Richard Kalina. *In Absentia*, 1992.
Collage, acrylic, and flashe on
linen, 60 x 81 in. (152.5 x 205 cm).
Courtesy of the artist and Lennon,
Weinberg Inc., New York.

The United States is in the throes of a recession brought on by inflated real estate, a credit bubble, and banking fraud. A president struggles for re-election. It's 1992, the year that Richard Kalina painted *In Absentia*. The red, white, and blue of the American flag have turned gray and grimy, chopped up into checkerboards imprinted with headlines and advertisements like the visual static of a TV screen. At left, stores announce that they are GOING OUT OF BUSINESS. At right, a STOP sign warns of FINAL DAYS, but a headline anticipates a possible sunrise. Everything is IMPORTANT. At the top or bottom of each column, scumbled white brushstrokes struggle to emerge from the grid. Signs of disintegration or signs of salvation? It isn't clear. Stay tuned for further developments.



Richard Kalina. *Azimuth*, 2011.
Collage, acrylic, and flashe on linen,
70 x 40 in. (178.8 x 101.6 cm).
Courtesy of the artist and Lennon,
Weinberg Inc., New York.

How high is a star in the sky? How many degrees away from true North? Back on earth, things are much as they were twenty years ago—*not good*—but Kalina's new painting carries us up, up, and away, to a realm of celestial serenity. It's a collage, actually, built up from translucent slips of colored paper, square abutting square like the tiles of a Byzantine mosaic. Heaven is orange: even the sky has fallen off the gold standard. Lines of latitude and longitude, altitude and azimuth, are marked out with precision. At this speed, the stars are drawn out into ovals, and the Doppler shift reveals colors hidden from the naked eye. If it's a dream, try not to wake up.

SHIRLEY KANEDA



Shirley Kaneda. *The Distorted Gaze of Desire*, 1991. Oil on canvas, 72 x 74 in. (182.9 x 188 cm). Courtesy of the artist.

Is flatness the essence of painting? Then perhaps you would like a green monochrome. Or is it the framing edge? Stripes echo the edge quite nicely. We have a good selection of colors: red and white, red and yellow, red and green, black and white. Please ignore that sound; it's just the dogmas collapsing next door. Here inside Shirley Kaneda's painting, everything is seen through the distorted gaze of desire, and the clarity of geometry slips away from us. What are those curved, spiky microorganisms, swimming across the picture plane? They look like the heraldic emblems of provincial nobility, warped by excessive inbreeding. Or the sexual organs of exotic species, brightly colored to attract mates. Once geometry has been infected by desire, can we ever make it pure again? And why would we want to?



Shirley Kaneda. *Plumb Askew*, 2011. Oil and acrylic on linen, 72 x 63 in. (182.9 x 160 cm). Courtesy of the artist.

Waves of energy seem to flow unchecked across the picture plane—rhythmic pulsation has banished geometry. Yet, here, in what ought to be a paradise of raw sensation, something feels off. The waves have been posterized into narrow rivulets of green and black. There's no shading, no modeling, just stenciled bands of flat color. It looks as if Kaneda's painting once included a third color, inscribed in stripes and loops, but it's been deleted, leaving only interruptions in the black as signs of its former presence. It's an image of the ghost of energy. Like a politician on a muted television, the picture shouts and gesticulates without making a sound. Is it plumb or askew? We can hardly tell the difference.

BILL KOMOSKI



Bill Komoski. *Untitled (8/10/90)*, 1990. Acrylic on canvas, 84 x 60 in. (213.4 x 152.4 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Feature Inc., New York.

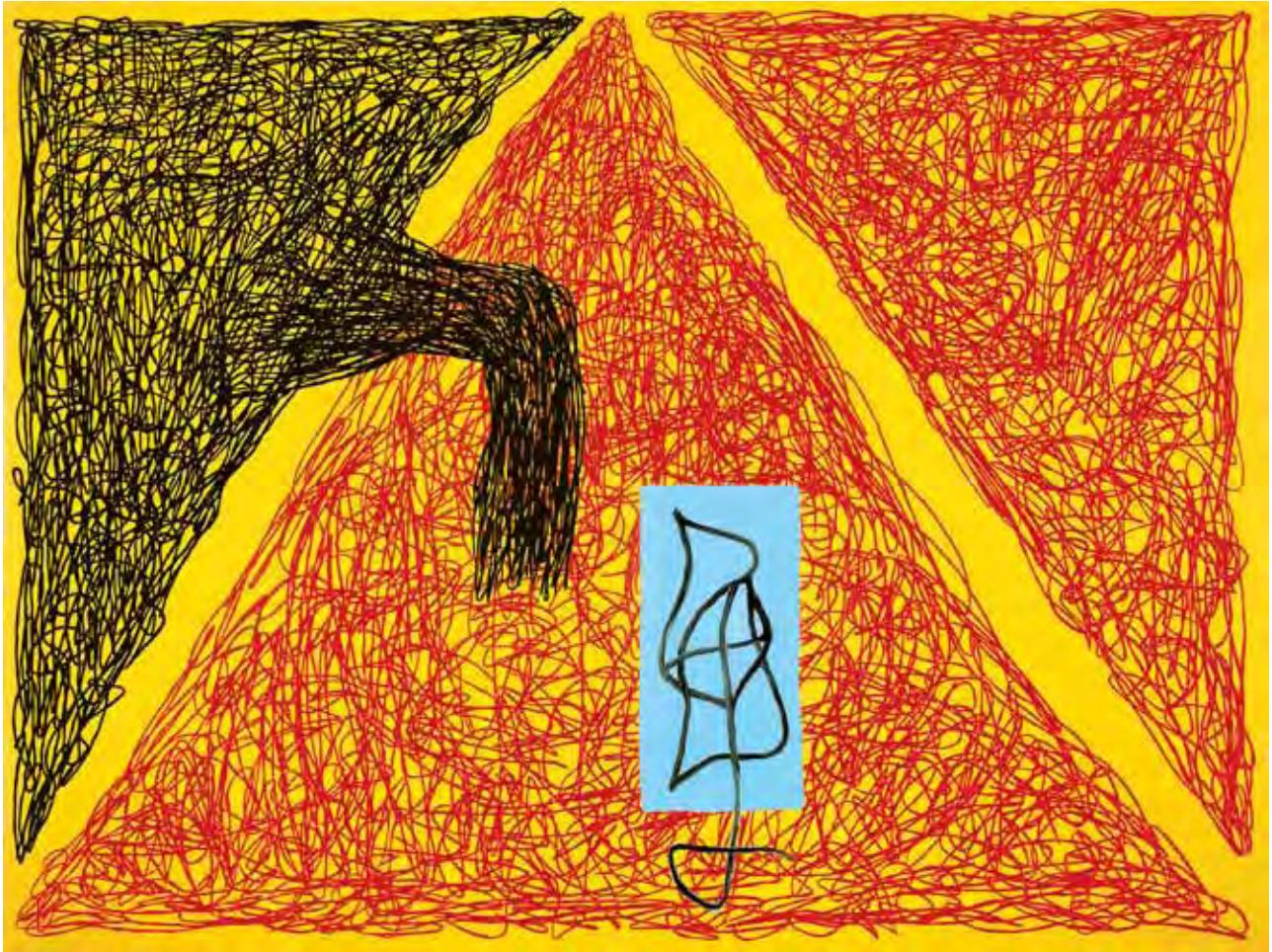
Bill Komoski's uncanny canvas feels haunted by the traces of things felt but not seen. A frame-within-the-frame announces an image that doesn't appear, like a mirror without a reflection. Along each edge, striations and patches of black paint evoke weather-beaten walls whose abstract patterning is the handiwork of nature, not man. The gray field shimmers with a blurry image of a cross, glowing like a cloud caught in the moonlight. The ghostly frame isn't a formalist device, it's a dark glass through which to see the world. Komoski reminds us of painting's magical ability to compel the conviction of reality not by reproducing the contours of things, but by reproducing the texture of material and the shimmer of light. He says: abstraction is the truest form of representation.



Bill Komoski. *10/3/11*, 2011. Acrylic on canvas, 94 x 74 in. (238.8 x 188 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Feature Inc., New York.

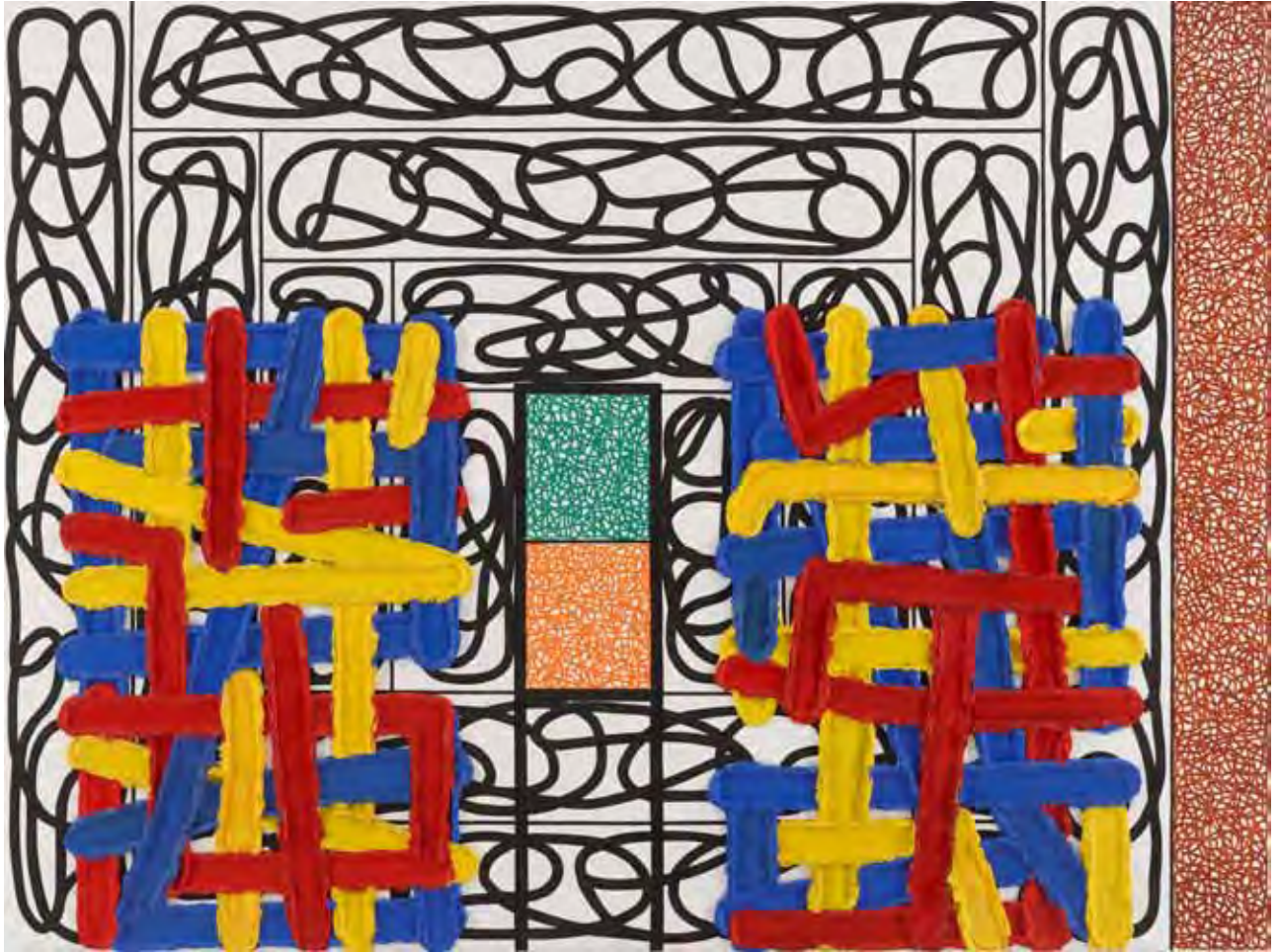
If you lifted your eyes to the summer sky at dusk and saw, not just the electric blue of impending night, but the actual universe beyond the sky, it might look something like this: a vision of the overlapping shards of multidimensional spaces, the densely-packed galactic cores where stars are born, and a web of narrow wormholes linking distant quadrants. Because we see with earthly eyes, Komoski depicts these things with familiar forms. His stars are rings of flame within the apertures of perforated screens, or bands of yellow and red expanding within rectangular frames. With the passage of years, Komoski's work gets denser and richer, enlisting the viewer as a partner in his ongoing quest to visualize the world as we know it, now, in the twenty-first century.

JONATHAN LASKER



Jonathan Lasker. *Born Yesterday*, 1989. Oil on linen, 77 x 102 in. (195.6 x 259.1 cm). Courtesy of the artist.

E.H. Gombrich argued that the evolution of art depended on an algorithmic process of making and matching. In each generation, artists learned to make conventional marks, and then adapted them to more closely match the things they wanted to depict, inventing new conventional signs that provided a starting point for the next generation. Jonathan Lasker takes us back to an early stage in this process, when artists had only a small repertory of primitive signs. Like the images on cave walls, his signs are arranged in simple relationships of contiguity and overlapping. Their contours are filled not with shading but with doodles, the autonomic motions of the hand. Yet, with these primitive signs, Lasker manages to represent the entire world, newborn, as if it had been created yesterday.



Jonathan Lasker. *The Inability to Sublimate*, 2009. Oil on linen, 75 x 100 in. (191 x 254 cm). Courtesy of the artist.

Lasker expands his repertoire of marks, dividing the picture surface into a series of nested boxes, and filling each one with a variety of doodles: some large, some small, some green and orange like a child's drawing of a Howard Johnson's, beckoning from the edge of the highway. Atop this grim rendition of the suburban panorama, he layers two repainted versions of Mondrian's *New York City*, with the Dutchman's hard-edged bands of red, yellow, and blue transformed into thick, unsteady strips of dense impasto. The urban grid is softened by the imprint of the human hand, and, if we all live in little boxes, at least there is room in them to be ourselves. Jay-Z was wrong: there *is* love in the heart of the city.

SHERRIE LEVINE



Sherrie Levine. *Untitled (Lead Knot: 7)*, 1988. Metallic paint on plywood, 52 1/8 x 42 1/8 in. (132.4 x 107 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

Growing from a tree trunk, branches leave scars that become visible when the trunk is shaved into sheets for plywood. Manufacturers fill in these “knots” with football-shaped plugs. In theory, Sherrie Levine’s knot paintings are simply sheets of B-grade plywood, their “footballs” highlighted with gold or lead paint: the composition of the paintings depends, Duchamp-style, on the accident of where the knotholes happen to be located. However, the grain of the plywood often seems to run without interruption through Levine’s painted knots, suggesting that the constellations of painted marks are partly found and partly invented. Are our emotional scars the inevitable result of growth? (R.D. Laing and Jacques Lacan spoke of psychic “knots.”) Or do we invent family constellations to make a better story?



Sherrie Levine. *Nature Morte: Copper Squares on Chocolate 1-4* (detail), 2012. Handmade paper, 4 sheets, each: 30 x 20 in. (76.2 x 50.8 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

Nature is dead, and all that's left is the grid. Not for Levine the pencil-thin lines of Agnes Martin or Sol LeWitt, but broad channels of chocolate brown, coursing between copper squares. The tall dark sheets look like Mies van der Rohe's Lake Shore Drive apartment houses, seen at night with light pouring from their windows, or like a row of golden retables, veiled behind wrought-iron grilles. Donald Barthelme: "Abstraction is a little heaven I can't get to." The deckle edges of the sheets seem to have been drawn by hand, the perfect gold squares seem stamped out by machine, but it's the other way round. Just as you're about to say, "subversive critique of the fetishized art object," Levine hits you with the drop-dead beauty of her work.

THOMAS NOZKOWSKI



Thomas Nozkowski. *Untitled (6-113)*, 1991. Oil on linen on panel, 22 1/16 x 28 1/8 in. (56 x 71.4 cm).
Courtesy of the artist and Pace Gallery, New York.

Thomas Nozkowski inhabits the history of abstract painting as if it were a neighborhood full of hardware stores and furniture showrooms, diners with cheap coffee, and restaurants with blue-plate specials. Like a great cartoonist, he makes things look more real than they do in real life. Except that you can't figure out what they are. The blobs linked in a ring: sausage links or cumuli? Behind them: a red tablecloth, or a red sky? The pale film around them: a herniated tendon, or a lace curtain? Nozkowski's picture is obstinately provisional. It seems as if he could take out a piece, insert something different, and the picture would still work just fine. This is what life is like, he says: you make it from what you've got on hand.



Thomas Nozkowski. *Untitled*
(8-120), 2009. Oil on canvas
board, 16 x 20 in. (40.6 x 50.8 cm).
Courtesy of the artist and
Pace Gallery, New York.

At first glance, the creamy blob in Nozkowski's 2009 painting looks like another body organ: a stomach or a cross-section of the small intestine, with cartoon villi poking inward. But the real action of the painting is in the striped areas around the blob. They transform the picture into an aerial infrared photograph of farmland, with a pond in the middle, two plots of straight furrows, an arc of contour plowing, and a burnt field at upper left. The colors modulate as the painting spirals outward: from creamy pink to washed-out black and red, to saturated black and red, to cool pink and green, and finally to black over red. There are many different ways to cultivate a field, all of them right, none of them wrong.

DAVID REED



David Reed. *#307*, 1991-92.
Oil and alkyd on linen, 26 x 108 in.
(66 x 274.3 cm). Collection of
Daniel K. Cantor.

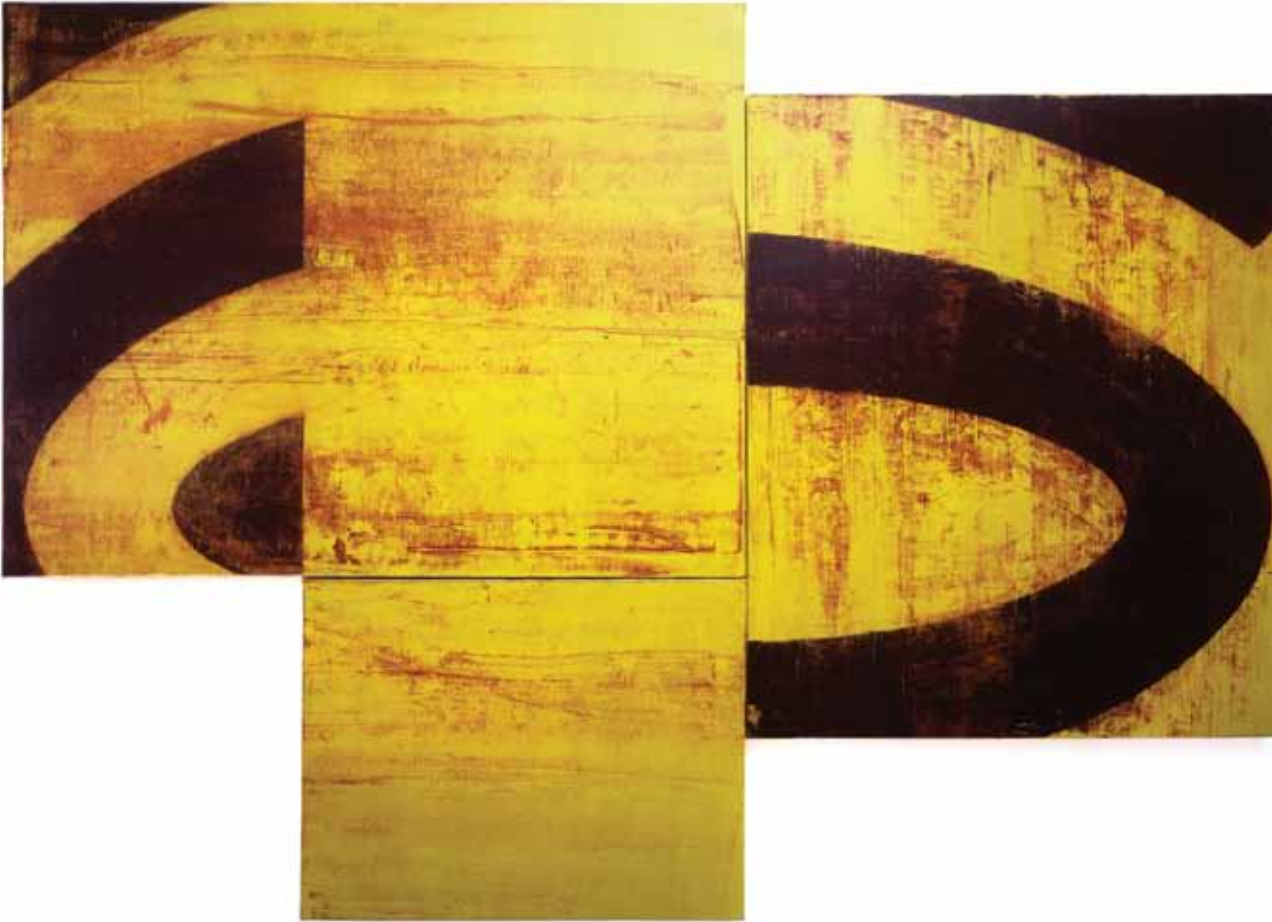
In the early 1950s, as television threatened, the movie studios fought back with panoramic images the cathode ray tube could not match. Television offered intimacy; movies offered the vast landscapes of the American West. David Reed's widescreen canvases translate the experience of both the actual West and its cinematic image. Curving bands of paint unfurl glamorously like clouds or waves—only photographed by George Hurrell instead of Ansel Adams. Reed divides his compositions into multiple frames, mimicking the cinematic experience of cuts, pans, and zooms. At the left of *#307*, a painted knot gets a close-up; at right, it burns against a roiling sky. Lipstick colors caress the canvas; squeegeed paint modulates from light to dark with a sensuous gleam. No wonder Reed calls them “bedroom” paintings.



David Reed. #576, 2007.
Oil on linen, 36 x 144 in. (91.4 x
365.8 cm). Collection of Michael
Weinstein.

In this work, Reed cuts from frame to frame like a film director obsessed with a sullen starlet. But the object of his obsession is a brushstroke. Once again she appears stage left, isolated and impetuous, caught in a crimson spotlight. Halfway across the painting we glimpse an energetic blue gesture, her pale counterpart. Separated by a world in flux, it seems unlikely they will ever meet. The tragedy plays out against a Neo-Realist setting. At left, bold chords of red and black announce the theme of conflict. Violence breaks out in flecks and smears of paint, silhouetted against a false dawn. Confrontations and negotiations fill the center of the composition. Finally we reach a coda of long, unhurried undulations, striding towards the horizon like a long-distance runner, full of hope.

DAVID ROW



David Row. *Split Infinite*, 1990.
Oil and wax on canvas, 86 x 116 in.
(218.4 x 294.6 cm). Courtesy of
the artist.

First published in 1917 and studied by generations of artists, D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's *On Growth and Form* showed that the transcendental logic of mathematics was at work in living creatures as well as in lifeless things: the laws that shape galaxies shape the snail's shell. David Row's *Split Infinite* is composed from a series of concentric ellipses like the orbits of the planets. But a glowing vertical panel has split apart the sides of the ellipses, and the remaining curved bands are colored alternating black and gold, so that they spiral outward to infinity: an aniconic icon. Beneath the Byzantine surface, rubbed and scraped, there seems to glow a red bole ground, reminder of the clay from which God made Adam.



David Row. *Ellipsis*, 2012.
Oil on canvas, 50 x 96 in. (127 x
243.8 cm). Courtesy of the artist.

After years exploring other motifs, Row returns in 2012 to his primal image of concentric ellipses, black against twilight blue. In the 1960s, when shaped canvases first appeared in North American art (they had been common in South America since the 1940s), they were intended to unite the picture's borders with its internal structure, or to make the borders themselves into a composition, silhouetted against the white wall. *Ellipsis* demonstrates a more complex relationship between border and composition. As in a photograph, the border redefines the image by cropping it, while the blue trapezoid, folding forward and obscuring the black elliptical bands, seems to carry the border into the painting's interior. Outside is in, inside is out: everybody's got something to hide.

PETER SCHUYFF



Peter Schuyff. *Untitled*, 1990.
Watercolor on paper, 10 ¼ x 7 in.
(26 x 17.8 cm). Courtesy of
Jim Schmidt.

It's said that Peter Schuyff painted this group of watercolors on a boat descending the Nile, dipping his brush in the river from time to time. His watercolors are as mind-bending as his large canvases of the time, but feel relaxed instead of obsessive. In the one reproduced here, glowing blue and green stripes have been laid in with deft, meticulous strokes, forming an irregular rectangle. Where the stripes overlap, they create narrow lines of darker blue-green. At left and right, Schuyff adds brown borders that veer off-course, travelling through the fertile interior of the image. Muddled by touches of water, the wandering lines become miniature riverbanks, blurring into reeds. Don't ignore the dabs of blue where he cleaned his brush, like a flock of marsh birds flying overhead.



Peter Schuyff. *Earth Shield*, 2006.
Oil on canvas, 48 x 36 in.
(121.9 x 91.4 cm). Courtesy of
Nicole Klagsbrun, New York.

In contrast to the pulsating optical fields of his earlier work, Schuyff's recent paintings often depict flattened disks with happy faces, or abstract 3D daisies, or panels of blobby lettering spelling out "LOVE" or "DOPE," like a roadside sign for a neo-hippie café in an L.A. strip mall. You could get a contact high at 60 m.p.h. *Earth Shield* depicts a wooden disk with a series of crisply carved concentric rings, and a woozy grid of brown and green stripes. Borrowing the format of Adolph Gottlieb's *Imaginary Landscapes*, Schuyff suspends the disk in a clear blue sky above a bleak, abstract landscape. A crowd of colored brushstrokes seems to gaze anxiously upward, wondering what rough beast slouches toward Bethlehem.

PHILIP TAAFFE



Philip Taaffe. *Desert Flowers*, 1990.
Mixed media on linen,
64 ¼ x 78 7/8 in. (163.2 x 200 cm).
Courtesy of the artist.

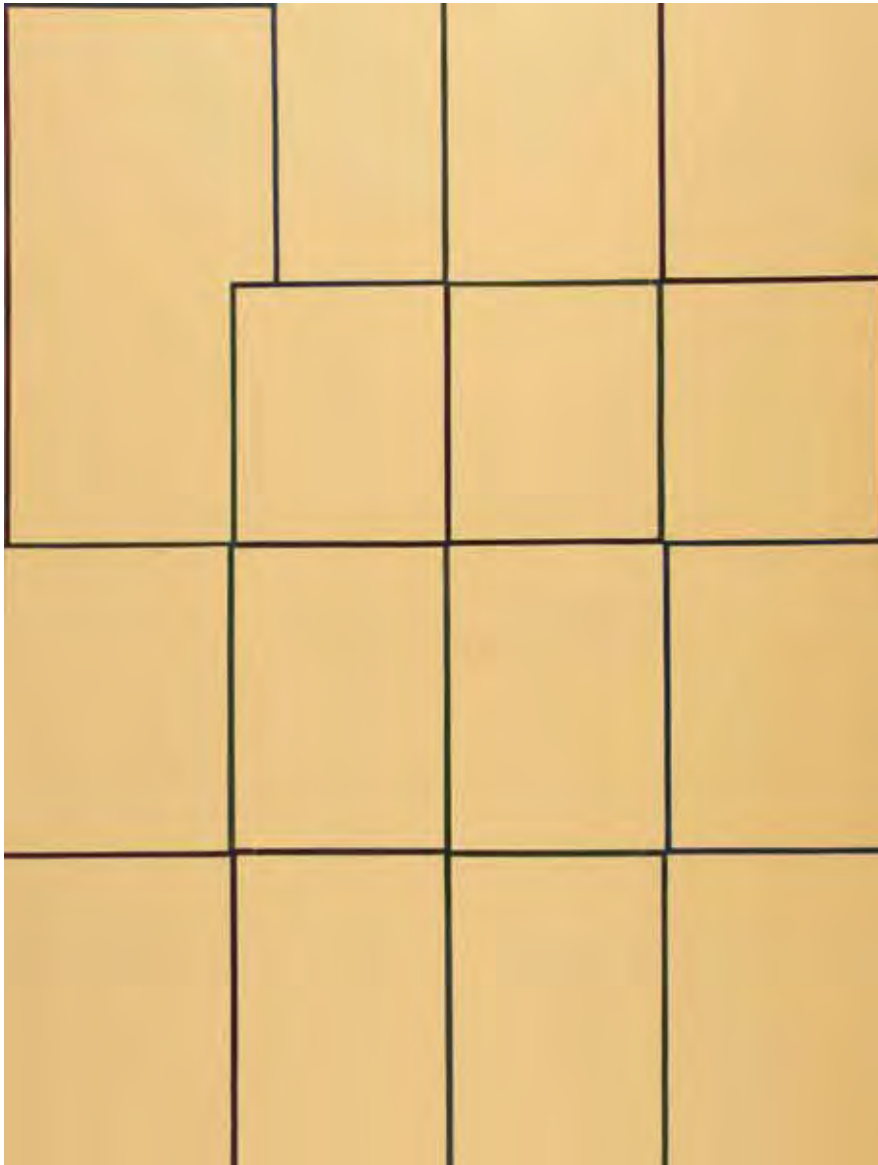
Philip Taaffe's paintings provoke the metaphysical vertigo of Jorge Luis Borges' *Ficciones*. Their individual elements come from the artist's vast archive of decorative art, natural history, and other recondite topics: a personal Library of Babel. Motifs are copied or redrawn onto stencils, silkscreens, and cardboard printing plates, and then applied to canvas in layered grids and arabesques. Earlier layers, overpainted or wiped away with solvent, linger as subconscious murmurs. Taaffe's flowers, here, are printed from the simplified, inverted silhouettes of ancient Roman anchors, mounted atop leaf-girdled stalks of acanthus. Elements repeat and permute across six seething columns. Taaffe describes his *Desert Flowers* as a response to the first Gulf War: their beauty a symbol of the fragility of civilization, their barbs a reminder of what it takes to survive.



Philip Taaffe. *Flowering Loculus*,
2010-11. Mixed media on linen,
80 ½ x 87 ¼ in. (204.5 x 221.6 cm).
Courtesy of the artist.

In *Flowering Loculus*, the first layer of imagery is painted atop a sky-blue ground; unfolding pairs of leaves are rendered in washes of red, brown, green, and yellow. Over this layer, light-green lines trace acanthus meanders (a classical version of the allover web) while darker greens and blues are used to draw an array of leafy, vertical plants. Heavily inked lines and shadows in the top layer describe ominous leaves—some spiky, some twisting like snakes, some flapping like bat wings—that seem to come from a 1950s horror comic book. Taaffe’s painting modulates from optical to tactile, from joyous to morbid, as it approaches the viewer. The *loculus* of the title could be the seed-bearing compartment of a pomegranate or a funerary niche in a catacomb: a “little space” of death and life.

STEPHEN WESTFALL



Stephen Westfall. *Claremont*, 1992. Oil and enamel on canvas, 70 x 53 in. (178 x 134.5 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Lennon, Weinberg Inc., New York.

Grids are not found in nature. It's been argued that this makes the grid the central image of modern art—precisely because it declares the autonomy of modern art. It might more accurately be said that the grid is a sign of *culture* as opposed to nature. Grids are, after all, found in textiles, chair caning, and buildings among numerous other manmade things. The black lines of Stephen Westfall's *Claremont* don't align perfectly at their intersections. They define rectangles of uneven height and width. The rectangle at upper left is twice as high as all the others, and is overlapped by one of its neighbors, disrupting the flatness of the composition. It feels like an open pane in a casement window, letting fresh air into the space of orthodox abstraction.



Stephen Westfall. *Nature Boy*,
2012. Oil and alkyd on canvas,
60 x 80 in. (152.5 x 203 cm).
Courtesy of the artist and Lennon,
Weinberg Inc., New York.

Westfall's 2012 painting parodies the obsessive logic of 1960s abstraction. The picture plane is divided and subdivided—the internal bands of the diamond align with the diagonal stripes in the four corners. But the kaleidoscopic colors make the diamond stand out from the picture plane like a ziggurat rising from a sea of carpets, or, more precisely, like the central medallion of a Buddhist thangka. Within the central mandala: four walls, four gates, eight paths to salvation. Black and white: the fundamental duality of the universe. Yellow-green and gray-green: the natural world. Pink: the temptations of the flesh. Red, yellow, and blue: the clarity of the spirit. Westfall's painting is a garish billboard for transcendence. St. Augustine: *Oh Lord, help me to be pure—but not yet.*

JOHN ZINSSER



John Zinsser. *White Star Line*,
1991. Oil and enamel on canvas,
84 x 60 in. (213.4 x 152.4 cm).
Courtesy of the artist.

White Star Line reinvents Abstract Expressionism with the methods of Process Art. John Zinsser began the painting with a silver ground scraped into horizontal bands. He then coated it with a transparent resin, shaped into vertical ridges by plastic sheeting dragged downward. A layer of black paint was applied and then scraped away with a squeegee. Turpentine wash removed more paint. Finally, Zinsser glazed the painting with cobalt-violet, counteracting the coldness of the black and silver. Like the protagonist of Carl Jung's "night sea journey," the viewer is drawn into the depths of the picture, confronting the threat of psychic disintegration. You struggle back to the surface, gasping for breath, intensely alive. The pride of the White Star Line was the *Titanic*: survive that.



John Zinsser. *After Nature*, 2007.
Oil and enamel on canvas, 90 x 72
in. (228.6 x 182.9 cm). Courtesy of
the artist and James Graham
& Sons Gallery, New York.

Zinsser often begins work on a picture by applying color in blobs and loops over a monochrome ground, then dragging the paint into bands with a knife, or stamping a grid into it with a metal plate. The canvas starts out looking handmade and ends up looking mechanical. He began *After Nature* by spreading cadmium orange irregularly across the glossy black ground, leaving gaps where he wanted the black to remain visible in the finished picture. Transferring the canvas from the floor to the wall, he pulled a broad knife upward through the orange paint, creating the vertical columns. Zinsser speaks of the areas where the black ground shimmers through the scraped orange paint as “half-tones,” like the graduated shades of Andy Warhol’s silk-screens. Think of *After Nature* as an abstract disaster.



Installation view of the 1991 exhibition *Conceptual Abstraction* at the Sidney Janis Gallery.
Left to right: works by Sherrie Levine, Peter Halley, Stephen Westfall, and Valerie Jaudon.
Photo courtesy of Carroll Janis.

CATALOGUE OF THE 1991 EXHIBITION *CONCEPTUAL ABSTRACTION*

The 1991 exhibition at the Sidney Janis Gallery has provided the inspiration and the point of departure for the present exhibition and catalogue. In our selection of paintings made in and around 1991, it has been our goal to evoke the experience of the earlier show but not to try to recreate it exactly. Under these circumstances, it seems useful to reprint the Janis catalogue as an essential historical document for the history of abstraction. On the following pages, we have reproduced the catalogue in its entirety, including not only the plates—black and white in the original—but also the collection of artists' statements, which brilliantly illuminate the critical debates and artistic goals of the era. We hope this will provide a stimulus to further historical research. It should also be noted that the plates in the original catalogue do not correspond precisely to the actual selection of works included in that exhibition, as can be seen in the installation photographs reproduced in the introductory essay of the present Hunter Art Galleries catalogue.