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PRESENTS

FRAMING ABSTRACTION:

MARK, SYMBOL, SIGNIFIER

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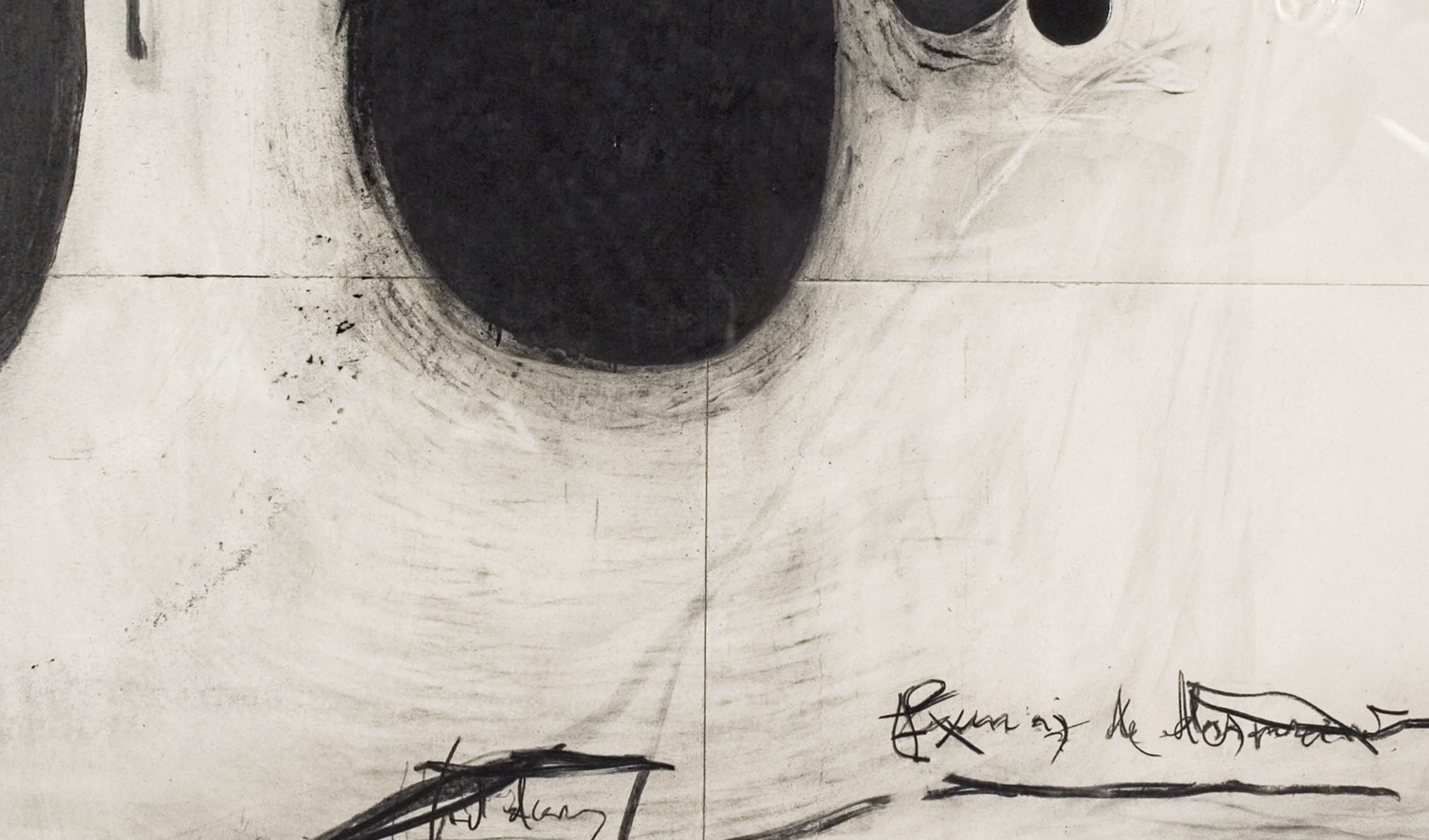


FRAMING ABSTRACTION: MARK, SYMBOL, SIGNIFIER

This exhibition, Framing Abstraction, is meant to celebrate the centennial of abstract painting. Abstract art has evolved from its original spiritual and utopian stance in the early 20th century to an art which was seen as radical avant-garde, and on to its present vibrant position. Refuting the digital display of the current moment, abstract paintings are simply pictures, brushed by the hand of the artist, in which emotional intuition is framed by the artist's rational mind into dynamic metaphors.

PETER SELZ

Abstract form always existed. Prehistoric cave art, ancient art, medieval art and modern art used abstraction right alongside stunning verisimilitude in smart, deliberate ways. Western cultures equated the ability to duplicate the world with the highest standard of art skill, until the camera. Machines that in a click captured the real - as well as contact with artifacts of colonialism - led artists to re-imagine a range of uses and meanings for abstraction: universal communication, theosophy, primal expression, the inner structure of objective reality, and to signify creative ‘free will’ in contrast to lock-step formulas of social realism. Art history attributes the first abstraction to Kandinsky’s Improvisation of 1911. Oddly enough, non-figurative forms in that work repeat similar shapes in the oldest known caves and these potent marks sit comfortably beside images of animals so real that they rend the heart. It is fitting that one hundred years later we reconsider what abstraction means today, its legacy and longevity, how and why it is used. More fitting still is that we do this through works of artists who deploy that language now, each in very different but ever viable ways.

MARLENA DOKTORCZYK-DONOHUE

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ABSTRACT PAINTING

With the resurgent interest in painting--especially in abstract painting--this seems to be the time to celebrate the Centennial of non-objective painting. The years 1910-11 were the crucial years when painters transcended representation of the visible world moving art into unexplored regions. Long before globalization and the internet, painters working in Munich, in Paris, in Milan and New York created non-objective paintings. In philosophical thought the idea of pure abstraction goes back to Plato, who spoke of the absolute beauty of sheer geometry and to the Neo-Platonist Roman Plotinus who exalted “formless form.”

There were important pre-1910 precursors in European art and art theory. J.M.W. Turner’s paintings and watercolors of the 1850s: were pictorial responses to the sublime power of nature. He called them “liquid reflections” of nature, which he re-assembled with fantasy and paint brush. His fluid symphonies of water and light seem to vaporize nature and point ahead to the audacious canvases which Jackson Pollock was to produce a century later. In France at the same time, Victor Hugo made mandala-like watercolors inspired by spiritual texts of the cabala and writings of Swedenborg. Informed by Turner’s paintings, James A.M. Whistler produced his *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* in 1875. John Ruskin, Turner’s great advocate, now accused Whistler of “flinging a pot of paint in the public’s face,” causing a much publicized libel suit.

In the late 1890s the French Academician and Symbolist Gustave Moreau produced a number of watercolors and oil sketches in which he had squeezed threads of polychrome pigment on cardboard. He signed these pictures with little or no identifiable subject, calling them “déjà abstrait.” At the same time the Symbolist painter, Maurice Denis asserted that “A picture, before being a war horse, a nude woman, or some anecdote is essentially a surface of color in a certain order.” And in Munich the German Jugendstil architect August Endell pronounced in 1898: “We stand at the threshold of an altogether new art, an art with forms which mean or represent nothing, recall nothing, yet which can stimulate our souls as the tones of music have been able to do.” In Sweden, Hilma Af Klint painted color abstractions of spheres, circles, crosses and spirals somehow derived from theosophical thought and Rosicrucian symbolism as early as 1906. At about the same time the Lithuanian composer and painter Mikalojus Ciurlonis, produced non-objective paintings with titles such as *Tranquility or Sonata of the Sun*.

After Cézanne created pictorial space with color, and after the Cubists shattered and dismembered the object and re-assembled it in a new rational order on a two-dimensional surface, pure abstraction seemed like the next step. Vasily Kandinsky, the leading theorist of pure composition and one of the great masters of abstract art, is often considered as the originator of non-objective painting. He worked in Munich as the leading artist of the Blue Rider group. By 1911 his paintings have little reference to the outside world, and two years later he achieved pure abstraction, writing in his treatise *On the Spiritual in Art*, that “the artist’s actions, thought and feelings play a part in constituting the spiritual atmosphere.” The term “abstract expressionist” was originally applied to Kandinsky’s organic abstract compositions.

The American painter Arthur Dove, a member of the Stieglitz Circle lived in Paris from 1907-08 and after returning to New York, created six abstract paintings in 1910. Their organic forms, were still based on nature, which is also true of abstract paintings throughout the history of abstraction. The Italian Futurist Giacomo Balla’s *Iridescent Interpretation* of 1912 consists of thin interfacing pointed wedges which appear like stalactites of light. The spiritualist Frantisek Kupka, born in Bohemia and settled in Paris, presented geometric and curvilinear abstractions at the Salon des Indépendants in 1912. A year later Robert Delaunay, knowing about Kandinsky’s abstractions, created his paintings of circular forms based on his color sensations. “Color,” he wrote, “is both form and subject.” The poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire linking the painter to Orpheus, the legendary Greek poet and musician, called his work “Pure Orphist” painting. “The supremacy of pure feeling” was the essence of the Suprematism, the name the Russian painter Kasimir Malevich gave to his canvases. To attain this realm of pure

feeling, art must be liberated “from the useless weight of the object.” His signal painting *White on White* (1918), is the first monochrome painting, giving rise to a whole history of monochromes. For this pioneer of a new art form, as for Kandinsky and Mondrian, abstraction was a step towards a universal realm of the spirit. These were by no means formal exercises, but these men were deeply involved in spiritual or metaphysical thought and in utopian aspirations. Piet Mondrian, who began his work as a modern landscape painter in Holland, reduced his forms to geometrical shape under the influence of Cubism. Inspired by reading texts of Helena Blavatsky and Rudolf Steiner, he joined the Theosophical Society in 1910 and produced paintings in primary colors, reduced to grids of horizontal and vertical lines in equipoise to create a unity between male and female, static and dynamic, spirit and matter. In Holland he became the central figure of the De Stijl group whose artists, active in painting, sculpture, architecture and design had a great impact on the development of modernism in the years between the two World Wars.

The Bauhaus, opened in Weimar in 1919 and brought some of these idealistic theories of modernism into praxis. After the devastation of the War a new sense of optimism was called for. Bauhaus founder, the architect Walter Gropius called on architects, painters and sculptors “to desire, conceive and create the new structure of the future...which will one day ride toward heaven from the hands of a million workers like the crystal symbol of a new faith.” Major contemporary painters joined this new enterprise. Kandinsky, who had returned to his native Russia during the WWI, came back to Germany as a Bauhaus teacher. Undoubtedly influenced by the geometric forms in the paintings of Malevich and his followers among the Russian Constructivists, Kandinsky’s own work became less Expressionist and more controlled. He now still selected colors and circles, triangles and straight lines on a two-dimensional surface to convey his belief of art as a medium of universal emotional thoughts and feelings. The Swiss-born Paul Klee also joined the Bauhaus faculty. A musician, enamored of Bach as well as an innovative painter, he took colors to stand as equivalents of musical notes, but he also created highly innovative paintings which gave expert visual form to a world of rich fantasy and vivid imagination. After the Nazis closed the Bauhaus, younger painters on its faculty, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and Josef Albers were able to bring many of its ideas to America. Moholy founded the New Bauhaus (Institute of Design) in Chicago and Albers exerted a great influence on American art at Black Mountain College and later at Yale.

Kandinsky and Mondrian dominated much of the abstract painting between the Wars. Groups such as Circle et Carré and Abstraction-Création were formed in Paris with fine practioners of abstract painting such as Auguste Herbin, Jean Helion, Jean Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp in Paris. In England, the Vorticists, David Bomberg and Wyndam Lewis were succeeded by painters who favored more geometric abstractions: Ben Nicolson and Victor Pasmore. Pure abstraction also became the mode of painters like Otto Freundlich and Willi Baumeister in Germany and in America, a style of geometric abstraction was practiced by the American Abstract Artists (AAA). The AAA, which had painters like Burgoyne Diller, Fritz Glaner and Albers among its members, had its first exhibition in 1937. The foremost American abstractionist during this period, Stuart Davis, was able to fuse Cubist construction with the syncopation of jazz in his brilliant compositions of color shapes. New York was ready for explorations of abstract art and in 1939, with Kandinsky as the principal artist, the Museum of Non-Objective Painting, the predecessor of Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum opened its doors.

Opposed to patriotism and its resulting death of millions in World War I, a group of artists calling themselves Dadaists originated in neutral Switzerland. Jean Arp, one of the originators of Dada, who by 1917 created collages assembled according to the “laws of chance,” opened the way to automatism in art. The German artist Kurt Schwitters used the detritus of everyday life found in the street to give them new life as abstract collages. The Dadaists were succeeded by the Surrealists who became the most important art movement between the Wars. In Paris, the Catalan painter Jean Miró produced abstract canvases which rejected the Cubist grid as much as traditional perspective and made paintings which relied on his innate sense of selective balance of form and color. Together with his friend and neighbor André Masson, he investigated the possibilities of intuitive painting. Masson was also one of the first artists to allow accidental drips of paint become part of his final compositions. During the Nazi occupation of Paris, many of the Surrealists took refuge in New York, where their presence and their theories and praxis were to play a key role in the development of Abstract Expressionism. Matta

(Roberto Sebastian Matta Enchauren) was one of the youngest Surrealists who adopted the concept of automatism. His welcoming of fortuitous ideas as well as free-flowing pigments was to have an important impact on American painting.

The artists sometimes grouped as “The New American Painting,” Abstract Expressionism,” “Action Painting” or “The New York School” are so well known that they do not need to be reviewed here. They never formed a coherent group or movement and, in fact, their individuality was of the essence. Arshile Gorky and Hans Hofmann were the great links to European art. Gorky was actually a member of the Surrealist group and Hofmann’s art theory and praxis was closely related to Kandinsky. Mark Tobey, working on the West Coast was receptive to the teaching of Zen. Willem de Kooning created astounding, often biomorphic paintings of controlled chaos. Jackson Pollock was known for his large, almost mural-size paintings which were created by pouring pigment onto canvas, creating surfaces of exuberant energy. Robert Motherwell’s signal pictures were abstract signs or images on white fields. Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still, Barnett Newman and Ad Reinhardt created large expansive fields inviting the viewer silent contemplation. Philip Guston and Sam Francis produced glowing canvases of vibrant, pulsating color. There is almost a consensus that these artists working in the US at mid-20th century formed the apogee of Abstract painting.

After World War II, Paris continued to be the great magnet of artists from many places. Wols (Wolfgang Schulze) was born in Germany, persecuted by the Nazis, interned by the Spanish fascists, and managed to get to Paris and created small paintings, somewhat reminiscent of Klee. At times they also suggest the existence of human faces, but they are records of spontaneous rhythmic marks of trickling and sprayed color. Wols, an alcoholic like Pollock took his own life in 1951. Hans Hartung, who had lost a leg in the French Foreign Legion, was like Wols, a German emigré in France. At the same time as his American contemporaries, he created large scale gestural paintings of controlled whiplash. Nicolas de Stael, born in Russia, produced abstract paintings of opulent, tactile texture. Before turning to landscape paintings--and eventually suicide--, his work formed an important bridge between Braque and the post-War generation. Jean-Paul Riopelle came to Paris from Canada. Some of his large dynamic abstract canvases of the early 1950s are composed of rhythmically composed mosaic-like facets of strong color. Related to the mode of geometric abstraction was Victor Vasarely, who was born in Hungary, studied at the “Budapest Bauhaus” and went to Paris before World War II. There he developed his “kinematic” images and became the leading originator of perceptual art, to become known as “Op Art.” By investigating the effect of advancing and receding shapes and colors he was able to activate the viewer’s vision and create illusions of an energetic third and fourth dimensions on a two-dimensional surface.
In Paris names such as “Tachisme,” “un art autre” and “art informel” were current. The latter term, introduced by Michel Tapié, was applied to the work of Jean Fautrier whose later work dealt with the horrors of the Occupation. After seeing hostages, picked up at random by the Nazis and their French collaborators he made thick impasto paintings in which ghostlike human faces can be discerned. “Modern Art,” he stated, “was undoubtedly born on the day when the idea of art and that of beauty were found to be disjointed.” Pierre Soulages painted dark abstractions in which their unique sense of gravitas reflect an understanding of the architectonic character of medieval cathedrals as well as a familiarity with the artist’s Cubist predecessors. An artist of very different sensibility, Georges Mathieu, drew upon spontaneity and flow. Whereas for most abstract painters, the act of painting was a very private affair, Mathieu, working like a dancer in front of his canvas, assailed it in a festive mood as a public performance. Performances were also employed by Yves Klein, when he supervised his “Anthropometrys.” He would immerse the bodies of naked women in monochrome cobalt blue paint (IKB International-- Klein Blue) and then apply these “living brushes” to white canvases. Earlier in his short career, Klein had created IKB surfaces which he believed would suggest the immeasurable depth of sea and sky, evoking infinite space. Like his precursors in abstraction, Kandinsky, Malevich and Mondrian, Yves Klein believed in an art of spiritual absolutes.

Italy, as well as the US and France, witnessed an emerging of great talent in painting after the War. Emilio Vedova, captivated by his Venetian predecessor Jacopo Tintoretto, infused his abstract canvases with passionate action of color and form. In the 1990s he created environments in which the viewer was totally surrounded by the artist’s canvases. Albeto Burri ripped tattered scraps of burlap and rags to evoke the horror of his

experience as an army doctor in the Italian medical corps during the War. Many of his compositions during the ‘50s are precarious fabrics which unravel revealing wound-like gaps which ooze red liquids. Burri, one of many European and American painters who opposed the trend of abstract art drifting toward mere decoration (see below) produced art of dramatic confrontation. Lucio Fontana’s slashings of his canvases can also be interpreted as wounds. But, instead of referring to war experience, Fontana’s cuts introduced negative space into the picture plane as a part of reality beyond the picture plane. A major artist of 20th Century abstract art appeared in Spain. Antoni Tapies created tactile paintings of paint and plaster which are somber, mysterious and silent. Influenced by Catalan mysticism and the teachings of Zen, he himself conceived of his paintings as “magical objects.” They, like Mark Rothko’s paintings are objects of meditation.

Ignoring the climate of radical politics, some visual arts in the 1960s became actually more insulated and indifferent. Abstraction moved from the subjective involvement of the artist to a cool and detached attitude. For the Minimalist sculptors, as for the Pop artists and the Color Field painters, emotional expression was as taboo as political statements. Frank Stella’s series of black paintings with their regular patterns are just that. They lack the mystifying quality of Reinhardt’s black paintings. Their substance has been summed up by Stella himself, who said: “What you see is what you see.” Stella’s later work, his shaped canvases painted with industrial pigments have been well placed in banks and corporate headquarters. The majority of the new abstract painters were in line with Clement Greenberg’s prescription that it was dialectically necessary for painting to evolve toward a flat two-dimensional surface of color. Coining the appellation “Post Painterly Abstraction,” Greenberg nominated Helen Frankenthaler, Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland and Jules Olitzki as the leading painters of the age. Unlike the pioneers of abstraction these artists did not consider art to be a moral enterprise.

There were, to be sure, abstract painters such as Agnes Martin, working in New Mexico and John McLaughlin in California, whose work at times achieved ethereal quality. And, using some of the syntax of geometric abstraction Josef Albers’ series, *Homage to the Square* are beautiful floating forms of color and Ellsworth Kelly painted panels of pure and vibrant color. Robert Ryman permitted the visible brushstroke and gesture to make a re-appearance in his canvases, but his paintings too remain purely self-reflective, which is true also of the neutral and pristine surfaces by the French painter Daniel Buren, who, quoting the writer Roland Barthes wished to produce “paintings at the zero degree.” Zero, “meaning the zone of silence” was also the name of a group of German painters: Otto Piene, Heinz Mack and Günther Uecker who worked primarily with the vibrations and reflections of light in their work.

In New York in the mid-1980s a group of artists emerged, who went by the name of “Neo-Geo.” Inspired by Jean Baudrillard’s “Simulation Theory,” they felt that the total proliferation of signs in the consumer age has led to the eclipse of the real, making originality and authenticity no longer a possible option. Peter Halley a member of the group, made hard-edge geometric paintings using DAY-GLOW paints and leaving no gestural mark on the canvas. His images seem to refer to subjects which he designated as factories or prisons and various dehumanizing systems. The highly regarded German painter Gerhard Richter is an artist of amazing versatility. He has painted romantic landscapes, nudes, portraits and political subjects with the greatest facility. In the 1980s he turned to abstraction, producing impressive large canvases which simulate the spontaneous brushwork and expressive colors of the Abstract Expressionists. Richter, however, went to great length to construct these pictures to resemble, represent and interpret the paintings of a golden age of the past.

At this time when abstract art tends toward the formulaic, there are also painters who approach their canvas with a more serious, emotional, even poetic frame of mind, painters who use traditional means for radical ends and new formulations. I want to discuss four painters: Per Kirkeby, a Danish painter, sculptor, filmmaker and poet, originally associated with the international Fluxus movement, has produced abstract paintings, which suggest forms of nature such as geological strata or forests. Kirkeby’s earthen colors are applied with a broad palpable brush and his paintings can be seen as new strategies in a tradition of romantic Expressionism. A romantic sensibility mediated by what the American painter Brice Marden called “spartan limitations,” is present in the smooth monochrome rectangles he created in the 1970s and 80s. Later, feeling a sense

of connection with Abstract Expressionism and under the influence of Asian calligraphy, Marden produced canvases which convey an energetic dance-like choreography of energetic lines embedded in the picture plane.

The California painter Richard Diebenkorn, while a student at the California School of Fine Arts, was informed by the work of Clyfford Still and Rothko. With painters such as Edward Corbett, Hassel Smith, Frank Lobdell and John Grillo among others, San Francisco was a fertile ground for expressionist abstract painting. Diebenkorn, working in Albuquerque, NM and Berkeley CA, produced abstract paintings, dynamic compositions with admirable chromatic variations and bravura brushwork, sometimes with slight reference to aerial views. After a ten year interval of figurative painting in the mid-50s, he produced tall paintings in which fields of color are divided into geometric areas. Indebted to Matisse's *View of Notre Dame* of 1914, Diebenkorn's Ocean Park series are sensitive optical celebrations of intelligently structured innovative color relations.

Sean Scully is known for his canvases of painted balanced vertical and horizontal bands, which can be seen as softened, Mondrian grids, humanized and transformed into fluid sensuous surfaces of modulated colors. Scully's paintings also resemble folk art quilts. Born in Dublin, Scully now has studios in New York, Barcelona and in Munich where he teaches. This is the city in which Kandinsky worked and wrote his On the Spiritual in Art. Now, almost a hundred years later and confronted by a cynical cultural climate, the tradition of abstract painting as a search for spiritual and universal meaning has, once again, become a forceful exponent as an emotional catalyst of human experience.

PETER SELZ

FRAMING ABSTRACTION

Why frame abstraction in 2011? It has been around at least as long as Kandinsky's *Improvisations*, quite a bit longer some would argue.

Framing Abstraction grew out of a desire to look at a small cross section of abstract art being made today in places far afield as Germany, Israel and Spain, but primarily in Los Angeles to support the regional mission of fading city galleries such as the Municipal Gallery. This interest was in turn predicated on thinking about the last thirty years of vital theory and practice engaged in the reading of the ideological 'texts' imbedded within Enlightenment and modernist existential and aesthetic paradigms. At its root, post modernism grew out of a program that looked closely at our deeply engrained *either-or* epistemes in language, values, laws, social and creative enterprises, which marked in defaulted ways one term as high, one term as low, one as crude, one as ordered, etc. We know these too well.

As we approach the fourth decade of these discourses, it seemed to me that dynamic investigation has been unable to resist somewhat anemic oppositions setting 'philistine' modern painting against 'advanced' post modern culture. One result has been to effectively align all abstract painting with out-moded 'high modernism,' tacitly towing with this positioning the contested mechanisms of genius, transcendent gesture, pure formalism, masculinism, etc. As binaries go, this system conversely equates everything after abstract painting, which is to say everything tacitly deemed au courant, with diverse, conspicuously new genre art practices at whose implicit and explicit root lies an assumed interrogation, debunking or at minimum 'maturing out of' abstract painting.

On which side of this modern-post modern opposition one elects to insert either reverence or suspicion no longer seems predicated on anything as tangible as materials nor quality of production or conception. 'Quality,' like abstraction is a property of art widely referenced but harder to concertize today. As regards abstract painting, how one perceives its current strategies and sustained viability appears to rest on discursive trends, generational art education, market forces, and other codes and mysteries of the social apparatus we have come to name 'the art world.'

As a counter-point to these contexts, *Framing Abstraction* hoped to look at swath of actual work to see what was being made today. This was intended more as a small window into the art objects and issues related to abstract painting in 2011, than any claim to a comprehensive overview; this latter enterprise would be a daunting one even for a huge museum show, much less a modestly scaled one such as this.

Peter Selz and I are not alone in our speculations about the state of abstraction today. A spate of major recent exhibitions revisiting global abstract expressionism, as well as scholarship on the subject, such as but not limited to Terry R. Myers' *Painting: Documents of Contemporary Art* due out shortly, suggest that abstract painting never 'went away' and therefore is not 'back.' To contextualize the evolution of abstract painting within the vagaries of cycling taste, as if all decisions were rooted in consumption (e.g. platform shoes are back, get yours now) is, from certain perspectives vulgar and from my point of view certainly superficial.

The artists in *Framing Abstraction* make clear that despite cycles in the theory and practice of art, despite the narrow lens criticality-cum-dogma can cast, compelling work that engages abstract marking on a variety of surfaces continues to be produced from both modern and post modern models, differences between these today being so porous as to become somewhat arbitrary. If these twelve artists partake of Kandinsky's core modus – simply summarized, the ability of form to speak – they do so in ways so extrapolated from their early modern sources that links are all but lost in translation.

As regards their dialogue with the art history of abstract painting, some of the works in the show arc more directly to its kernel axioms--as in Hans Burkhardt's pictorial existentialism, and James Hayward's singular focus on paint process. In others, the citation

is there but less directly so. The immediacy of nature (an idea central to Kandinsky's thinking about abstraction) is conveyed as thickets and forests of skeined color by Naomie Kremer, whose parallel and highly conceptual performance practice is acclaimed in Europe.

Lita Albuquerque yokes this city's slick, processed surface art to the whims of cosmic phenomenon: she 'paints' with minerals moved by wind gusts. Gary Blum embeds virtuoso illusionist thumbnails of tiny, perfectly rendered abstract canvases inside super senses-stirring color planes identical to the ones depicted; Spaniard Jordi Alcaraz bends/perforates the transparent surfaces that cover works, so that optics and light enrich and problematize the trope of hand gesture. Kevan Jensen paints quite literally with smoke, his sfumato atmospheres inspired equally by studies of Rubens and his pending book on none other than Duchamp. Charles Hill makes magnificent, conspicuously hand rendered stripes and dots locked in layers of glaze that remind us of resin-ed industrial surfaces (So Cal surfboards, decals), but were actually influenced by prehistoric cave doodles and non Western Kuba textiles the artist discovered only after years of studio work using nearly identical shapes.

Mark Harrington grew up at the knee of his step father, the late and noted abstract artist/teacher Hassel Smith, asking questions early on about the epistemology of marks. In the transparency, trajectory, linearity of his marks, as well as the deliberate diptych construction of his surfaces that we 'read' as one, Harrington's wants to remind us tangibly that perception is a sort of unmediated knowing by the senses, different from the sort of knowing which ideas gleaned from perception can evoke. Oddly enough, he gets these two to operate in sync with liquidity striations that rely on the concept of modern grid for compositional unity, but expand our eye and body in both directions as only *being in* open, horizontal space can.

There is in all of this work an irreverent and/or quite serious inquiry into the rhetoric of 'universal' form. There is as well a smart analysis of the difference between presentation and representation, between rationalized concept and in-time experience, inquiries not simply aesthetic but ontological, reaching back to Plato and made the more pressing by our irrevocably virtual age. Here, Claire Cregan's ephemeral video of a quirky hand-sketched frame that can project itself across any surface or object, digitally adding and removing the defining perimeter of fine art hits on all this in light-hearted but deeply informed ways.

Though never our curatorial plan, works selected ended up to our surprise being visually stunning, a fact that in no manner forecloses their conceptual rigor, their engagement with broader ideological themes, however much pre and post formulaics want to imagine these as separate. To our surprise, there were hard edges a plenty, equally sonorous, ephemeral atmospheres and super muscular signature strokes, flat form that demanded our phenomenological interaction with it.

As Dave Hickey and a score of others have suggested, all abstract, non figurative, not narrative art has a rhetoric, and this rhetoric can be complex, stealth and gendered in important ways. Hickey's essay *Invisible Dragon* suggests that in its anesthetic evacuation of life, of beauty, of history and the consequences of history, stark abstraction exiles embodied, felt experience and indirectly those bodes —gays, women, the subaltern --still associated with suspect modalities like excess delight in the visual, or surfeit dangerous pleasure.

In their dangerous beauty, the works we selected –created by men and women -- are unabashedly and democratically visceral; they claim space, amaze with fine craft and invite more than censure the eyes and senses, both of which draw caution under the auspices of high concept. This is not to suggest that these works indicate a resolution to the on-going problematics of ideology and gender in aesthetics, it is simply to say that the forms engaging us here are speak semiotically because they are abstract and that language is neither surgical, puritanical nor austere.

This is borne out in the richly elegant, systematic geometries by Manfred Muller that operate like related units in a spatial sentence able to literally build a dynamic visual architecture from the stasis of four walls. This is equally clear in the highly expressive, fraught little squiggles extracted by Meg Cranston from pop sources like the Sunday

comics and striking in their ability to remind us that all marks are deeply communicative whether we call them high or low, abstract art or not.

Finally, I was intrigued as a curator by the fact that “pure abstraction’ and its related issues remain distinctly Western European constructions. I am quite sure that relatively aniconic cultures past and present not grounded in the artistic nor philosophic standard of realism—Asian, Islamic, Oceanic, African--would be either quite confused or bemused by the thousands of books, panels, conference papers and exhibitions (this one included) on the topic of formalist *abstract art*.

Such a non Western footnote on abstract painting (though I feel critical to how we use it) ought not beg the issues. At the end of the day, we make, view, trade and are vested in art from within a Western European aesthetic system, and the artists in this show are deeply anchored in and by that tradition; any inquiry into abstraction today ought not therefore default to arguments outside that context.

MARK, SYMBOL, SIGNIFIER

Mark: Charcoal across rock, a cuneiform, the arcs and edges in E=mc2 a rectangle in cobalt green oil, a wet white line indicating a progressing shin by Manet ---these are all marks. All these at various times in their creation and use exist as both shape, volume, space, direction, opacity . . . and meaning. The trajectory from ‘pure’ form to meaning and back again requires both imagistic and conceptual abstraction in a sort of ricochet-ing conversation from the world of things as perceived to the realm of ideation. One could argue this process is endemic to all structured meaning systems and equally essential to post structural, metaphorical thought; the transcription between these constituting communication, both imagistic and verbal.

From its inception and today, abstraction was and is not a matter of skill sets, but a choice of syntax. Earliest cave markings-- possibly art, record-keeping, ritual fetishes, doodles or none of these – deployed *simultaneously* both sophisticated realism and recurring simple shapes, each in systematic and selective ways. Advanced naturalism seemed reserved for animals, and icons--concentric circles, dots, stick figures-- often suggest humans, or it’s been proposed the forces of nature. Setting aside considerations of dating beyond my scope, scholars agree shockingly accurate naturalism existed in close physical, chronological and possibly rhetorical proximity to equally deliberate non figurative and geometricized forms. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the so called *Well Scene* at Lascaux where we see both idioms sensitively juxtaposed in the interest of meaning-making.

The advent of writing and language insert themselves into this argument. Stunningly real renditions of life like horses, tigers, bulls found in prehistoric caves (those discovered in the late 90s at Marseille dating earlier than the Woman of Willendorf) come before and give rise to by a process of visual analogy cuneiform characters; a half circle turned down (body), and a half circle turned up (horns) show ‘bull.” Gradually analogues for the real get sparer, ever more remote from the literal thing, until a series of lines and dashes we call letters and phonemes with no association whatever to the observed are able to subjectively and normatively (to use Kant’s distinctions) conjure everything ‘bulll-ness’ denotes and connotes—a thing in the world, power, force, transport, food, nature, danger, on and on.

What this tells us is that all abstract painting, past or current, highly gestural or starkly geo does not necessarily embody (or axiomatically reject) tropes born with modernity as per Clement Greenberg: namely an elite, uniquely prescient (white male) risk-taker diving into the mysterious, thereby preserving for posterity pure invention, or unveiling deeper truths. Nor does visual expression necessarily begin with simple marks that evolve and improve into the classical standard of realism, the non figurative indicating an earlier more ‘primal’ phase and the later made possible by a great leap in technical or cognitive mastery.

Symbol – As both essayists Peter Selz and Mario Cutajar suggest, abstraction is a peculiar and ubiquitous distillation in seeing/expressing, able to bridge the world and our

simple to arcane ideas/feelings about and beyond that world. It is good to bear in mind however that *abstract art*, on the other hand, is a particular kind of cultural product that comes into being only when, as Wittgenstein and Lyotard suggest, those who need it name it and *perform it* according to that name.

What we know as abstract art is not some concrete event/system of form-making or speaking that is discovered in 1911. It is rather a re-framing of fine art interpellated -- borrowing here from Althusser---as a cultural construction when turn of the century to mid century artists/thinkers like Gauguin, Van Gogh, the Nabis, Kandinsky, Malevich, Mondrian, Roger Fry, Willem Worringer, Clement Greenberg, (early) Michael Fried, and others inscribe it into legitimized history using words like "the rod, the cone and the sphere," syntheticism, color symbolism, abstract expression (lower case a and e) and the New York School. These ways of talking about and performing fine art in late 19th to 20th century conjure to life this odd species – pure plastic form -- around which so much creative activity and art discourse revolved. This creative activity was interdisciplinary, appearing across arts and letters (Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Bertold Brecht) and fore-fronting process/mechanics over content/narrative as a way to press back against the long tyranny of specially sanctioned structures and voices—i.e. 'authors and their stories.' As Mario Cutajar argues in his catalog essay, this friction against *author-ity* was and is inevitably political. What began as a dismantling of overly rational, accepted narrative structure (i.e. realism) as a means to enter psychic, social and formally unsanctioned realms, became institutionalized in fine art as the exclusivity of pure form; the 'revolutionary' was equated with 'new' ways for the artist/visionary to mark, see and reveal Truth. This type of non descriptive marking, as argued, was not new, and the revelations it claimed to access – humankind's legitimate and lasting grand questions -- were pretty traditional as well.

It is not at all coincidental to note in this regard that Kandinsky, credited with 'inventing' abstract art and authoring its most naunced (if still Western and aesthetic) articulation was among the few modern artists who actually traveled to experience first hand, as art, as social syntax and ritual, the aniconic culture of Africa. Matisse was briefly in North Africa but his work after the visit remained more figurative and classical than abstract; Picasso, Roger Fry and Clement Greenberg, artist/thinkers perhaps more responsible for strictly formalist and hence contested conceptions of abstract painting viewed Congolese 'objects' in museums as form *per se* , artificially isolated from life and apart from those broader contexts able to expose as myopic from the start any modern aesthetic claims to absolute 'formal purity.' As Benjamin Buchloh has stated, form too lives in history.

What Kandinsky had in mind when he cited the example of music and coined the words 'universal language of abstract form,' may well have been that 'core' imaginative act of abstraction involving complex visual distillation from reality to idea and back again, which is indeed in some ways endemic, collective, common to all and originary. This way of seeing and expressing may be what Walter Benjamin had in mind when he said the 'aura' of the original – i.e., our attraction to the artist's actual touch -- comes from some analogy made between the real time of a mark as we experience it and the unfathomable construct of 'time-ness.' When Worringer claimed only abstract art engenders true empathy, he was not privileging form for its sake, he was saying that the predictable narrative pathos in realism (works like *Laocoon*—and for that matter most of our all our visual culture today), leaves no room for wonder, short circuits active curiosity, renders unnecessary the sorting out, uncertainty, and heightened awareness we feel when faced with the less than literal and analogical.

Before the camera such visual analogies fell to the single sources of visual culture---sculptures and primarily paintings. It was the artist's job to supply/call out in imagistic form for collective use these sorts of bridges between ideas-- from the categorical to specific, present to absent, divine to profane, straight, hard lines of a king's jaw to idea of virtue (even if his virtue was not guaranteed). With the advent of the camera the literal became an analogy for itself. This is not clever theoretical double talk, it is to say that the exact copy came to stand in for the real. As Beaudrillard has suggested, digital technology exaggerates this, so that now the virtual does not stand in but becomes the real and the analogy collapses.

This special sort of super narrow analogy linking the represented to reality, and the technologies supporting it became (and continue to be) the favored language and consumer item of the straight forward owning class. At the very moment when the camera, plus the crowded and socio-economically stratified secular city were making it clear that human experience was not ‘universal’ nor ‘transcendent’ but economic and specific, the social construction of abstract art accomplished a great a deal of efficient analogic work. The mystery of abstract art (mysterious only to white male intellectuals since European female crafts and folk art tended toward the patterned and the schematic) could ‘eternally symbolize’ an (increasingly fading) sense of human unity, be a ‘timeless symbol’ for some common human experience that forms the basis of classical philosophy. Abstract art could also conveniently and miraculously ‘show’ the contrary but modernized version of progressive humanism, it could ‘symbolize’ the free willed self and the non communicable inner-subjective states marking it as unique. As developed over use, this new universal language of individual selfhood (in fact a logical contradiction) was indeed presented as being so profound that it required Greenberg’s avant gardist to access it and interlocutors/critics to explain it to those masses that humanism advances in the generic but never quite trusts to grasp Truth without some help from the enlightened. Plato’s Cave re-purposed. Business as usual. Nothing new here.

Modern artists then did not invent radical new ‘symbols’ via abstract art, they realigned their analogical job to the visual, socio-economic, technological, political, spiritual realities of their day, and this act like all creative acts has both artistic and ideological dimensions.

Signifier: What post modernism has taught us is that there is no such thing as the non-representational---everything represents, everything stands in for as it were. Few alignments of marks, symbols, and signs are culturally innocent, even fewer are fixed and much less timeless. Greenberg based a career on the idea that pure flat form was the one thing that power could not colonize, its creative insularity was impervious to the forces of profit and taste. As Laura Crockcroft’s famous 1971 *Artforum* essay indicated, Abstract Expressionism and post painterly abstraction were far from above the fray, they were groomed and scaffolded analogues for American cultural superiority and the idea of Western creative free will (perhaps more honestly said, free trade).

With the socio-economic pressures of the 1950s and 1960s pressing us toward diversity, conceptual, new genre and performative strategies rightfully demanded from artists and thinkers a more phenomenologically and philosophically informed engagement with actual people’s actual experience, with the unspoken limits set to that experience by privilege and power. These deconstructive readings of the ‘texts’ of modernity in general and abstract art specifically simply could not ever be dismissed by any cogent critical thinker.

However, over the last thirty years this has resulted in simplification of abstract painting as the vehicle of modernism, as ‘over,’ ‘dated,’ in some way unable to be self reflective or dialogue imaginatively with its complex roots. What has been ironic here is that this way of viewing abstract painting is susceptible to modernism’s very tools. Here ‘progress’ comes first to mind.—another Western European construct, along with cycles of manufactured taste, that endures tenaciously (even in the most cerebral circles) in the service of capitalism. Via this progress model, art matures from modern painting into conceptually diverse, serious creative practices. Even an artist-theorist as astute and prescient as Allan Kaprow suggested Pollock’s per-eminent legacy was to point us toward that more evolved iteration of art practices we can call art-as-action. Via this view, abstract painting is necessarily a devolution, a going backwards to ‘raw’ form as way to position an elite avant garde colonizing non- Western lived culture to make costly art-for-art objects (as did Picasso with Cubism). However indisputably true all this is, in 2011our premises are due for a more nuanced up-dating. That is nowhere made more evident than through the artists, ideas and works on view in *Framing Abstraction*.

By casting a wider lens that looks before and after 1911, the cultural relevance of abstraction – in fine art, language, in mass media-- extends beyond questions of high modernism vs. post modernism to interface with anthropology, information systems, linguistics, cognition, the marketing of desire, the psycho-biology of perception , Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalytical models of how we selectively abstract/distill a sense of self (i.e. form consciousness) from a vast composite of objective data/impressions of-

fered to the psyche from the external world. This is conceptually tougher, less charted discourse; it's been simpler to pit painting against criticality, and leave it at that.

Going then to the heart of it, valuing and contexualizing abstraction as an earlier, cruder iteration of either realism or conceptual art relies on some imagined linear progress that just does not exist—abstract marks, naturalism, and sophisticated concept are not successive steps, but inextricably meshed in a messy matrix that goes back millennium and stretches into now, informs art and all meaning-making. Primeval mark makers, unnamed carvers of classical pediments or medieval tympanum, artists and graphic designers in 1914, and creators sampled in *Framing Abstraction* use an abstract visual vocabulary to express certain classes of information because that language is best suited to their communicative task. That choice is varied, profound, still timely and implicated culturally in far from 'pure' ways.

The works shown here help us in the task of newly *Framing Abstraction*. They are conspicuous in their resistance to ready categorical dialectics, and tell us us that abstract painting is alive – here looking kooky, there refined, radially as opposed to linearly hyper-linked to myriad inputs. One clear tradition seen here is the recognition that art intrigues and compels us first visually, but is just as sure to move us through personal exigency, deep emotion, spiritual search, our social contract with each other and the forest of fluxing signs and signifiers that constitute experience today.

MARLENA DOKTORCZYK-DONOHUE

ELIZA'S FATHER: ABSTRACTION AND THE REFUSAL TO WORK

As Slavoj Žižek is fond of repeating, the contemporary threat against pleasure does not come from its proscription but from the insistent, pervasive injunction to enjoy, which poisons pleasure at its root by turning it into a social obligation (reflected in and made clear by the injunction that for the good of the economy, consumers have a duty to consume, if necessary beyond their means). It is in this context that Matissean aesthetic pleasure came to seem a quaint notion. In a culture of immersive, obscene scenography (as Giuliana Bruno has called it), the pleasure of the visual has been enfeebled by surfeit. What could abstraction deliver to a culture already mainlining ever-more potent synthetic visual stimulants?

It seems odd, therefore, that this rhetoric of visual pleasure should be so prominent in the discourse that sustains abstraction. All the more so in that abstraction originated in a milieu in which its formal operations were understood as performative gestures laden with radical political meaning.

The notion of abstraction as a purely formal project was a fiction invented by Clement Greenberg who in the guise of safeguarding abstraction from the encroaching miasma of totalitarian kitsch performed a Stalinist airbrushing of its history that disconnected it from the explicitly revolutionary aims that were the source of its greatest intensity. Deprived of this connection, which is to say deprived of its traction in the social field, abstraction could not but degenerate into a symptom of vapid spectacular capitalist culture, mirroring that culture's endless generation of dazzling surface effects that give the system the appearance of constant mutation while hiding the brute constancy of capital's impoverishment of everyday life. We begin with Malevich—whose *Black Square* (1915) originated as backdrop for the Futurist opera *Victory of the Sun* (thus forging an originary link between the nonobjective and the performative) and after the October revolution would become an icon of the militant erasure of author and of both compositional and class hierarchy—and end up with what at the beginning of the '80s, Benjamin Buchloh dismissed as Frank Stella's "corporate brooches," an oeuvre paradigmatic of the straining after formal novelty to which depoliticized abstraction condemned itself.

What Greenberg did not foresee, is that in reducing modernism to a depoliticized aestheticism he guaranteed its occlusion by the very machinery of kitsch production that he claimed to be defending it against. This was assured since the generative power of this kitsch machinery (which Greenberg failed to appreciate) far exceeded that of the bohemian brotherhood Greenberg designated as the avant-garde. Trapped in the formulaic equation of with industrialized academicism, he failed to register (as Marcel Duchamp had) that the industrialization of design, communication, and entertainment amounted to the industrialization or automation of formal innovation itself. The abolition of content and the fetishizing of form would come to be realized in their most extreme form in bourgeois ideology, wherein even politics would be subsumed into formal discourse ("perception is reality"). Far from providing a basis for avant-garde autonomy, Greenberg's depoliticization of the avant-garde facilitated modernism's convergence with the capitalist spectacular economy. Within this economy, aesthetics reigns supreme, reducing all discourse to an argument over style, and all history to a succession of makeovers, each of which, whether it be the latest flavor of toothpaste or a focus-driven retooling of a presidential image promises to be revolutionary—a formal rupture—but whose accumulation is the tedious iteration of the same hegemonic frame that is the limit of the discourse.

Greenberg's enduring legacy in the arts, rarely acknowledged as such, is the belief that the meaning of art works resides "inside their edges" to use Abigail Solomon-Godeau's apt phrase. Certainly, as Malevich made explicit by proposing *Black Square* as a negation of the visible and not merely a withdrawal from it, abstraction's refusal of representation was not an assertion of the autonomy of the nonobjective work but, quite the contrary, an indication that the nonobjective derives its meaning from the discourse (as opposed to the individual) that authorizes it. This is what enabled the black square motif

to germinate as a stage backdrop, be realized as several paintings, and also circulate as an agitprop emblem among Malevich's radicalized students. It was only when the discourse that gave abstraction its allegorical or performative function was repressed that the discourse of beauty became its default and specious support. *Black Square* is exemplary in that when removed from its historical moment it reverts to a dumb, unbeautiful object whose materiality is almost repellent, the corpse of a signifier.

Abstraction's refusal of mimesis was always registered by the naive bourgeois public as a species of dereliction or shirking of the proper labor of art—a suspicion that abstraction's formalist apologists have countered by harping on the arduousness of invention and formal rigor: the by now familiar refrain of "It looks easy, but it's not." In case the Philistines demanded proof of competence, there were always Mondrian's paintings of trees (and numerous other representational works by abstractionists) on hand to supply it.

But I think the naïve public was on to something that got closer to what was radical about abstraction: its refusal of the bourgeois work ethic. This refusal is sometimes flaunted, as in those early abstract collages of Jean Arp whose titles assert against the visual evidence of their careful construction that they were composed according to the laws of chance. This refusal is often unremarked and just as often only manifest negatively as a straining after virtuosity. That abstraction makes possible almost effortless production is a secret that its institutionalization as high art required to be suppressed. In the case of the monochrome, which is the one abstract genre where this secret of ease practically leaps from the surface, it is only by dint of the labor conspicuously expended on its finish or else the imputed conceptual rigor informing its design that the monochrome can retain the authority required of institutionally validated art. Occasional *succès de scandales*, such as Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio's invention of Industrial Painting in the late '50s (whereby abstract paintings were created by the yard on an assembly-line basis by roller-wielding volunteers), or the activities of the French BMPT group later in the '60s, -- scandalous precisely by virtue of their indiscreetness, proved the rule. For the most part, as in the work of a number of artists in this show, discretion is maintained without the secret being actively suppressed. Whenever the aleatory is invoked (as in Lita Albuquerque's *Red Pigment Paintings*) or process becomes performance (as in James Hayward's monochromes) this idea of absent labor is merely implicit as an aspect of the absence of authorship.

Of course, to say that abstraction refuses to work is like saying of the fictional Alfred P. Doolittle, Eliza's ne'er-do-well father in *My Fair Lady*, that he did little, when his doing little was an act of dissent ("I'm undeserving and I aim to go on being undeserving"). Abstraction's mimetic poverty like Dolittle's enforced idleness is most pointed when it performs itself as lack rather than what might compensate for the lack. "Keep moving, nothing to see here," as the police are fond of saying. But who can resist seeing nothing?

MARIO CUTAJAR

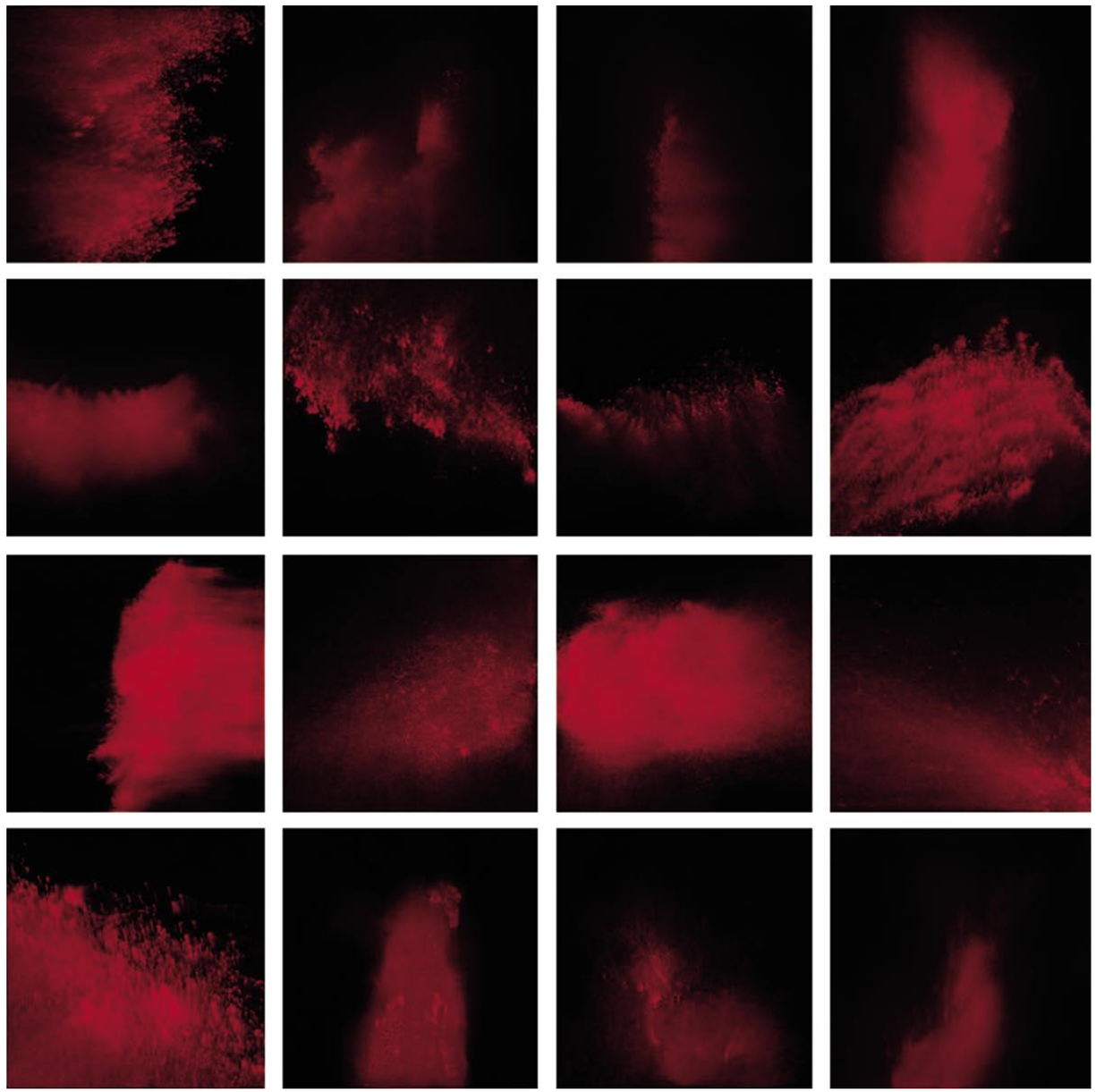
ART IS . . . “ALWAYS ALREADY INSCRIBED WITHIN INSTITUTIONAL POWER.”

BENJAMIN BUCHLOH

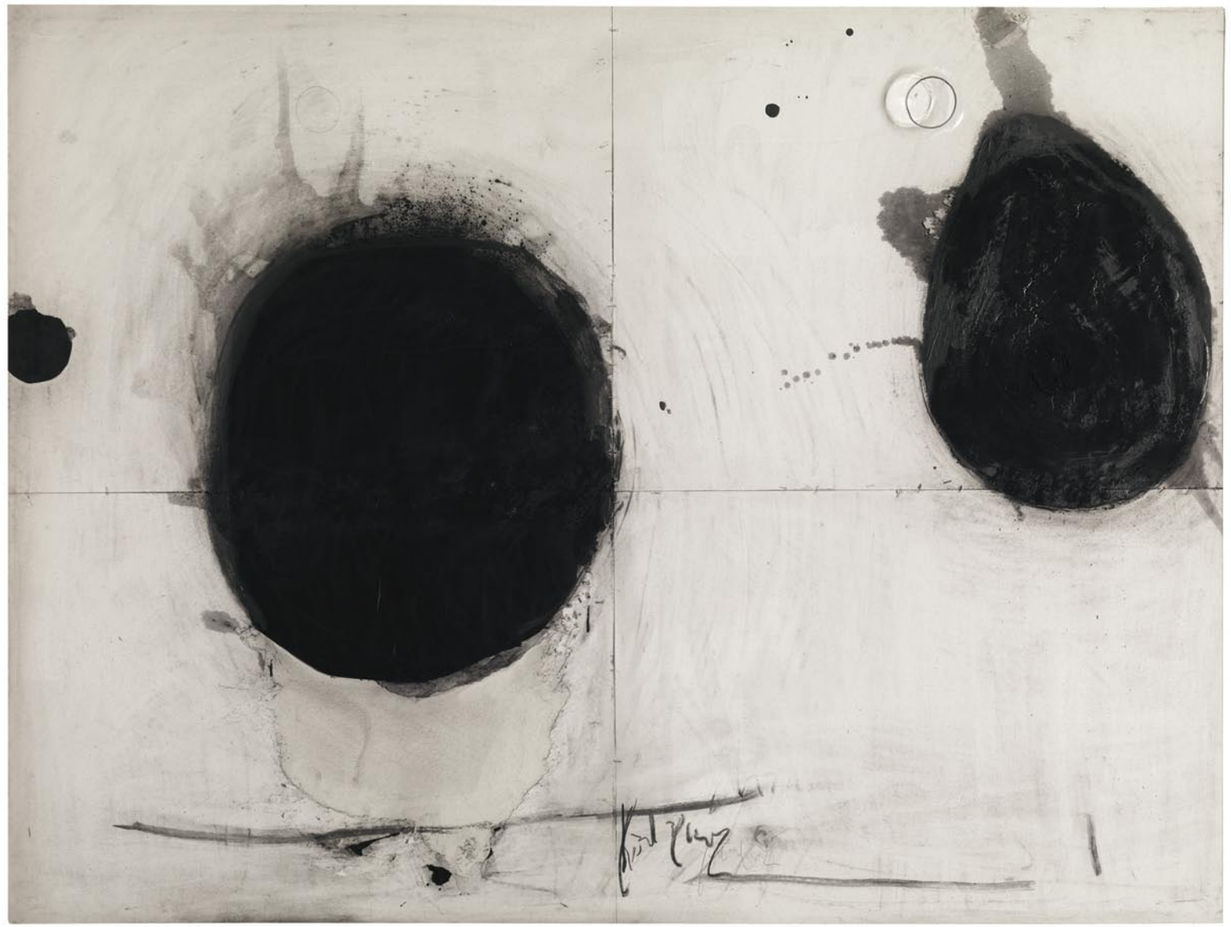
LITA ALBUQUERQUE (b.1946)

Red Pigment Paintings, 2006 - 2011. Pigment on canvas. 18 x 18 inches each (16 panels)

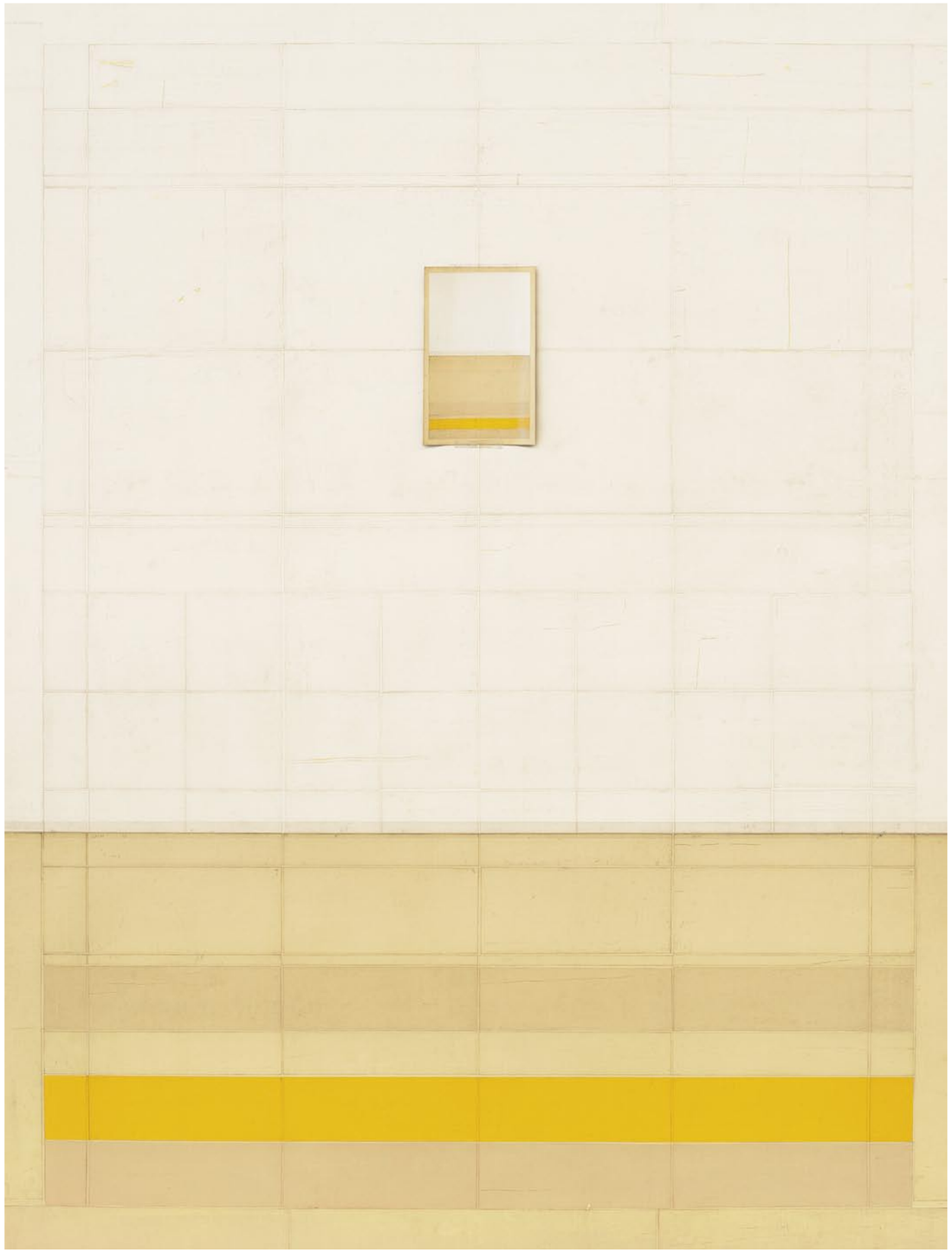
Courtesy of Lita Albuquerque



JORDI ALCARAZ (b. 1963)
Exercicis De Desaparicó (III), 2010, Exercises of Disappearance (III). Painting on cardboard, plexiglass, wood. 67 3/8 x 87 inches
Courtesy of Jack Rutberg Fine Arts, Los Angeles

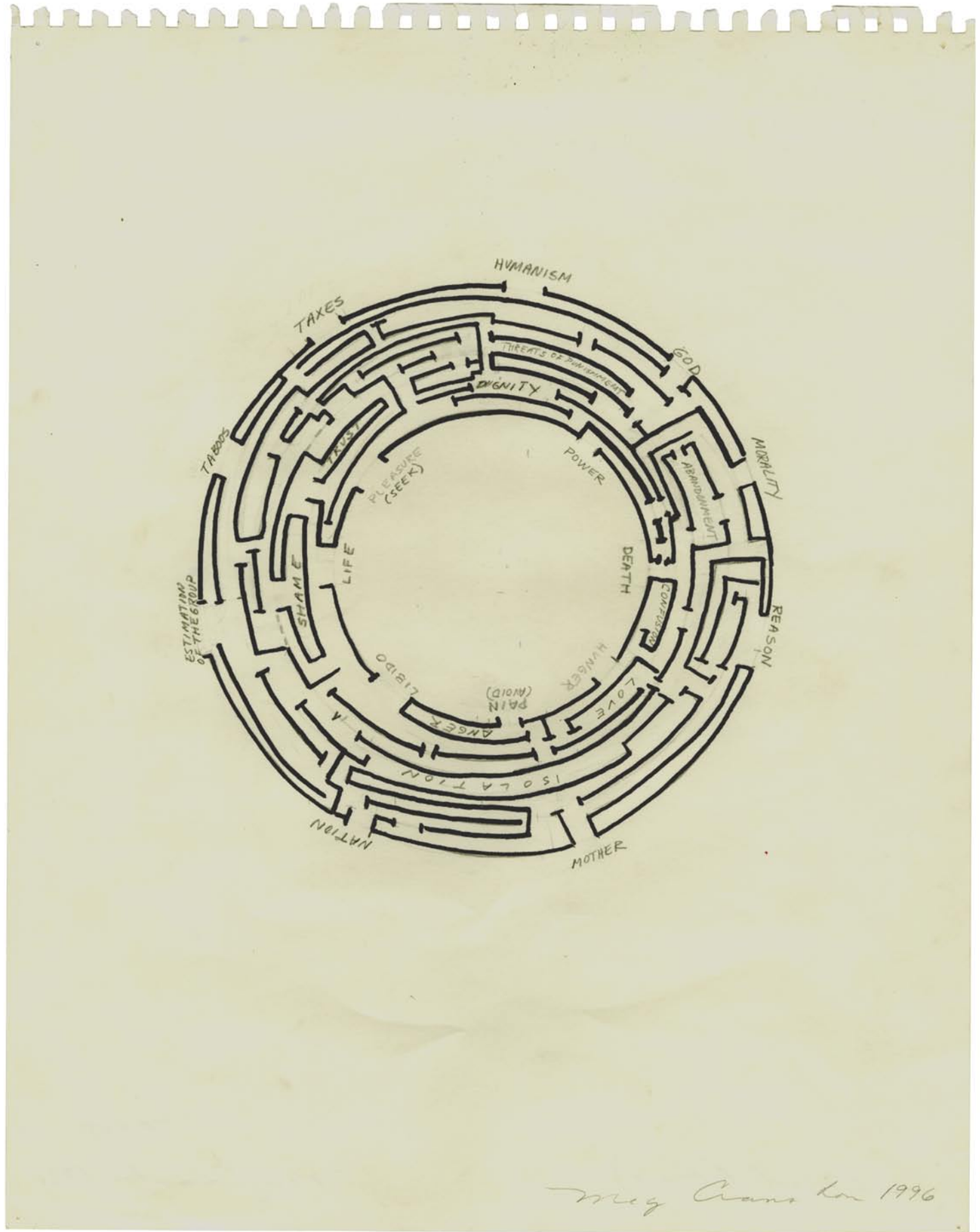


GARY EDWARD BLUM (b. 1971)
Painting for Sylvia, 2010. Acrylic on canvas over panel. 58 x 44 inches
Courtesy of Dolby Chadwick Gallery

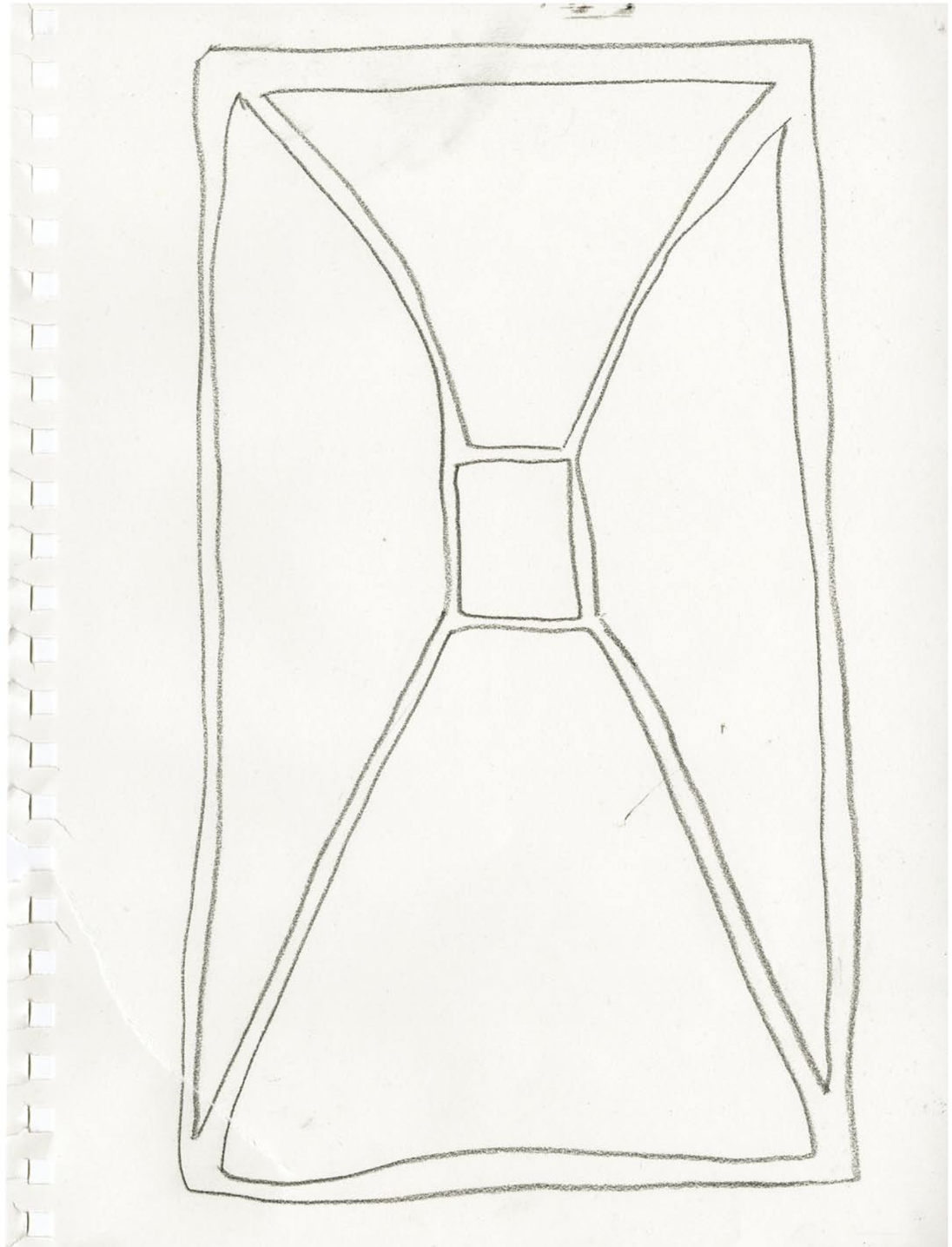


HANS BURKHARDT (1904-1994)
Silent Sounds, 1958. Oil on canvas. 60 x 50 inches
Courtesy of Jack Rutberg Fine Arts, Los Angeles

MEG CRANSTON (b. 1960)
Untitled (Maze), 1996. Ink on paper. 14 x 11 inches



CLAIRE CREGAN (b.1980)
Drawing Room II, 2007. Graphite and paper projected on wall. Dimensions variable

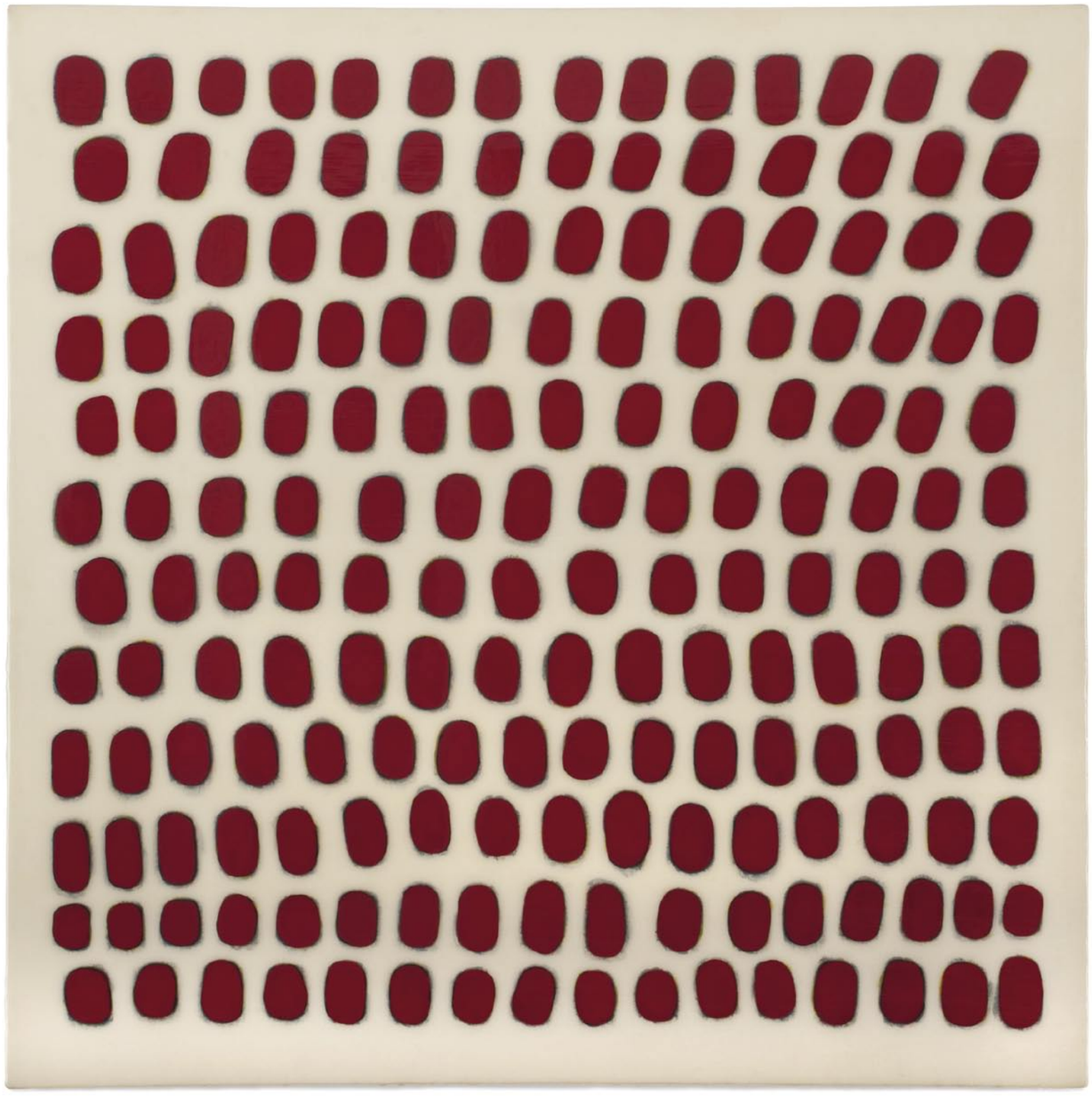


MARK HARRINGTON (b. 1952)
Lonely Woman, 2010. Acrylic on linen. 72 7/8 x 61 3/4 inches
Courtesy of the artist

JAMES HAYWARD (b. 1943)
Absolute 55x46 Cobalt Green, 1989. Oil and wax on canvas on wood panel. 55 x 46 inches
Courtesy of Modernism Inc., San Francisco

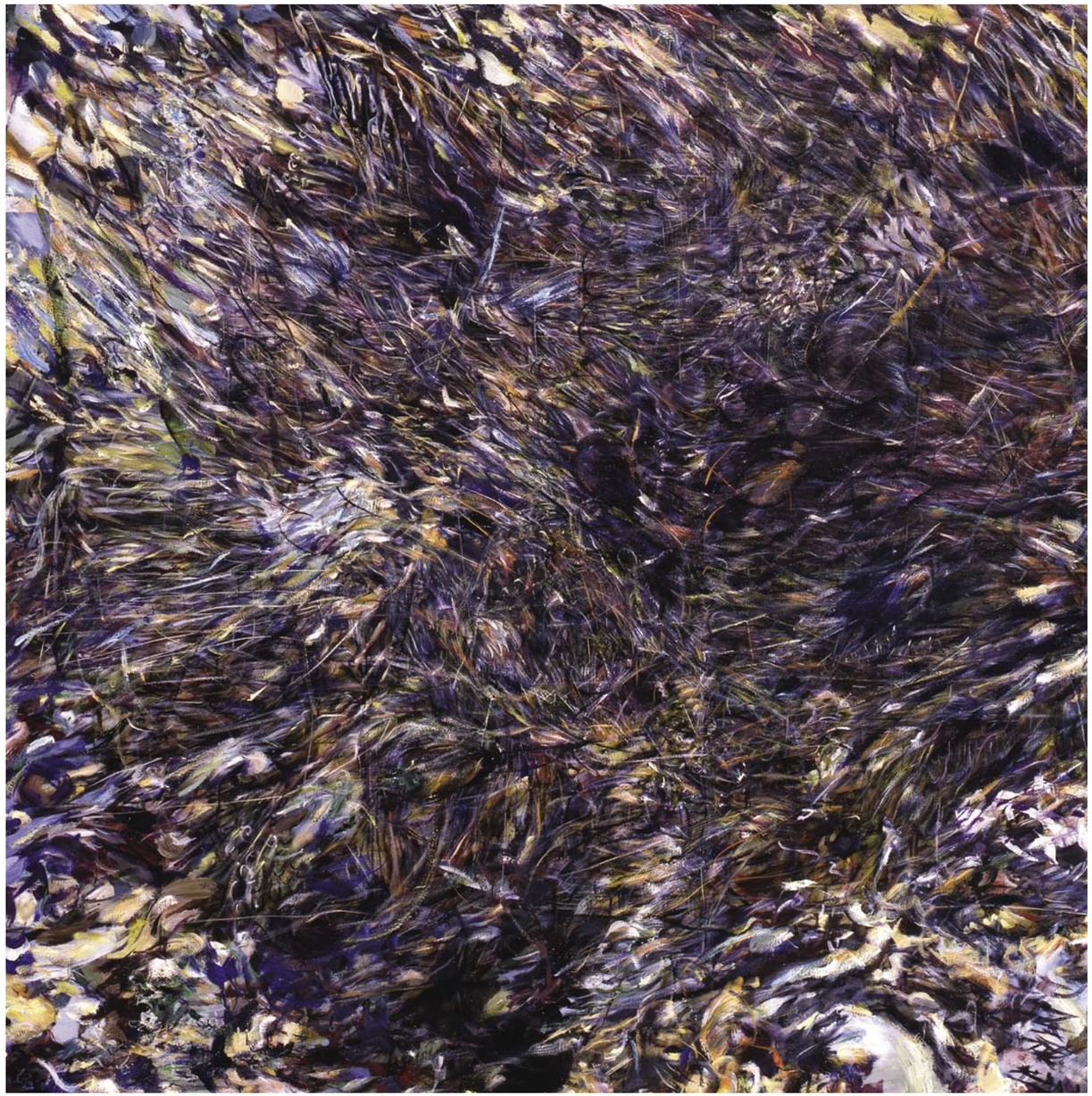
CHARLES CHRISTOPHER HILL *(b.1948)*

Fafner, 2004. Acrylic on canvas. 48 x 48 inches



KEVAN JENSON *(b.1958)*
Rubens Unbound, 2005. Synthetic oil and smoke on canvas. 72 x 48 inches

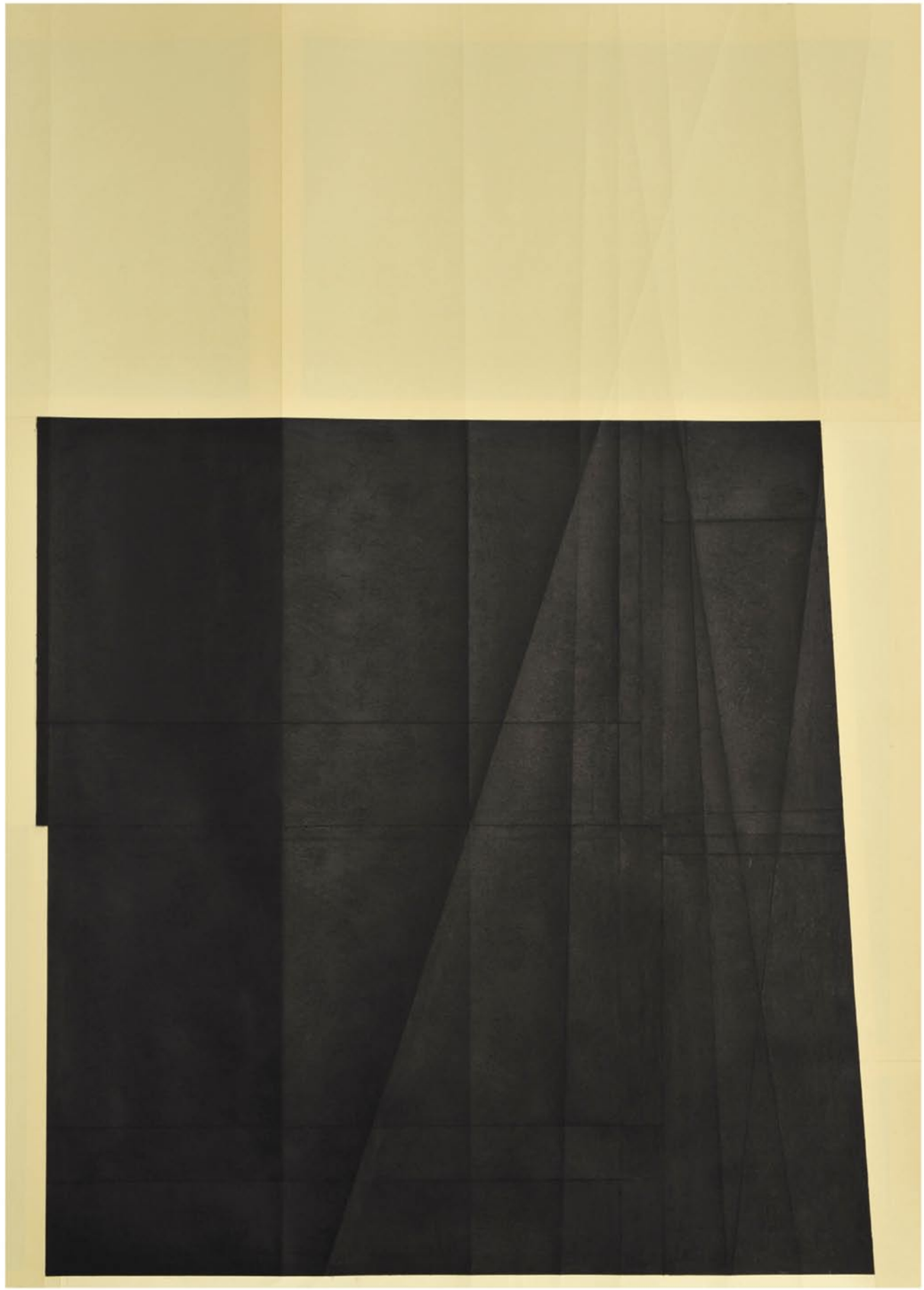
NAOMIE KREMER (b. 1953)
Square Root, 1996-98. Oil on canvas. 48 x 48 inches
Courtesy of Modernism Inc., San Francisco



MANFRED MÜLLER (b.1950)

Repercussion 1-8, Palazzo de Memoria, 2011. Oil pastel on Manila paper. 52 x 72 inches

From the collection of the artist. Courtesy of ROSEGALLERY



LITA ALBUQUERQUE

Lita Albuquerque is an internationally renowned installation, environmental artist, painter and sculptor. She has developed a visual language that brings the realities of time and space to a human scale in ways that are simultaneously ancient and futuristic. For decades she has created large scale ephemeral pigment pieces in desert sites including the Pyramids of Giza and more recently the ice desert of Antarctica where she led an expedition and team of scientists and artists that culminated in the first and largest ephemeral art work created on the continent. Often best seen from space, Albuquerque's work challenges perspective, and the perpetually shifting relationships between bodies in space.

Her paintings are a materialization of the ideas about color, light and perception first created in her ephemeral works. Through her use of pure pigments, gold leaf and copper, she engages perceptual and alchemical shifts in the viewing subject. Her work was recently seen at MOCA in The Artist's Museum exhibition and will be featured in Art Paris 2011 as well as in the Getty Museum's Pacific Standard Time Performance Festival in 2012. Albuquerque is the recipient of numerous honors and awards including three National Endowments for the Arts, the Cairo Biennale Prize and a National Science Foundation Artist Grant. Albuquerque's work is included in collections at the Whitney Museum of Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Getty Trust, and The Los Angeles County Museum, among others. She has been a Professor on the Core Faculty in the Fine Art Graduate Program at Art Center College of Design for over twenty years.

JORDI ALCARAZ

Jordi Alcaraz was born in 1963 in Calella, near Barcelona. His works have been the subject of numerous solo and group exhibitions in galleries and museums of Belgium, Germany, Italy, Canada, Switzerland, and Spain. Utilizing various tools and materials much like an alchemist, Alcaraz creates realms as ambiguous as those of his Catalonian antecedents, drawing inspiration from the minimal and playful spaces of Miró or the suggestions of other worlds in the landscapes of Dalí. Alcaraz's abstract aesthetic verges on the minimal but conceptually extends and tests our easy definitions of abstraction, incorporating in subtle ways two and three dimensions, references to illusionistic and real space. Alcaraz bends, tears and punctures materials in unpredictable ways that remain painterly at their essence; he uses collage and other unusual media in paintings which call into question the distinction between interior and exterior, between the objective world of sight and that which we can know through contemplation and intuition. In the almost Zen-like manner that has interested abstract expressionists and existentialists in all eras, Alcaraz investigates for himself and invokes for viewers alternate dimensions of consciousness, of human experience, of perception, suggesting the role art and beauty can play in revealing these to us.

GARY EDWARD BLUM

Gary Edward Blum was born in Montara, California and currently lives in Oakland, California. He received a B.A. from California State University, Chico, and an M.F.A. from the University of California, Berkeley in 2002.

His work can be found in prestigious corporate and public collections throughout the country and in 2010 The Crocker Art Museum in Sacramento acquired the major work, *The Long Year*.

With their tiers of flat horizontal banding and extended fields of rich color, Blum's compositions can be seen as emerging out of and in some fashion reconciling the historically and visually divergent legacies of Minimalism and Abstract Expressionism. Indeed, Agnes Martin's emphasis on lines and grids and aspects of Richard Diebenkorn's later color field paintings can be observed in Blum's work. But the exercise Blum has in mind extends far beyond a mere reworking of established styles.

Intrigued by dualities like verisimilitude and abstraction, as well as curious about the phenomena of coexistence between binaries, Blum introduces aspects of acute realism into certain sections of his geometricized compositions – typically the upper register – as a means of generating, investigating and reconciling stylistic opposition. He uses trompe l'oeil skill to realistically render swatches of paper held up by strips of masterfully executed cellophane tape, then integrates these within arrangements of flat conceptual color. In so doing he investigates the distinction between objective and non objective, asks questions about the separation of art and life and sheds light on the way in which representation—always an act of abstracting-- is translated from experience. By co-mingling divergent styles to create a picture within a picture, a copy of the world within a formal schema, Blum invites the viewer to come away from his work with an understanding that oppositions can exist harmoniously in the same pictorial, cognitive and experiential space.

HANS BURKHARDT

Hans Burkhardt was born in Basel, Switzerland in 1904, emigrating to New York in 1924. Upon his arrival to New York, he became associated with the pioneers of what was to later emerge as the New York School, Arshile Gorky and Willem de Kooning. He shared Gorky's studio between 1928 and 1937.

In 1937, arriving in Los Angeles, Burkhardt represented the most direct link to the New York School. In Los Angeles, he independently pursued his Abstract Expressionist style, often anticipating formal and existential questions being raised by his contemporaries and later artists in the East Coast and Europe. His first solo exhibition in 1939 at the Stendahl Gallery was at the suggestion of Lorser Feitelson. As Director of the L.A. Art Association, Feitelson chose Burkhardt to be the first artist afforded a solo show by the Association. Burkhardt's paintings spanned the range of human emotion, and fearlessly have taken on the subject of war and the celebration of life. While Los Angeles art in the 1960s came to be identified with California Light and Space, Hard Edge, Minimalist and Pop aesthetics, Burkhardt, in typical independent manner, continued to create powerful examples of Abstract Expressionism.

In recent years, as his place in art history and West Coast art history is re-evaluated, Hans Burkhardt's works have increasingly been exhibited in major museum exhibitions nationally and internationally. Burkhardt's works are included in the collections of such major museums as the British Museum, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Guggenheim Museum, Whitney Museum, Hirshhorn Museum, Palace Legion of Honor, San Francisco, Santa Barbara Museum and Los Angeles County Museum. In 1992, Burkhardt was honored in New York by the American Academy of Art for his lifetime achievements. He died in Los Angeles in 1994.
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MEG CRANSTON

Meg Cranston is a Los Angeles based artist. Her work in sculpture, performance and video along with numerous public and artist curatorial projects have been shown internationally. Her work came to prominence in the 1990s in exhibitions such as Helter Skelter at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and the 1993 La Biennale di Venezia. Her recent work has been shown at the Nuer Aachen Kunstverein, Aachen, Germany, the Getty Museum of Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, The Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh, K21 Museum, Dusseldorf, and the ICA, London.

She is the recipient of a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, an Architectural Foundation of America Art in Public Places Award and numerous other prizes.

Meg Cranston was born in Baldwin, New York. She received her M.F.A. in Studio Art from California Institute of the Arts in 1986, an undergraduate degree in Studio Art from the Jan van Eyck Akademie, Maastricht, The Netherlands in 1988, and holds a B.A. in Anthropology/Sociology from Kenyon College awarded in 1982. The artist was recently appointed Chair of the Fine Arts Department at Otis College of Art and Design, where she has taught studio and theory classes for almost two decades.

CLAIRE CREGAN

Claire Cregan was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1980. She received her BFA from Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles where she currently lives and works. Cregan works with painting, sculpture, animated drawing and projection to explore a shifting state between two and three dimensional space.

In *Drawing Room II*, Cregan explores the boundary between two-dimensional pictorial space and three-dimensional installation space using a looped animation of a loosely drawn abstracted architectural space. Just as the wall is altered by the presence of the projection, so are the jiggling lines of the drawing altered by the particular lay of the wall. It is work that adapts to the space within which it is presented, taking on its form as part of the composition.

MARK HARRINGTON

Mark Harrington was born in Bakersfield, California in 1952. He was raised between Northern California and the West Country of England, to which his family made a permanent move in 1966. He completed B.A. studies in sculpture with history of art at Sheffield Polytechnic in 1975 and took an M.A. in modern English literature (focusing on aesthetics and the history of art criticism) at University of Reading in 1977. Between 1979 and 1999 Harrington held teaching positions in southern England (Portsmouth), Spain (Barcelona) and Norway (Bergen and Kabelvag). From 1997 to 1999 he was director of the world's most northern art school (Lofoten Islands). In 1999 Harrington was awarded artist-in-residence by the city of Munich (Bavaria) at Villa Waldberta on the Starnbergersee. Since 2000 he has maintained studios in the countryside south of Munich and has exhibited widely in Europe and the U.S.A.

In the artist's words: My paintings address the vortex of pictorial space, emphasizing format, surface, transparency and rhythmic horizontal line. I work with diptychs in an effort to resolve two parts into a singular whole. I wish for my paintings, whether large or reduced in scale, to confront the viewer within the vertical plane while provoking the sense of liberation into an un-bordered expanse.

JAMES HAYWARD

Throughout the last thirty years, James Hayward has exclusively dedicated his studio practice to painting in monochrome. Diversity distinguishes the artist's palette, with colors ranging from absolutely pure hues, to combinations so complex they seem to suggest colors we have never seen before. His resolve to focus on stark color applied thickly evolved out Hayward's determination to avoid any form of presupposition that might compromise what he feels to be the pure act of painting.

James Hayward's canvases of the 1970s were flat, single-hued panels of black, dark green, or gray. In 1977, Hayward was invited to participate in the famous "Less is More" exhibition at New York's Sidney Janis Gallery, which brought him national recognition. While in New York, he was introduced to Robert Ryman, Brice Marden and Sean Scully, who were influential in Hayward receiving a fellowship to Japan in 1982. There, Hayward became keenly interested in the calligraphic mark. He began to paint in a more expressionistic and spontaneous way, experimenting with thick paint and wax, while also adding deep, rich, vibrant primary colors to his palette. On returning to the U.S, Hayward began creating paint-rich, deeply impasto surfaces that have characterized most of his work in recent years.

Hayward was born in San Francisco, California in 1943. He completed his M.F.A. at the University of Washington, Seattle, Washington in 1972. In 1996, Hayward received the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant. Recent one-person exhibitions include *James Hayward*, curated by Mike Kelley at the Cue Art Foundation in New York City, and *James Hayward: Works 1975-2007*, a retrospective at Modernism Gallery, San Francisco. Group shows include: *100 Artists See God*, co-curated by Meg Cranston and John Baldessari, *Triple Play: Richard Allen Morris, James Hayward, Ed Moses*, at R.B. Stevenson Gallery. Hayward lives and works in Moorpark, California.

CHARLES CHRISTOPHER HILL

Charles Christopher Hill attended East Los Angeles College from which he graduated in 1969 and The University of California, Irvine, where he graduated in 1973 with a Master of Fine Arts degree.

A lifelong resident of Los Angeles, Hill has exhibited extensively in England, France, Italy, Switzerland and Germany. A National Endowment for the Arts grant in 1993 included a residency in France where he refined his current painting technique using forms from Kuba textiles. A 2001 trip to Spain introduced the Ideomorph cave paintings of La Pasiega in Puente Viesgo. The Kuba forms and cave paintings continue to be influences in Hill's current work. Charles Christopher Hill's work is included in the collections of The Albright Knox Museum, the Louisiana Museum, The Solomon Guggenheim Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art, The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The City of Paris and the Contemporary Museum of Honolulu.

KEVAN JENSON

Kevan Jenson was born in Los Angeles, California in 1958 to a family of writers, artists and musicians. At 17 he began studies at UC Berkeley in math and science, abandoning these to pursue art after encountering the work of Marcel Duchamp. His studies took him to Mexico City and New York, back to LA for work in the film industry and eventually to Berkeley where he attends U C Berkeley and resides with wife Maria and son Marcel Samuel.

Jensen has worked as a NYC cab driver, a waiter, an English teacher, a video engineer, associate director, director, and TV producer, to name a few. He completed two documentaries with psychologist James Hillman and is in the process of completing a book on the work of Duchamp. In the artist's words:

Art and painting in particular have a content that cannot be suppressed. A Klein blue field or Fontana rip means something to the viewer and that meaning follows the a-b formulation suggested by Duchamp. The artist is the "a" side inputting content, the painting is the slash and the viewer is the "b" side viewing it. An artist can intend or function in whatever cosmos he desires, but the viewer is free to "read" whatever he sees. Art is thus both in the eye of the beholder and has an intended specific content.

From my "a'" side, I'm a Western artist in two senses. First, as an artist with a lineage going back to the givens of Greek, Roman and less acknowledged but very present African foundations of European culture. Second, as a California native with the all the dusty trails, campfires and coyotes of that magical legacy. This neck of the woods is famous for hallucinations and visions, the birthplace of cinema and religious cults and is the most ethnically diverse place in the world. My work is an exploration of what emanates from our land: a certain beauty and psychological terror, an ineffable that gives unique characteristics to the creative endeavors undertaken here.
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NAOMIE KREMER

Naomie Kremer was born in Tel Aviv, Israel and raised in Brooklyn NY. She received a BA from the University of Rochester in 1975, an MA in Art History from Sussex University, England in 1977, and an MFA with High Distinction in Painting and Drawing from California College of the Arts in 1993. She has taught painting and drawing and has lectured extensively in the US and abroad, including at San Francisco Art Institute, California College of the Arts, Oxford University, England, and Syracuse University's program in Florence, Italy. Her work has been exhibited internationally, and is in many private and public collections, including the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, the Berkeley Art Museum, the United States Embassy in Beijing, China and the Hewlett Packard Corporation in California. She lives and works in the Bay Area.

Kremer's large-scale, intensely colored abstract paintings are built on childhood memories, everyday observations and experiences, and family traditions. Her canvases emit a sense of risky adventure that is made accessible partly through the seductiveness of her colors and touch, and partly by art historical reference to abstract expressionism, cubism, Italian futurism and Bay Area figuration. Deeply grounded in painting practice, Kremer has also worked extensively with digital media since 2000, including text animations, painting animations, and hybrid paintings, which are oil on canvas with video projected on their surface. Recent exhibitions include video based work at Knoedler Gallery in New York City, and Modernism Gallery, San Francisco, and painting exhibitions in Los Angeles, California, Paris, France, Düsseldorf, Germany and Houston, Texas. In 2008 the Berkeley Opera commissioned her to create a video set for Bela Bartok's Bluebeard's Castle. She is currently creating a video set for a collaboration with Margaret Jenkins Dance Company, premiering at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco in November, 2011. Her video sculpture *Dictionary* was exhibited at the Jewish Museum, NYC, in 2009, and her painting animation *Each Way* is part of a yearlong exhibition of video at Oakland Airport's giant Media Wall.

MANFRED MÜLLER

Manfred Müller was born in 1950 in Düsseldorf, Germany. In the late 60s Muller studied technical drawing, receiving a state license as an industrial engineering draftsman. The artist then received a Diploma in design following four years of graphic art and design study at the University of Düsseldorf. He went on to study fine art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Düsseldorf, Germany until 1981.

From these rich applied and aesthetic inputs, Müller makes works that speak about and are experienced from the spatial, perceptual and associative overlaps shared by flat abstract form, the reality of objects in lived space and the broader frame of architecture.

Since the late 1980s, Müller has resided and worked in studios located in both Düsseldorf, Germany and Los Angeles, California, USA. His grants include the Cité des Artes Scholarship, Paris, France, as well as the prestigious Grand Prize for Fine Arts awarded by the City of Düsseldorf. He has shown in countless major galleries and museums across the US, Europe and Mexico over the last three decades.

In addition to gallery and museum works extensively reviewed in national and international journals, Müller is a noted artist of conceptual public art projects in his native Germany.

LITA ALBUQUERQUE
Bow Shock, 1998 - 2010
Pigment and silkscreen on panel
72 x 20 inches each (5 panels)
Courtesy of Lita Albuquerque

LITA ALBUQUERQUE
Red Pigment Paintings, 2006 - 2011
Pigment on canvas
18 x 18 inches each (16 panels)
Courtesy of Lita Albuquerque

JORDI ALCARAZ
Exercicis De Desaparicó (II), 2010
Exercises of Disappearance (II)
Painting on cardboard, plexiglass, wood
67 3/8 x 87 inches
Courtesy of Jack Rutberg Fine Arts, Los Angeles

JORDI ALCARAZ
Exercicis De Desaparicó (III), 2010
Exercises of Disappearance (III)
Painting on cardboard, plexiglass, wood
67 3/8 x 87 inches
Courtesy of Jack Rutberg Fine Arts, Los Angeles

GARY EDWARD BLUM
Painting for Sylvia, 2010
Acrylic on canvas over panel
58 x 44 inches
Courtesy of Dolby Chadwick Gallery

GARY EDWARD BLUM
Get Your Things, 2010
Acrylic on canvas over panel
60 x 48 inches
Courtesy of Dolby Chadwick Gallery

HANS BURKHARDT
City at Night I, Guadalajara, 1957
Oil on canvas
50 x 60 inches
Courtesy of Jack Rutberg Fine Arts, Los Angeles
©Hans G. & Thordis W. Burkhardt Foundation

HANS BURKHARDT
Silent Sounds, 1958
Oil on canvas
60 x 50 inches
Courtesy of Jack Rutberg Fine Arts, Los Angeles
©Hans G. & Thordis W. Burkhardt Foundation

MEG CRANSTON
Anguish (Schultz Monumental), 2000
Ink on paper
11 x 14 inches

MEG CRANSTON
Avery Tree, 2004
Acrylic on canvas
8 x 6 inches

MEG CRANSTON
Desk (Schultz Monumental), 2000
Ink on paper
24 x 18 inches

MEG CRANSTON
Drawing for Eyes Smell Onions, 2006
Ink, collage on paper
14 x 11 inches

MEG CRANSTON
Drawing for Public Project, Ambassador Hotel, 2005
Ink on paper
14 x 11 inches

MEG CRANSTON
Drawing for Public Project, Ambassador Hotel, 2005
Pencil on paper
14 x 11 inches

MEG CRANSTON
Drawing for Rock Bottom, 2005
Paper
60 x 120 inches

MEG CRANSTON
Flat Piano (Schultz Monumental), 2000
Ink on paper
11 x 14 inches

MEG CRANSTON
Ice Cream Cone in Nature, 2005
Acrylic on canvas
10x 8 inches

MEG CRANSTON
Jump Rope (Schultz Monumental), 2000
Ink on paper
24 x 18 inches

MEG CRANSTON
Lucy's Mouth (Schultz Monumental), 2000
Ink on paper
11 x 14 inches

MEG CRANSTON
Purple Mountain Majesties, 2004
Acrylic on canvas
8x 6 inches

MEG CRANSTON
School Desk (Schultz Monumental), 2000
Ink on paper
24 x 18 inches

MEG CRANSTON
Unbuilt Public Project Ambassador Hotel, 2005
Ink on paper
14 x 11 inches

MEG CRANSTON
Untitled (Maze), 1996
Ink on paper
14 x 11 inches

MEG CRANSTON
Untitled (red painting), circa 1994
Acrylic on canvas
20 x 16 inches

MEG CRANSTON
Volcano Trash and Ice Cream (floor fragment), 2007
remake of 2005 work
Paper acrylic wood
43 x 92 inches

CLAIRE CREGAN
Drawing Room II, 2007
Graphite and paper projected on wall
Dimensions variable

MARK HARRINGTON
Blue North, 2007
Acrylic on linen
72 x 62 inches
Courtesy of the artist

MARK HARRINGTON
Lonely Woman, 2010
Acrylic on linen
72 7/8 x 61 3/4 inches
Courtesy of the artist

MARK HARRINGTON
Star Spangled Odyssey, 2010
Acrylic on linen
93 1/4 X 71 1/4 inches
Courtesy of the artist

JAMES HAYWARD
Absolute 55x46 Cobalt Green, 1989
Oil and wax on canvas on wood panel
55 x 46 inches
Courtesy of Modernism Inc., San Francisco

JAMES HAYWARD
Asymmetrical Chromachord #41, 2009
Oil on canvas on wood panel
80 x 70 inches
Courtesy of Modernism Inc., San Francisco

JAMES HAYWARD
Athenian (Naples Yellow/Cerulean Blue/Phthalo Green/ Mars Orange), 1989
Oil and wax on canvas on wood panel
Polyptych, 80 x 280 inches overall
Courtesy of Modernism Inc., San Francisco

JAMES HAYWARD
Morocco #33, 1994
Acrylic on paper on canvas mounted on wood panel
56 1⁄2 x 51 inches
Courtesy of Modernism Inc., San Francisco

CHARLES CHRISTOPHER HILL
Fafner, 2004
Acrylic on canvas
48 x 48 inches

CHARLES CHRISTOPHER HILL
Txeroki, 2009
Acrylic on canvas
48 x 48 inches

CHARLES CHRISTOPHER HILL
Wowkle, 2011
Acrylic on canvas
60 x 60 inches

KEVAN JENSON
Rubens Unbound, 2005
Synthetic oil and smoke on canvas
72 x 48 inches

KEVAN JENSON
Sacro-Idyllic, 2010
Synthetic oil and smoke on canvas
72 x 48 inches

NAOMIE KREMER
Blue IVA7, 1996
Oil on canvas
72 x 84 inches
Courtesy of Modernism Inc., San Francisco

NAOMIE KREMER
Heliotrope, 2005
Oil on linen
65 x 60 inches
Courtesy of Modernism Inc., San Francisco

NAOMIE KREMER
Thicket, 2009
Oil on linen
65 x 75 inches
Courtesy of Modernism Inc., San Francisco

NAOMIE KREMER
Square Root, 1996-98
Oil on canvas
48 x 48 inches
Courtesy of Modernism Inc., San Francisco

MANFRED MÜLLER
Basic Hidden Cache, 2007
Gelatin silver print, solarized with oil paint on museum board
36 x 26 inches
From the collection of the artist
Courtesy of the ROSEGALLERY

MANFRED MÜLLER
PDM 20-25, 2011
Oil pastel on paper
6 works, 20 x 24 inches each
From the collection of the artist
Courtesy of ROSEGALLERY

MANFRED MÜLLER
Red Coat No. 300, 2007
Oil paint and raw pigment on felt paper
68 x 33 x 4 inches
From the collection of the artist
Courtesy of ROSEGALLERY

MANFRED MÜLLER
Repercussion 6-8, Palazzo de Memoria, 2011
Oil pastel on Manila paper
Two panels 48 x 72 inches
Four panels 52 x 72 inches
Overall size: 80 x 300 inches
From the collection of the artist
Courtesy of ROSEGALLERY

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I would like to thank first and foremost my co-curator, the immanent Peter Selz, whose books, essays and ideas taught me to be curious and critical about art when I was still an undergrad studying biology. Working with and talking with Peter Selz over the course of this project, over breakfasts in Berkeley or in his bright blue VW Beetle named after Duchamp's female alter ego was like a lesson in seeing and thinking every day. I am in awe of his brilliance, his contribution to scholarship and his generosity in all respects. He will not mind me saying that behind every great man, there is a Carole Selz.

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The art and issues and ideas presented in this exhibition and catalogue are a small cross section the considerations I and Peter Selz wrangled with in thinking through this project. Our one curatorial rule was that we would include only works both curators – coming from distinct generational and theoretical points – agreed on. The size of the show meant that much fine work we mutually admired—by Bonita Helmer, Rene Petropoulos, others too numerous to name – should have been included.

MARLENA DOKTORCZYK-DONOHUE

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