

**Ann Pibal, *RBWCMX*, 2017**, acrylic on aluminum panel, 41 x 63".

NEW YORK

### **Ann Pibal**

TEAM GALLERY | GRAND STREET  
83 Grand Street  
December 6, 2018–January 19, 2019

Ann Pibal's paintings have all the geometric intensity of Piet Mondrian's, and yet they feel more interwoven with life than the Dutch modernist's creations. Like Mondrian, she sets certain rules to guide her patterns. See *RBWCMX*, 2017, for instance—one of the three acrylic-on-aluminum panel works in her exhibition here. Its chevrons, made up of colorful and seemingly uniform lines, are actually variegated, ever so slightly. Pibal is always willing to lay waste to her systems when necessary. Her electric, razor-sharp lines are too vivacious to illustrate anything except the experience of living—actively—within the world, within a body.

It makes sense that one model for the artist's practice would be surfing. In addition to the paintings, she presents a series of works on paper, "Surf Type," 2018. Each piece features a page taken out of a surfing magazine that has been laser-cut with patterns. But they can't compare to *CBLT*, 2018, a painting of what might be an epiphanic moment. Its surface of deep blues—with a subtle arrangement of six skinny red stripes—is like a wall of water, a wave coming in and subsuming your field of vision before it crashes. Yet it is of modest size—no sententious abstractionist's spirituality here, just meditative, beach-bum loveliness.

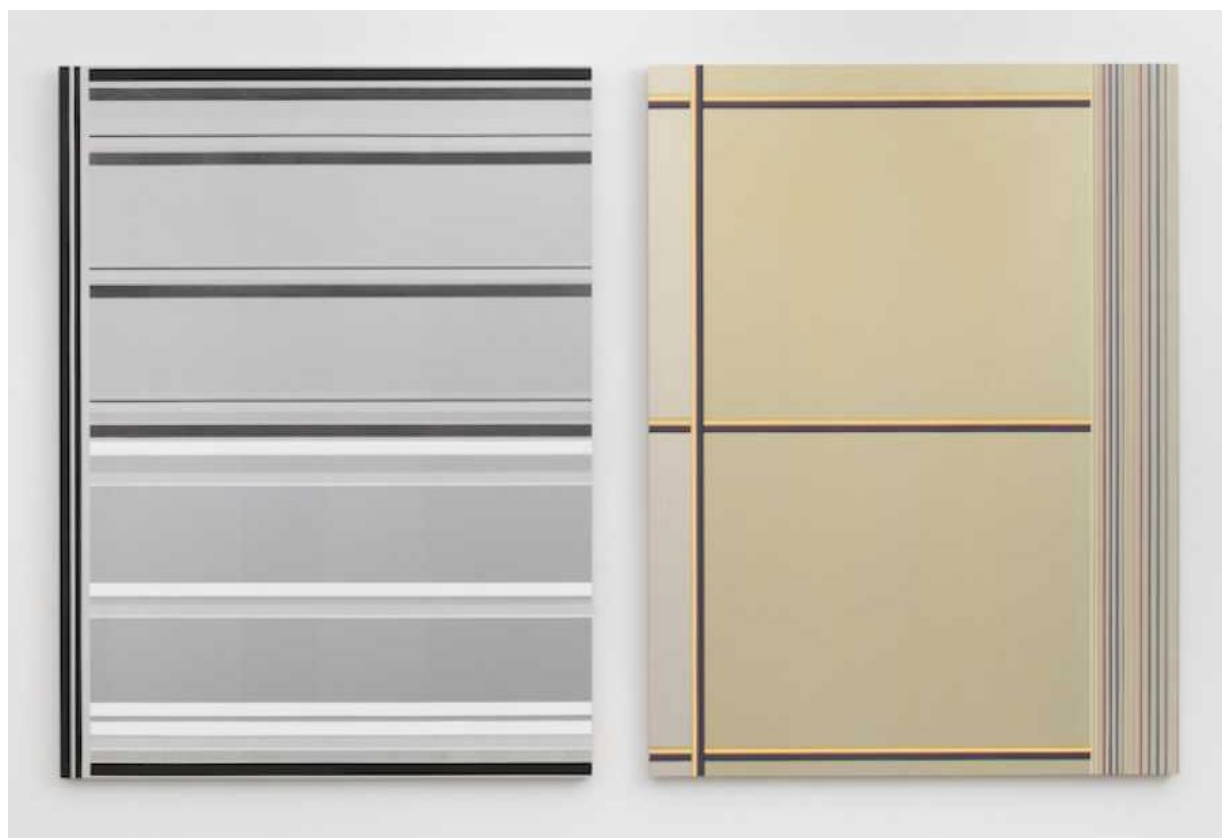
Surfing admits no figure/ground opposition: Foreground and background are irrelevant when massive waves blot out the horizon or the figures that try riding them. Like the sun-bleached Adonises of the surf rags (experts on the oceans' capricious moods), Pibal is attuned to the subtlest shifts in perspective, angle, and depth of field. She is a master surfer of the visual, perceptually hanging ten.

—Nicholas Chittenden Morgan

VISUAL ARTS / NEWS / ARTICLE

## In New York, Catching a Wave with Ann Pibal

BY CODY DELISTRATY | DECEMBER 24, 2018



**Ann Pibal**

*RWPT1/2*, 2018

acrylic on aluminum panel

39 x 29 inches (each panel); 100 x 74 cm (each panel)

(Courtesy the artist and Team Gallery)

1 of 5

---

The artist Ann Pibal has chosen surfing — particularly mid-century depictions of male, American surfers in print magazines — as the lens through which to view not only new modes of artistic abstraction but also the gender and power politics therein. “Surfing,” she recently told *Modern Painters* over written correspondence, “is a ready metaphor in my mind for painting, especially abstract painting and all of its trappings.” Both surfing and abstract painting have tended to be “emblems of primarily white, male, American individualism, prowess, [and] exceptionalism,” she noted, while also both being legitimate ways of finding “transformative personal experiences.” How, indeed, might one square the circle of abstract painting being at once a mode of gendered and racial power as well as a place of legitimate, near-spiritual experience? On view at the Team Gallery in Manhattan through January 19, her current exhibition “Surf Type” both poses this question and continues her signature style of doing away with artistic hierarchies, exploring a work’s medium and physicality, and finding new meaning in classic archetypes.

**What was behind your decision to use surfer magazines as the center of your current show?**

About a year ago, when José Freire invited me to do an exhibition at Team Bungalow in Venice Beach, I immediately knew I wanted to revisit a body of work on paper I made about surfing in 2010. A selection from the new group of drawings is included the current show at Team in New York. The new series, like the previous one, uses pages torn from *The Surfer’s Journal* as a substrate for drawing with laser-cut shapes. Stars, stripes, hearts, X’s and O’s. Surfing is a ready metaphor in my mind for painting, especially abstract painting and all of its trappings — everything from the way surfing and abstract painting have both functioned since the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century as emblems of primarily white, male, American individualism, prowess, exceptionalism, to the real ways both activities allow for legitimately transformative personal experiences embedded in a kind of quasi-spiritual language and an often-romanticized relationship to natural forces.

**From the standpoint of the medium and its physicality, how do you see a page of a glossy magazine in dialogue with an abstract painting?**

The main thing about these magazines is that I am completely captivated by the highly produced water and landscape imagery. I like the athletes too. From the beginning, when I started working with this type of ephemera in 2010, I saw the photography in *The Surfer's Journal* had much of what I aim for while painting with regard to space and light. For a long time, I've been engaged through my painting with a kind of transitional light — the luminous stuff of morning and evening. It is that kind of color — color with glowing, reflective parts — that allows me to engage most directly with an idea of time passing or of shifting realities. These magazines are packed full of photography that takes advantage of this kind of light — morning sets and evening sets. This, along with the heavy post-production this imagery goes through, makes for an unreasonably luminous color extravaganza.

Recently, I've been using a lot of reflective paint — silver, gold, also some iridescent colors. This has been partly to evoke the idea of a painted image as icon, and also to engage literally with the phenomenon of reflection. Water provides a reflective surface and simultaneously a translucent depth. Something I aspire to with my surfaces: that they be not solely flat, reflective, or pictorial.

**You're from Minneapolis and live and work on the East Coast; what does the “West” — and its archetypes, like California surfers — represent to you and your artistic practice?**

I probably only saw the ocean three or four times as a child. Because my experiences at the “edge” were few and far between, it was always a transformative space for me and held power beyond any other experience for my young self. I realize, of course, that this is not uncommon to allow the experience of the ocean to contain one's spiritual life. At this point, I go to the water to replenish myself, to do my grieving and to send my respect into the universe. The desert works for me too, but it doesn't provide anything close to the same kind of redemption. Somehow, the Atlantic doesn't have the same resonance for me as the Pacific, and I find time in New England generally to be non-satisfying with regard to moving through and inhabiting the landscape. My partner, Colin Brant, is from California, although we met in Iowa City, and over the 25 years we have been together, he and I have

regularly spent significant amounts of time out there and also in Baja, Mexico. Something in my connection to him is also sealed into a connection with the Pacific in particular. He isn't a surfer, but he is an athlete, so I think I have an empathetic connection to the men in the magazine tear sheets, even as, at the same time, I take great and delicious joy in making some humor and criticism out of the images of them.

**The phrase “without privileging one source over another” is often applied to your work. What does this mean, exactly, to you and how you create?**

I've been interested in disregarding hierarchies between design and painting — the “decorative” and the “serious,” the “grand” and the “personal” from the beginning. The decorative or effusive aspects of Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism are paramount and are rejected based only on Modernism's inherent cultural biases. I'm invested in the generosity of pattern and color in painting, in architecture, and also in industrial and domestic design, especially textiles. When I started working with hard edges, I discovered that the use of the hard edge makes easy work of connecting the history of Western painting to older, more venerable histories. The reach of abstraction obviously goes beyond the short story of European and American Modernism. And finally, aiming as I do, to create mutable surfaces and dynamic engagements with light and space the evocation of landscape and the pictorial has never been off limits for me.

<https://www.blouinartinfo.com/>

Founder: [Louise Blouin](#)

---

## RELATED

ARTISTS

VENUES [Team](#),

EVENTS

---

---

Wednesday, January 13th, 2016

## Like a Sequence of Thoughts: Ann Pibal at Lucien Terras

by David Rhodes

November 21, 2015 to January 17, 2016

325 Broome Street 1W (between Chrystie Street and Bowery)

New York City, (917) 517-4929



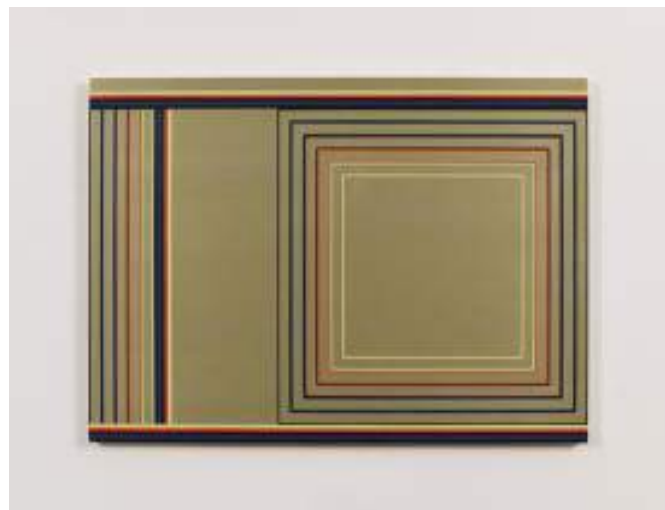
*Ann Pibal, DWHT2, 2013. Acrylic on aluminum, 14-1/2 x 19-3/4 inches. Courtesy of Lucien Terras*

In the paintings of Ann Pibal, quietly resonant color and stringent asymmetry assert a hard-edged intimacy. There is an implied scale beyond the actual size of these small pictures in acrylic on aluminum. Her current show presents two series, both from 2013, hung at the same height on opposite walls of this long, rectangular gallery space. The titles hint at specificity without reducing meaning to something prescribed or directed: *RBWC* a group of five paintings with gold as a background color, face *DHWT*, six dark blue and brown paintings.

The gold paintings constitute a single, multi-part work, whereas the dark blue and brown paintings remain a series of related, but independent works. This fact adds complexity to serial thinking. The two groups of works contrast structurally, as well as conceptually—the gold are light filled and somewhat reflective whereas the blue and brown ones are light absorbent and close in tone. Perhaps the former tend toward an idealization where the latter are more earth bound and rational. But such generalizations are qualified by connections between the two groups, with constant and subtle variations at play and a sometime withdrawal from, and undermining of, symmetry as a given. Often close symmetry – more akin to the slight off kilter of the human body than exact mirroring – is like a ghost or reverberation within the image rather than a formal presence. We are aware of it even though it is not, in fact, fully expressed.



*Ann Pibal, RBWC2, 2013. Acrylic on aluminum, 10-1/2 x 17 inches. Courtesy of Lucien Terras*



*Ann Pibal, RBWC3, 2013. Acrylic on aluminum, 12-3/4 x 17-3/4 inches. Courtesy of Lucien Terras*

All the gold paintings contain a regular ten-inch bounding square that itself contains concentric squares that radiate, each a different color, in a rainbow sequence. Over the course of permutation within this set, horizontals become diagonal and one work may appear as an enlarged section of another. This turning and focusing is actually like a sequence of thoughts, at once both intuitive and analytical.

*RBCW 2*, reveals itself to be increasingly complex once the presumption of any straightforward balance has been, all be it incrementally, thoroughly undermined. A fast assumption, like a reflex, might lead to seeing the painting as only iconographic in its apparent simplicity—a single stem of parallel lines vertically off-center and flanked by two squares. But a moment later, the viewer is engaged in discerning comparative differences—thickness of line, difference of color, variable spacing, placement of shape, corresponding horizontals. In contrast *RBWC 3*, using the same colors and linear elements, demonstrates just how much change can occur within restricted means, enlarging a sense of ongoing possibility, within designated formal and conceptual frames. Like one stanza among several in a poem, or one fugue following on after another, the ensemble sense of RBWC is actively built.

The dark toned color of the *DWHT* paintings, together with solid shape, represents something quite other to those of the sharply graphic RBWC. In using a lot less contrast between the two colors, blue and brown, not only is the light crisply internal, but time seems to move more slowly, too, and the space is gradual in its expansiveness. In *DWHT 2*, a receding pair of centrally placed, symmetrical, inverted V's are beneath a slightly off-center horizontal line—consisting, like the V's of two adjacent lines, one shorter and blue—as if this horizontal could itself be converted into a V. This off balancing is so slight that, once noticed, it charges the painting with a silent, calm, and yet, occasionally surprisingly tense, emotional force. Josef Albers, and Pibal's contemporary, Tomma Abts, both come to mind. The beauty, common to all of the paintings, is that the shifts, when located, are as much felt as they are measured. Pibal's art is not one of cool formalism. There is a precision here that does not exclude either intellect or sensual pleasure. Neither of these attributes is reduced because of the presence of the other; on the contrary, they combine to enhance each other.

ART & DESIGN | ART IN REVIEW

# ‘Self-Referential Nonobjective’

By KEN JOHNSON SEPT. 8, 2011

*Feature Inc.*

*131 Allen Street, Lower East Side*

*Through Oct. 1*

In his brief introduction to this buoyant show of abstract paintings, Feature’s director, the single-named Hudson, writes that he finds an essential magic in “how the artist leaks the personal into the formal.”

The personal is mainly evident in a sensuous care for material and craft. In Cary Smith’s updates of Mondrian’s “Boogie Woogie” paintings, it is as much in the velvety smooth matte finishes as it is in the eye-buzzing patterns of multicolored striped bands framing and separating Granny Smith-green squares. With one of Richard Rezac’s eccentric, painting-sculpture hybrids, it is in the perfect joinery of four cherrywood planks with staggered rows of diamond cutouts along the seams, and in the seductive gloss of the peach-colored paint covering the surface.

Douglas Melini appears to take inordinate pleasure in painting masking-taped lines. On two canvases he has layered countless stripes of varying widths and shades of green into symmetrically centered, wonderfully complex and intricate compositions. Ann Pibal’s paintings of fine lines, also made using masking tape, are Minimalist by comparison, but there is a subtly strange, futuristic vibe about them.

Not all are neatniks. Nancy Shaver’s compact grids of wooden blocks painted or wrapped in patterned fabric are loosely hedonistic. Todd Chilton’s argyle pattern made of cake-frosting-thick horizontal lines resembles something by the mystic polymath Alfred Jensen. And in his punchy choreography of brightly colored, irregular shapes on white fields, Andrew Masullo stays in touch with an elemental spirit of comedic play.

A version of this review appears in print on September 9, 2011, on Page C26 of the New York edition with the headline: ‘Self-Referential Nonobjective’.



## DENSE PACK

ROBERT STORR

These are small paintings, compact paintings, paintings with no spare parts and no extra room for anything, least of all unfulfilled promises. These paintings are very much of their time, but as such, a corrective to its excesses.

That time, our time, is a protracted period of spasmodic expansions and contractions, inflations and deflations in virtually every domain of culture, politics and the economy, spasms which have propelled us toward exaggerated, never disinterested aesthetic expectations, preposterous, inherently compromised critical rhetoric and the jaded regrets of too many cotton-mouthed “mornings after.” Buffeting us, bamboozling us, nearly drowning us only to leave us high and dry, these waves of excitation have hit the shores of collective consciousness with the regularity of magazine publication, exhibition cycles, and lecture series and the disorienting, demoralizing effects of equally predictable inundations along the Mississippi down into the hurricane-prone Delta.

Summer storms are brewing as I write, and tempests seem inevitable this fall; however, in the interest of following the lead of the work I am addressing, terseness is the order of the day. So having briefly noted the imperiled flood plane where Ann Pibal has dug herself in and built levees against prevailing currents, I will abandon the broader themes introduced above to concentrate on the work itself, work that, image by image, is concentration incarnate.

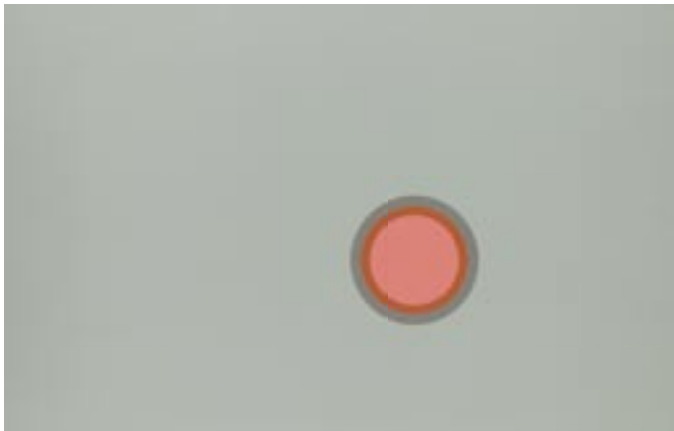
The strength of Pibal’s paintings—I cannot call them canvases since they are executed on metal panels—resides first and foremost in their self-containment. That insularity is in part a function of their modest proportions. So saying, I am again invoking the feeling they give of being bastion islands in the flux of fashion, knowing full well that their own consummate stylishness is one of the reasons they so successfully resist

external pressures. For proof of this, go to the Brooklyn Museum and witness the inviolate presence of the Pibal that hangs there in galleries crammed with much bigger works—though few are as taut—and notice on the label that it is a gift of Alex Katz, the quintessential New York School stylist who would not waste his time on art that cannot compete in wall power with his own generally expansive pictures. But then Katz—who composes small and then enlarges—knows that the dynamic sturdiness of an image is wholly a product of the rigor of its internal armatures in tension with its outer boundaries.

Pibal’s spare pictorial structures strictly observe that rule, whether they consist of visibly locked-in matrices or of frameworks whose joinery is incompletely articulated but palpably considered throughout. That is, grids in which sections may suddenly drop without viewers ever losing their bearings or the overall framework of the composition imploding into disjunctive fragments. Pibal is a modern if not latter-day modernist constructivist rather than a post-modernist deconstructionist. In that regard she is, like Katz’s contemporary Al Held, a spatial engineer. Moreover, consistent with her otherwise divergent purpose—albeit like a machine tool designer rather than a bridge builder—she is just as muscular, and the capacity to absorb counter-forces imbues every dexterous line she traces.

Unlike Held, though, she locates the sublime not in vast baroque volumes and polychrome plateaus but in zones that are close to hand, intimate zones where predominantly close valued hues are lit up by flashes of saturated color as lightening bolts illuminate the desert at dusk or neon signage sparks in the rain along vacant thoroughfares at the urban margins of the American landscape. Am I going too far in making such analogies? If so, then the artist can safely disown the comparisons when it comes her turn to speak. For me they serve to identify sensations I have had in the “real world” that are evoked by my experience of Pibal’s made up, abstract world. For in the final analysis

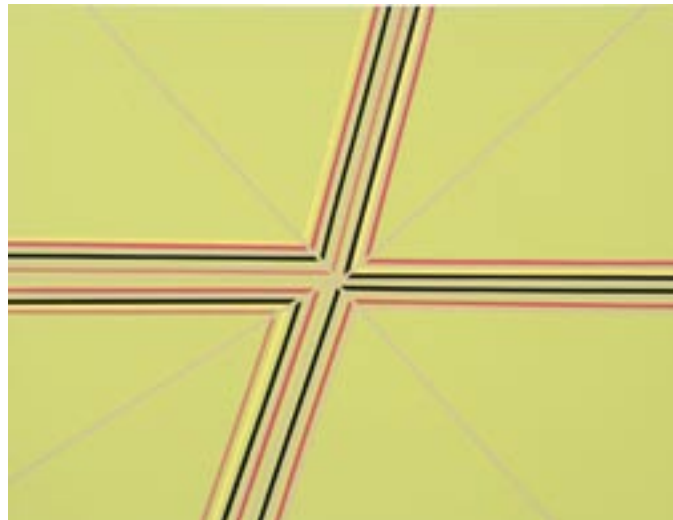
*Drifter* 2004, 26.75" x 42"



such “correspondences,” as Charles Baudelaire labeled these associations, are what draw us to otherwise unfamiliar images and they continually discharge their poetic stimulus long after we have absorbed all that is fresh and distinctive about them.

Now, if I insist a little more on these “edge-city” correlations it is to further distance Pibal’s work from precedents it may superficially resemble and is undoubtedly indebted to. Obviously, for an artist who nests slivers of finely calibrated, rarely primary colors, these include the work of Josef Albers. There is no denying that Albers, the pedagogue, wrote the indispensable manual of chromatic manipulation, *On the Interaction of Color*. But he did not write a recipe book for art, any more than Arnold Schoenberg foresaw, much less dictated, all the expressive uses of the twelve-tone scale. Over the course of time Schoenberg’s example has inspired everything from John Cage’s silence to dissonant hybrids involving every imaginable musical genre and idiom, from those developed by Milton Babbitt to the improvisations of post-Bebop jazz. “Different strokes for different folks / And so on, and so on, and scooby doobie doobie,” as the Über-aesthete Sly Stone would have it. Pibal, it strikes me, is as much a product of Stone’s America as of Albers’s, as much or more a creature of strip malls as of pure Utopian geometries. Anyway, I am, and much of the public for painting is, and it is likely they will see in

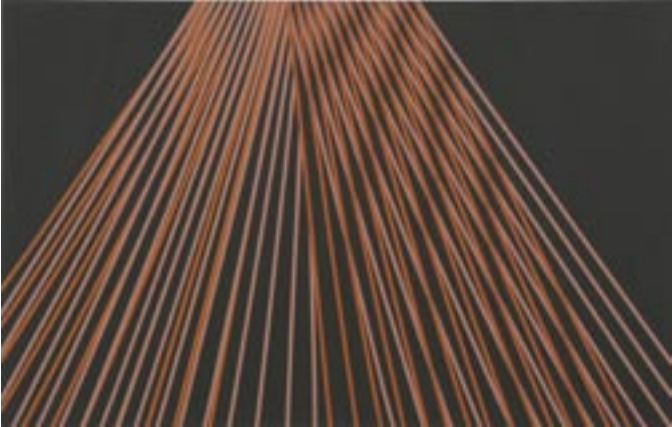
*TuffStuff* 2005, 20" x 22"



the shimmer and glare of her interactive palette more of what they know than of what the Bauhaus master theorized. And that is as it should be, since painting that really turns on the lights is never about lessons learned and systems applied but about intuitions enhanced by knowledge and explored to the limits of that knowledge—and beyond.

Pibal does all of this within the physical confines of her chosen formats, grasping that those voluntary physical constraints release rather than bottle up her gift for invention. Initially her work hewed toward severe, arguably “minimalist” strains of American abstraction, though everyone has an argument with that rubric, above all those to whom it is customarily assigned. No matter, Pibal is not an ism-obsessed artist at any level. Then came a phase of subdued but recognizably Op-Art dazzle in which the oblique was pitted against the squared-off, and cool acid greens and blues were flickeringly juxtaposed to off-key oranges and pinks or to earth or flesh tones masquerading as tints of a more aggressive decorative or cosmetic order. In both bodies of work, pigment went down matte and flat. Lately there have been disturbances in that once uniformly inflected painterly field while

*PetitRoi* 2005, 13" x 21"



shades of gray, slate blue, moss green, deep pumpkin, maroon and brown have become more common. In broad expanses brush marks have started to show, agitating everything in their vicinity or reinforcing our sense of the relative fixity of those elements in which brush strokes have been entirely subordinated—like tides washing up on breakwaters, if I may return to the aquatic metaphors with which I began. With these developments Pibal reminds us that she issues from a long tradition of American gesturalism and that even her taped, die-cut bars of pigment should be read in terms of how they thrust into and configure the comparative emptiness surrounding them, although seldom have monochrome “backgrounds” felt so solid or looked so much like criss-crossed “foregrounds.”

It is with respect to this ability to give subtle moves dramatic accents and to make little pictures register with the impact of large ones that Pibal’s work bears an affinity to that of another master of deceptive modesty, Thomas Nozkowski. To be sure Nozkowski, who came of age aesthetically in the late 1960s and early 1970s, has approached this proposition from a different generational point of departure and in the course of a four-decade career has charted alternative tributaries of “mainstream” New York painting. That Pibal’s work betrays no nostalgia for previous eras—of the first half of the twentieth century or the second—

*AERIE* 2008, 44" x 66"



suggests that she is equally at home with her generational cohort, that of the 1990s, which also includes Tomma Abts, with whom striking, reciprocally informative contrasts can be noted.

Still, to the degree that I am right in thinking that this is the moment for both of them, such a conviction derives from something intrinsically similar in their work. That something, contrary to first impressions, is an immodest ambition—specifically the drive to create uniquely memorable images rather than consistent products—but one that nevertheless recognizes the dangers of over-statement and values the virtues of what may seem to be understatement until viewers have had a chance to re-gauge absurdly dilated sensibilities and bring them back into the sharp focus required by thoroughly considered, completely realized painting of every scale. Right now doing the right thing favors compression and decisiveness over grandiosity and approximation, over the supersized and the generic but excessively finished. Pibal has come down on the side of making things that could be no other size and no other way. Nor need they be to satisfy those who care to pay attention. Her paintings are promises made with full understanding of the stakes and the competition—and they are promises kept, one by one by one.



Ann Pibal, *FLFM*, 2011, acrylic on aluminum, 16 1/4 x 12 3/4".

## Ann Pibal

MEULENSTEEN

Abstract painters usually give their works titles after the fact, and often quite arbitrarily, so trying to draw out connections between these verbal handles and the real content of the art is a dangerous game. But the way Ann Pibal titles her paintings really does correspond to an important aspect of the paintings, namely a sort of agnosticism about whether abstraction should be strictly nonobjective, a self-contained construct eschewing all reference to the outside world, or should instead evoke aspects of reality but in an indirect way. The titles of paintings in this show, “DRMN’,” are, but for a few exceptions, composed of sequences of capital letters, and most of the time only consonants. The lack of vowels means, of course, that the titles can’t be words in English—can’t straightforwardly signify. And yet some of them do tempt one to read them as familiar words: I can’t help but read *HNGRS*, 2011, as either “hungers” or “hangers,” and *CRMB*,

2010, as “crumb,” even if I try not to. Other titles, though, resolutely resist any attempt to find an accordion-folded word inside them: *HMLP* and *SPLK* (both 2011) invite no interpretation, at least from me. Finally, there are titles that neither invite nor repulse my reading. My brain doesn’t automatically fill in the supposedly missing letters in *SPLD*, 2011, but if I decide to make the effort to read it as “spilled” or “spoiled,” the four consonants put up no resistance.

Pibal’s paintings are elegant, compact, highly refined abstractions with family resemblances to those of such contemporaries as Tomma Abts and Ruth Root. They are clean-lined but not finicky, geometrical but not didactic. Some of them, like some of her titles, invite reading as highly stripped-down or decontextualized bits of representation—*HTMT*, 2011, at least when I saw it just after Hurricane Irene had made its way up the Eastern Seaboard, distinctly brought to mind a bank of windows with streaks of rain blowing in from some unseen opening between the lower sash and the windowsill—whereas others seem quite strictly to resist reference (*LSHT*, 2010, for instance). But just like the titles that allow you to fill them in as words if you so desire yet don’t importune you to do so, many of the paintings themselves seem neither to demand nor disclaim reference. I can see the horizontal line about two-thirds of the way down *APLN*, 2011, as an invitation to see this painting as an abstraction of landscape space if I want to—or just let the idea drop. (If it is a landscape, it’s more like the one I see in my GPS than the one out the window—the graphic, linear appearance of the paintings is part of their contemporaneity.) And the same is true if I think of reading the ascending lines in *FLFM*, 2011, as evoking architecture.

Since I’m a viewer with a bias toward finding paraphrasable meaning, this puts me in a position that reminds me of that of the suitor in a famous passage from Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*. As you may recall, the fellow doesn’t know whether the girl means to accept or resist his advances—and neither does she. He puts his hand on hers, hoping to find out whether she will accept the caress or push it away. Instead, she simply leaves her hand there inert, not acknowledging his gesture at all. Sartre (taking the side of the suitor) defines the girl’s position as one of bad faith, but that’s probably unfair. Yes, she estranges her hand from her consciousness, secretly enjoying her companion’s desire at the price of self-alienation, and maintaining in him a state of mere “sentimental speculation.” But in painting, at least, this tactical separation between the mental and physical may be the opposite of bad faith: One’s painting, after all, really is a separate thing in a way one’s hand isn’t. If anything is capable of bringing me face-to-face with my own condition, torn between facticity and transcendence, it’s an abstract painting.

—Barry Schwabsky

# Art in America

REVIEWS Nov 30, 2011

## Ann Pibal

NEW YORK

at Meulenstein

by David Humphrey



Racing stripes can make cars look as though they are moving even when parked. Anne Pibal accessorizes her small painted aluminum panels to likewise imply motion, albeit warped and multi-directional. Her suave bandings, skewed subdivisions, broken patterns and sporty orthogonals toy with decorativeness as well as the more “serious” traditions of modernist and postmodernist abstraction.

This exhibition, called “DRMN” (all works 2011), consisted of 18 paintings, all under 18 inches tall or wide. Cryptic titles, such as *LSHTP*, *AFTMX* or *HNGRS*, seem to compress words or phrases so that their sense, like that of the paintings themselves, is merely suggested, impossible to confirm. Pibal’s preferred compositional element is a very skinny rectangle that can function both as a structuring device, like a two-by-four or an I-beam, and a decorative motif, like a stripe. What seems at first to be scaffolding can change on second glance into patterned folly, while stylish geometric ornament can take on the muscle of a suspension bridge.

*FLS2* suggests a building under construction, as blue beams of various thickness cant eccentrically into the frame. Dropping in from above are two pinkish stripes flying tiny, flaglike parallelograms. The blue structure contains a brushed, atmospheric passage, as though rainy weather has been captured within.

*FLS2*’s precarious order oscillates between matter and mind-architecture in various states of being. In addition to architectural models, *AFTQ* and *DKNT* evoke shelving units and Art Deco marine décor. All the paintings tap the historically saturated languages of modern design, geometric painting and the meta-historical, death-of-painting abstraction of the ’80s and ’90s, like that of Gerwald Rockenschaub or Peter Halley. Pibal’s bright lyricism, though, emphasizes a playful or poetic relation to those sources. Her irreverence and slippery vitality resist the stern regularities of ruled form. Like the Proun paintings by El Lissitzky, minus his Suprematist utopian avant-guardism, Pibal’s work is a task-oriented form of visionary creation. She invokes commercial or industrial production by means of standardized, repeatable components, but shuffles, limns and frames those elements so that they become idiosyncratic. And whimsical: tape is surely one of her tools, yet she uses it to make painted shapes that resemble tape. Her labor is precise; every decision feels sure and permanent, even as she is crafting a sense of improvised contingency. In Pibal’s paintings, off-kilter seems right and inscrutability makes perfect sense.

*Photo: Ann Pibal: FLS2, 2011, acrylic on aluminum, 17½ by 14¼ inches; at Meulenstein.*

## ANN PIBAL & SIAH ARMAJANI

by Charles Schultz

MEULENSTEEN GALLERY | SEPTEMBER 8 – OCTOBER 8, 2011

Both Ann Pibal and Siah Armajani are well-established artists with track records of producing structurally rigorous and conceptually astute works. They also share the Midwest—specifically Minnesota—as part of their cultural heritage. Armajani emigrated there from Tehran in 1960 and has stayed ever since. Pibal, who was born in '69, resided in the North Star state long enough to earn a college degree. Their concurrent solo exhibitions at Meulenstein Gallery make for a fascinating pair, bookending these artists' time in middle America. Fifteen new paintings by Pibal hang in the main space and a dozen of Armajani's earliest pieces, many created in the years leading up to his arrival in America, occupy the adjacent room dedicated to projects.

Pibal's exhibition, *DRMN'*, continues her ongoing exploration of geometric abstraction as a process-based, improvisational practice. Rather than canvas, Pibal paints on thin sheets of aluminum cut in a rectangular shape that hang snugly on the wall. Most are not much bigger than an open textbook, a modest scale that lends each piece an air of intimacy. Her compositions, crisp slivers of colored lines against alternately flat and brushy backgrounds, have a highly focused, meditative quality. They are sleek, with all the grace of modernist refinement.

Pibal is also a consummate colorist, extending the legacy of Josef Albers in ways the old maestro might not have imagined. Perhaps surprisingly, she does so in acrylics, which have long been considered sumptuously inferior to oils—something any painter visiting this exhibition will have to reconsider. What makes Pibal's paintings so strong, color-wise, is her combined ability to create exceedingly subtle hues and her skill for balancing them on a single surface. More than that, Pibal doesn't blow out her color capabilities with subject matter. Just the opposite, the linear structures activate her cast of rich pigments.

There are no curves in Pibal's compositions. Sharply delineated angles, both acute and obtuse, dominate the picture plane. It is tempting to see in some the airplane perspectives of squared-off fields and long straight highways that make up much of the midwestern topography. Such an analogy quickly breaks down, however, when Pibal's lines are split and truncated, creating a sense of objects rising and falling, receding and advancing. "HNGRS" (2011) exemplifies this optical cunning. Three whitish bars pass parallel and horizontal against a ground of greening yellow. Extending off the center bar, which is also the thickest, five skinny white bands shoot diagonally to the top and bottom edge of the canvas, giving the appearance that



the center bar is dropped back in space. Little rod-like clusters of color hang from these diagonals like stalactites, convincingly adding an illusion of gravity.

Pibal has talked about her painting as a way of thinking. Her decision to improvise rather than plan suggests openness, a broad sense of searching, rather than any kind of conclusive idea. This is where Armajani's early work resonates most strikingly with Pibal's paintings. It reveals the trappings of a young Persian mind seeking a means of understanding his place in a social and political reality rife with conflict.

These early pieces, made between 1957 and 1962, have never been exhibited in the United States. This is a curious fact, considering how thoroughly the international (especially the American) art establishment has embraced Armajani over the last 40 years. Be that as it may, these works are impressively composed. Many employ ink or watercolor on cloth or paper, which has yellowed with age. Armajani's mature work often incorporates text, especially poetry, and these pieces show that the artist was already bringing writing into his work at a nascent stage. Here, however, the text is calligraphic, and it shares space with archetypal images like a key, a horseback rider, a pear, an apple—many of which reflect Armajani's interest in folk tales and miniature painting.

Armajani's father is a recurring figure in the works made between '58 and '59. He never paints a likeness of his father; instead the artist incorporates him into the titles of his pieces, "Father has a Pear," "Father has an Apple," "Father has a Pomegranate," "Father has Water." These may be referring to the artist's flesh-and-blood dad, but it's just as possible that they refer to a metaphysical parent, one who possesses the bounty of the earth. Alternately, "Shirt" (1958) is an explicit reference to Armajani's biological father; it was his shirt. Using pencil and ink, Armajani completely covered the garment in neat Persian script. The piece calls to mind the work of another Iranian-born, American-based artist, Shirin Neshat. Neshat, two decades younger than Armajani, has made a number of photographic self-portraits upon which she's shrouded herself in equally elegant calligraphic Persian script.

Both Neshat and Armajani are deeply philosophical and politically engaged artists who share an affinity for quoting poetry in their work. For Neshat, veiling bare female skin in calligraphy metaphorically challenges the



Ann Pibal, "RTOF," 2011. Acrylic on aluminum. 17  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 12  $\frac{3}{4}$ ".



Siah Armajani, "Shirt," 1958. Cloth, pencil, and ink on cloth. 31  $\frac{3}{4}$  x 29  $\frac{7}{8}$  x  $\frac{3}{4}$ ".



censorship of women oppressed by traditional ideological laws. Armajani’s “Shirt” (presaging Neshat’s highly acclaimed photography series by 40 years) might be understood through similar symbolic logic. It’s a functional, utilitarian garment transformed into an aesthetic object through the act of writing. This is what Armajani’s father likely wore in public, and perhaps the writing—if taken as a symbol of tradition and religion—can be seen as another form of public dress code, strictly adhered to in society, less so in the privacy of one’s home. If so, “Shirt” would certainly have upset the State’s authorities, and may have put the artist’s father in an uncomfortable, even dangerous, position. The artist was 19 years old then, two years away from leaving the conservative culture of Tehran for the hippie wave of liberation and revolution in America.

It is probably coincidence that both Pibal and Armajani moved to the Midwest to attend college, but those are formative years regardless of what circumstances enabled them. Might the broad expanse of the topography have been influential for both on some unconscious level? I am unfamiliar with Pibal’s work prior to her painting practice grounded in open-ended propositions and compositional experimentation, but we know that Armajani went on to have a tremendous career making large sculpture, often for public spaces. In that regard, the mature work of both artists encourages a sense of openness and asks viewers to think critically about the nature of the structures they encounter, be they physical or otherwise.

---

**CONTRIBUTOR**

**Charles Schultz**

---

ART & DESIGN | ART IN REVIEW

# Ann Pibal: ‘Drmn’

By ROBERTA SMITH SEPT. 22, 2011

*Meulensteen*

*511 West 22nd Street, Chelsea*

*Through Oct. 8*

Ann Pibal’s new paintings can deliver something bordering on an eyeful, but only if you have patience and ignore their slightly pretentious bending-over-backward modesty and attenuation, as well as, in this instance, their numerousness. Her fourth gallery solo show in New York, “DRMN” presents 17 small paintings, which is too much considering the close looking required, and furthermore creates something of a production-line effect.

Ms. Pibal’s fastidious little works, painted on aluminum panels not much larger than the pages of a book, usually begin with smooth, monochrome grounds in tasteful colors. These are disrupted by thin, clustered lines and bars in contrasting colors that suggest collapsing scaffolding, fragmented maps or computer designs, and are punctuated by tiny stacks of more intensely colored bars and rectangles loosely brushed with a second color. The brushiness is sometimes more expansive, as in the light blue right half of “FLS2,” which plays against a solid aqua left side and is overlaid with lines suggesting a falling ladder in a third blue. In “EPTO,” uncharacteristically loose black brushstrokes nearly obscure a glowing pink, creating relatively fiery effects and electrifying a pair of pink lines running parallel at the edges and across the bottom of the panel.

There is an argument to be made for these works as latter-day, text-free manuscript illuminations that expand up close, especially as you begin to fathom the careful layering (and taping) that goes into each composition. But there is an equal argument against them as a kind of overly precious micropainting that is similar to (if less nostalgic than) the more widely lauded Tomma Abts.

Perhaps the most concise criticism of this show comes from Ms. Pibal’s own work: two paintings with more assertive colors and emphatic arrangements of lines currently on view in a group show at Feature on the Lower East Side. They suggest that despite the severe restrictions she places on painting, they provide more room to move than she is using here.

# MODERN PAINTERS

DEC 2011/JAN 2012 | ARTINFO.COM

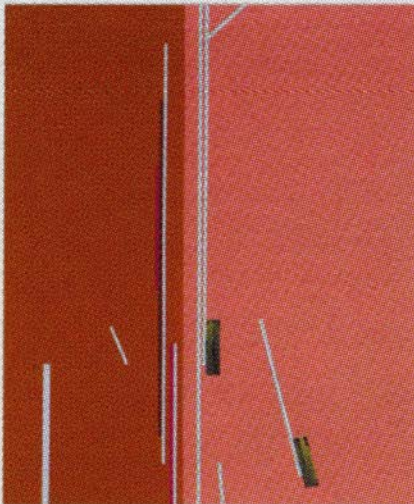
ART / ARCHITECTURE / DESIGN / PERFORMANCE / FILM

---

## Ann Pibal

*Meulenstein Gallery // September 8–October 8*

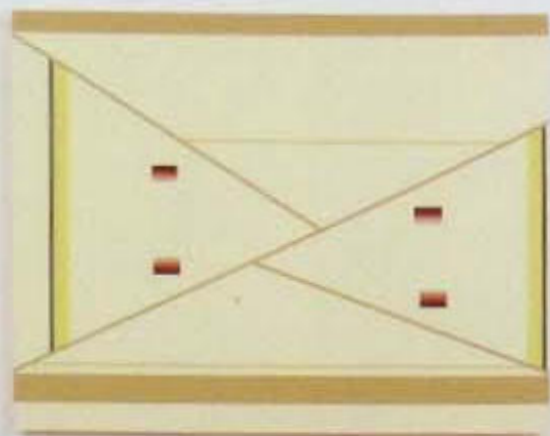
---



A few things that these small oils on aluminum bring to mind: outdated video games like Pong, extraterrestrial musical notation, frozen animation cells, the outline of a sports field for a game that has yet to be invented, a carefully

plotted grid caught in the act of falling to pieces (as in 2011's *DRFP*, pictured here). Pibal's variations on a theme stick to the same basic elements without falling into a rut; her hard-edged abstractions are quiet and winsome without being twee. And they have more of a human pulse than the equally hard-edged and geometric work of, say, Sarah Morris.





# REDUCTIVE MINIMALISM

## WOMEN ARTISTS IN DIALOGUE, 1960–2014

Nearly fifty years after its heyday, Minimalism is enjoying a resurgence of critical attention, though much of the focus continues to be on male artists, or on a small number of women sculptors. *Reductive Minimalism: Women Artists in Dialogue, 1960–2014* offers a fresh perspective on the movement and its evolution, bringing together formative works from two generations of women Minimalist painters, to examine and celebrate the dialogue between them.

Minimalism was born in the late 1950s as a reaction to the perceived hubris and theatricality of Abstract Expressionism. But even though its most prominent, mostly male, practitioners favored an aesthetic of simplicity, clean geometry, and essential forms, the hubris remained—in oversized works with grandiose themes. Artists such as Frank Stella, in his tremendous *Black Paintings*, created austere, imposing compositions that overpowered the viewer both in scale and physical aggression. Similarly, the cleanly painted surfaces of Brice Marden's monochromatic paintings from the 1960s revealed little of the artist's hand or his emotive experiences as a painter.

The first generation of women Minimalist painters, however, took a more restrained or reductive approach than their male counterparts, one more intimate in scale, more personal in narrative, and more open-ended in its experimentation with pure surface, color, grid structure, and texture. Whether by instinct or by deliberate strategy, the work was seductive and inviting rather than bombastic or controlling. Dorothea Rockburne's *Fire Engine Red*, for example, used an uneven application of paint to outline the surface support, demystifying the structure of a work that was still imposing in scale. Likewise, Eleanore Mikus covered irregular wood or synthetic surfaces with monochromatic pigmentation, enhancing and drawing attention to beautiful imperfections within a flat and seemingly pristine planar structure.

Many of these women—Agnes Martin and Anne Truitt among them—worked for much of their careers outside the New York art world, and outside the critical discourse that would have offered them support and recognition. Though gender politics was not necessarily the impetus for their work, it played a role in the circumstances of where and how they practiced. But



Above: Anne Truitt, *Sandcastle*, 1963; acrylic on wood, UMMA, Gift of Mrs. H. Gates Lloyd, 1984/2.57, ©annetrutt.org / Bridgeman Art Library. Photograph by Charles Edwards.  
Opposite: Ann Pibal, *XXMT*, 2013, oil on aluminum, Courtesy of Richard S. Marcus, Los Angeles, CA, Courtesy of the artist, Photograph by Jeffrey Sturges.

In spite of their relative isolation, their work had a profound influence on the next generation of women Minimalist painters working today—including Iranian Shirazeh Houshiary and German Tomma Abts—who have international exposure and who are celebrated in a varied and robust critical environment. It is unlikely that without their predecessors' tenacity these women would be embraced without marginalization or gender classification.

In the gallery, *Reductive Minimalism* traces the conversation between these two generations in an installation of nine pairs of paintings, to reveal the call-and-response of their artistic symbiosis through a series of formal, aesthetic, and narrative themes. In identifying these connections, the exhibition explores a strain of Minimalist practice that is still vital and provocative in contemporary painting; and offers a long-overdue critical context for the original generation of women Minimalist painters, whose work, even today, is alive in its fearlessness, its generosity, and its power to inspire.

#### Erica Barrish Guest Curator

Lead support for this exhibition is provided by the University of Michigan Office of the Provost, the University of Michigan Health System, and the Richard and Rosann Noel Endowment Fund. Additional generous support is provided by the Susan and Richard Gutow Fund, Elaine Pitt, the University of Michigan CEW Frances and Sydney Lewis Visiting Leaders Fund, Department of the History of Art, the Katherine Tuck Enrichment Fund, and the Doris Sloan Memorial Fund.



# University of Michigan Museum Showcases Two Generations of Women Minimalists

Mark Stryker, Detroit Free Press Staff Writer

Published 12:04 a.m. ET Jan. 4, 2015



(Photo: U-M Museum of Art)

"The only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own."

Betty Friedan wrote those words in "The Feminine Mystique" just over a half-century ago in 1963. Friedan wasn't an art critic, but it's revealing that at the very moment her landmark book was published, a number of gifted and original women painters were learning just how difficult it could be to do their own creative work in a male-dominated art world, where gender, politics and the critical tide were all stacked against them.

Those issues are front and center in "Reductive Minimalism: Women Artists in Dialogue, 1960-2014," a tightly focused, lucid and drop-dead gorgeous exhibition at the University of Michigan Museum of Art. Organized by guest curator Erica Barrish, the show connects the dots between nine often-neglected, pioneering women artists who came of age in the first flush of minimalism and nine contemporary painters who stand on the shoulders of their predecessors.

The result is an imaginative exhibition that opens a new window on an old subject. Barrish offers smart, close-readings of the paintings while placing them in a historical context that amplifies their meaning and shines a spotlight on some overlooked artists who deserve the push — and she does it without the fog of *au courant* theory or jargon.

All of the artists in the show work under the umbrella of minimalism: abstract art of simplified forms, pure geometry and restrained expression. Spaciously installed, the exhibition progresses two by two, as Barrish pairs works by older and younger artists who share common formal attributes: Agnes Martin and Tauba Auerbach each jump off from grid structures and patterns. Anne Truitt and Ann Pibal operate in a world of private symbols that imply narrative. Sally Hazelet Drummond and Shirazeh Houshiary create monochromatic fields of hypnotic, mystical power.

As Barrish argues in her catalog essay, the first generation of women minimalist artists — Martin, Truitt, Drummond, Jo Baer, Eleanore Mikus, Dorothea Rockburne, Mary Heilmann, Mary Corse, Suzan Frecon — was at a competitive disadvantage. On the one hand, the women's commitment to painting was seen as old-fashioned in relation to male sculptors like Carl Andre and Donald Judd, who defined the cutting edge. On the other, these women eschewed overt feminist ideology and themes that were markers of "seriousness" in the eyes of curators, critics and some artists.

Instead, they pursued an art of quiet, often intimate personal expression that lacked the aggressiveness of form and rhetoric associated with the art made by their male counterparts. The pointillist brush strokes in Drummond's shimmering "Presence of the Heart" (1962), the lush painterly quality of Rockburne's "Fire Engine Red" (1967) and the seductive shapes and pastels of Truitt's painted wood sculpture "Sandcastle" (1963) all reveal an

expressive lyricism dismissed at the time as self-indulgent and feminine.

Thankfully, times have changed. Artists today operate in a far more open, pluralist and egalitarian age in which prejudices against women, emotionalism and the very act of painting have all subsided (though still remain in pockets). The newer painters represented here — who also include Tomma Abts, Sam Moyer, Kate Shepherd, Alex Olson, Svenja Deininger and R.H. Quaytman — carry the torch forward with an exhilarating sense of freedom and confidence.

The surface of Olson's "Shell" (2011) is a subtle wash of grayish and white tones with tactile strokes and rhythms that create a kind of walking-on-eggshell balance of strength and fragility. It's paired with Heilmann's "Orbit" (1978), whose equally nuanced use of painterly imperfection suggests, like Olson's work, an enigmatic personal narrative.



Dorothea Rockburne's "Fire Engine Red" (1967, wrinkle finish oil paint on aluminum), on view at the U-M Museum of Art. (Photo: U-M Museum of Art)

Pibal's "FXMT" (2013), a meticulously painted small-scale abstraction, uses angled lines, bars, tiny rectangles and savvy color to create a painting in which the elements appear to interact and tell a story in a language beyond words. Pibal, like all of the women in "Reductive Minimalism," knows who she is in a way that Friedan would have recognized. The proof is right there on the canvas.



Painting Abstraction:  
New Elements in Abstract Painting  
by Bob Nickas

PHAIDON

Ann Pibal's paintings are deceptively simple; alternately straightforward and illusionistic, they are both autonomous and referential to art and life. While a finished painting may look to be the product of design, of an idea executed according to plan, her work is actually made through a process of improvisation – she draws, composes, and re-composes with masking tape on a painted ground. For all the resonance her paintings have with the history of geometric abstraction and the sense of detachment we might associate with it, Pibal's approach is intuitive: "My work is intensely personal," she admits.<sup>16</sup> She doesn't mean this in terms of narrative, but with respect to a painting practice, feeling caught as she does between "doubting that a painting is possible and wanting to make a painting that is transcendent. This activity makes life meaningful, and at the same time you doubt that." To begin, she sets up a formal problem so that there is a reason to make a painting and follows various rules or parameters, maintaining certain constants, such as scale, which is almost always intimate, although size often changes from one painting to the next. "I have to fulfill the requirements of the painting," she says, as if on an assignment she has given herself, while also acknowledging that she has a responsibility to something she will bring into the world. Another constant is that Pibal uses acrylic paint on thin aluminum panels that provide a smooth surface and are hung close to the wall. The flatness of the support corresponds to the thinness of the lines that often mark out dense space in the dark grounds of a number of paintings and to the matter-of-fact frontality that characterizes others. In terms of image, a final rule/constant in her work is the use of repetition. Pibal always echoes shapes, repeats motifs, and creates mirror images – though they are often askew – that suggest the reflection of water, as in *POOL* (2007).

When Pibal moved from upstate to New York City just over ten years ago, she was a figurative painter, but she stopped shortly after encountering the paintings of Mary Heilmann and Dan Walsh, with whom she felt an immediate affinity. While it's difficult to say with any certainty whether more painters shift from figurative to abstract work – or the other way around – as they mature, it's worth wondering to what extent an artist who works in an abstract mode has held onto representation, and what significance this really has in the end. In the studio, Pibal is at first reluctant to say what the paintings are about, what their references are, as if the mystery she is after will be dispelled. But as she talks about the quality of light she is interested in – "shifting, transient light, the kind you see at dusk or dawn" – you can't help but be reminded of the doubled, perhaps rising and setting suns with radiating lines in *DRMN'* (2008). Pibal is drawn as well to light that "indicates pictorial space." Some of her images have a relationship with architecture. *LUXLUX* (2008), for example, could be a mirrored transom or an oblique view of an empty storefront. When she mentions her attraction to "something about a painting being luminous," she seems to be referring to a recent work, *LULL* (2008); with slender lines of color that illuminate a dark ground, it could be an abstract image of Dan Flavin's fluorescent tubes. Finally, and without any great emphasis, she says, "The paintings have always been about nature." While her circular forms can be seen as referring to the sun and the moon, and bright blue or black expanses suggest the ocean or the night sky, the paintings are firmly rooted in the abstract: a circle is still a circle, and blue is still blue. She adds, "I spend a lot of time looking at digital design but also, and more often, to twentieth-century

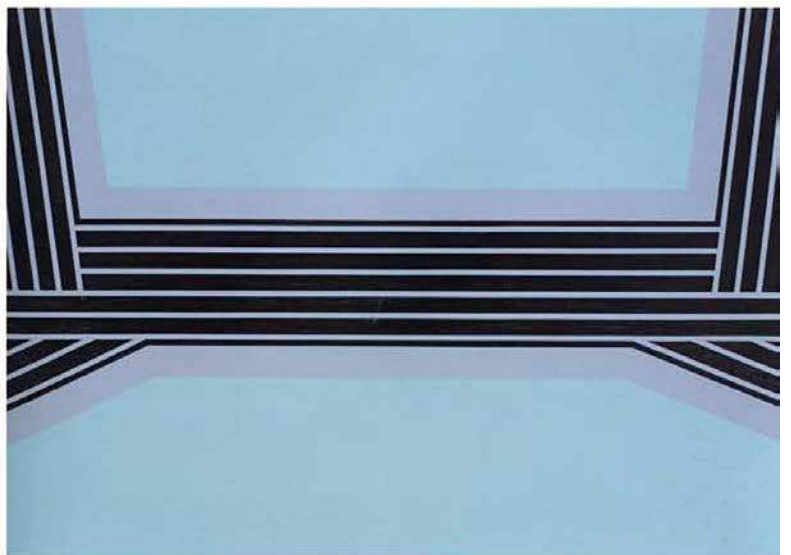
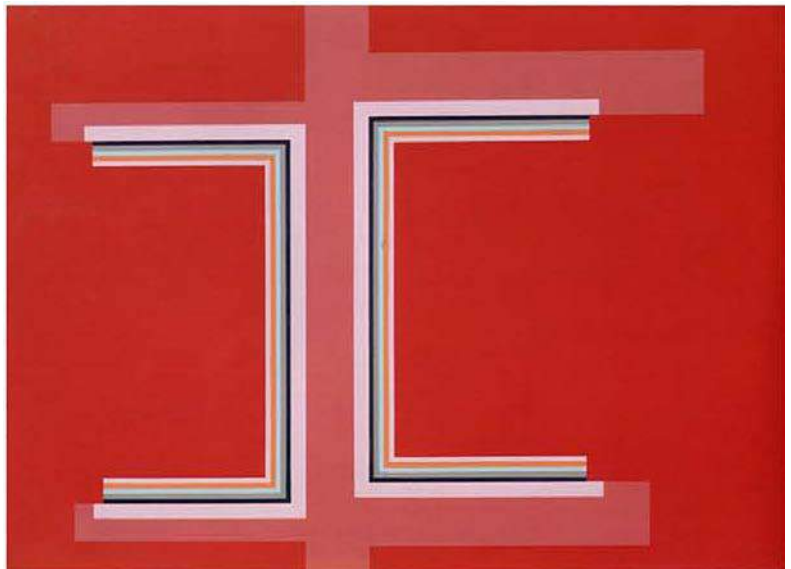
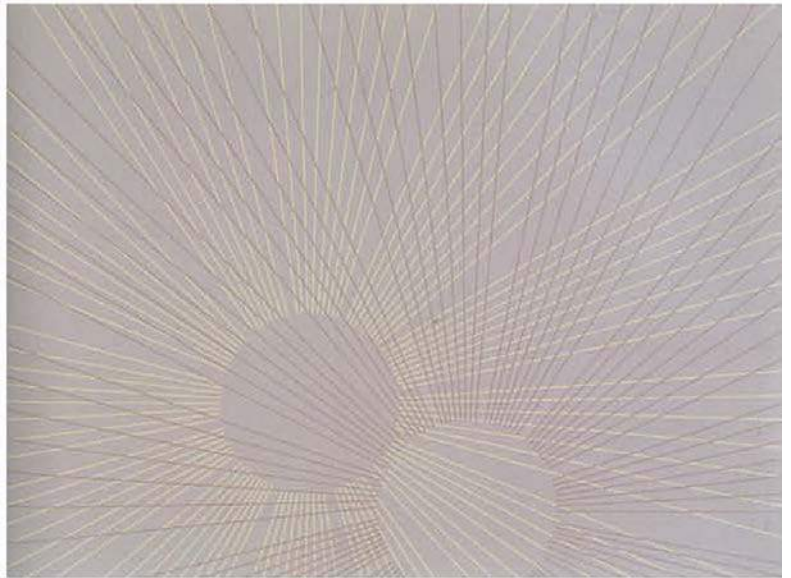
American and French textiles, especially for color, and to wallpaper and interiors of all kinds. I like thinking about painting and design and the everyday as not being so far apart."

Pibal's interaction with abstract painting reveals relationships to historical as well as contemporary figures. Her use of line and space connects her paintings to those of Agnes Martin and to the early work of Jo Baer; there is as well Tomma Abts, who also prefers a modest scale and has an unexpected sense of color, and Walsh, with whom Pibal shares an offhand geometry. *FTHRWT* (2007) can be seen as descended from Frank Stella's "black paintings" and his pinstripe line. And then there is the passage of time. As Pibal has said, "The flexible/not-fixed quality that the line gives the compositions implies movement" and presents a temporal situation. In *LULL*, for example, the bend and bow of her lines renders Barnett Newman's "zip" as an interlude, as the title implies. A group of recent paintings are in the studio, some hung, others set flat onto a worktable. They are each on a brown ground, and lines have been drawn with tape cut into about a dozen widths, from narrow to wide, to compose the picture. Each has six or seven colors, all warm and earthy tones. "I think that these paintings have a curtain or a lens that creates an aperture," she notes. "They expand or contract." Like all of Pibal's previous works, they have the appearance of symmetry. On close inspection you can see that this is not the case – a final constant, and yet a generous deception for an artist who considers her work "an index of possibilities."

DRMN' 2008  
acrylic on aluminum  
47 1/2 × 66 1/4 in (121 × 168 cm)

2 APTR 2008  
acrylic on aluminum  
19 1/2 × 14 1/4 in (36 × 50 cm)

3 POOL 2007  
acrylic on aluminum  
12 1/2 × 17 1/2 in (32 × 45 cm)







Ann Pibal, *TRPHY #6*, 2008, Acrylic on aluminum, 12 ½" x 17 ½", From the six-part work *TRPHY*, 2008

## Ann Pibal

MAX PROTETCH

The paintings in this exhibition, Ann Pibal's second at the gallery, feature narrow rivulets of color zipping across and around monochrome backgrounds. They make clear that masking tape, with its chastening, restrictive qualities, is as important to the artist's practice as are acrylic-laden brushes. Look intently, and these taped-off lines perform various feats of optical magic. They carve space out of the featureless expanse on which they rest, interact playfully with the colors they abut, and, when Pibal has painted the edges of the thin aluminum panels on which she works, appear from certain angles three-dimensional, as if the painting were a skyscraper with setbacks. While not conventionally expressive, Pibal's paintings are nonetheless full of incident.

*TRPHY*, 2008, a work comprising six separate panels, was hung in Max Protetch's project space. The paintings are diminutive and share a strange palette: buttery yellow, salmon,

light blue, and greenish-brown lines on nearly black backgrounds. No two paintings feature the same composition, nor are any exactly the same size, though Pibal is clearly exploring the possibilities inherent within constraints: The width of the colored bands is constant, they travel only vertically or horizontally, and they never cross one another. Some lines reach the edges of the panel or wrap around it; others float, unattached, in the dark field. To one side of each narrow band trails a halo of black that differs subtly from the background and gives the colored lines the impression of motion. (I imagine the whole series as a time-lapse view of neon tubes flashing on a cinema marquee.) This sense of flux is a suitable metaphor for the artist's process. Despite her reliance on tape, which might preclude spontaneity, Pibal's working method is a search for rough visual harmonies and effects, not seamless perfection: Elements that appear symmetrical, such as the vertical lines in one constituent painting, *TRPHY #3*, are in fact just slightly off-kilter. This is the work of a confident painter building on historical precedent (Mondrian to Newman, Stella to Noland) and engaging with a new generation of talented abstractionists such as Tomma Abts, Kate Shepherd, and Dan Walsh. Like Abts in particular, Pibal focuses attention on the act of seeing itself.

These six paintings benefit from compression, both of the compositions onto small panels and of the panels themselves into a small room. A much larger, similar work—also titled *TRPHY*, 2008—hung alone on another wall. One is better able to see, at the larger size, the intricate tracery of brushwork bounded by Pibal's taped edges, yet the sense of movement and of contingency is lost in the shift of scale. A small nearby nook contained, one to a wall, three paintings from 2010, roughly the same size as the ones in the front room. As with any abstract work, there is the possibility that a composition will resolve into a representational image that a viewer cannot dismiss, and *XCRS* appeared to me as the iconic DK logo of the Dead Kennedys, reimaged by a hip Scandinavian graphic designer. I could not engage the painting on its own terms. In *SPTR* and *MNGO*, the image plane itself seemingly hiccups or stutters, allowing for what appears to be the doubling of certain forms on the left and right sides of the composition. But, again, look closely. In these and the best of Pibal's works, she addresses the ever-shifting, two-way relationship between the eyes and the mind.

—Brian Sholis

But her methodical equations, in the acrylic-on-aluminum paintings now on view at Steven Zevitas Gallery, have a graceful simplicity you don't see on many white boards: straight lines, intersections, and little trolley-like loafs of color that ride along the lines, adding up to a system of weights and balances.

Look at "EXTS," in powdery gray-blue and red. The red lines could almost map a small downtown area, with five shooting off at clean angles from a central horizontal stripe. Some of them carry freight: lean black bars, flat sandwiches of beiges and browns. A fat, red bar streaks across the top. At the bottom, a second red bar doesn't quite reach the right border. It aborts with an alarming ragged tear. Amid the rest of the perfectly straight edges here, it's like a pimple on a model's face.

---

# ANN PIBAL: SWIMMING IN THE OCEAN AT NIGHT

ART NEW  
ENGLAND, JAN/FEB, 2013

By Craig Stockwell

I first saw Ann Pibal's work at Mark Protetch gallery in NY in 2008. She has, since, been showing widely in NY and internationally and her work was included in the DeCordova Biennial last year. I am always drawn to minimalism, challenged by the issue of formalism, and seduced/repulsed by gorgeous color and craftsmanship and these paintings delivered all of the above and left me knowing that I was seeing it all presented in some new way.

An new way that touched on issues of formalism, minimalism and quiet/intelligent/modest painting but somehow presented something more. I visited Ann in her North Bennington, Vermont studio in late August and the question I brought was about her ability to make something new of these concerns. The answer I got totally surprised my expectations and deeply satisfied my sense of how good art happens, when it does. Ann came to these paintings after she stopped painting, around 1998.

Ann stopped painting because there was too much of everything. First, the oil paint and mediums she was using were toxic, the streets outside her Brooklyn studio were full of huge trucks hauling toxic waste, and the paintings she, were making were laden with thick accumulations of crap. She had come to a point where she could not answer basic questions such as: what are you doing, why are you doing it, why is it justified? She says she no longer wanted to have to, "apologize for being superfluous." In reflecting on this Ann also now realizes that this was, perhaps, a necessary and even predictable developmental moment. She was done with graduate school and a few years out in NY making her way as an artist, the time of institutional context had passed and she was forming a relationship now as an adult artist and needed to figure out, "what I wanted to get to, rather than what I was trying to avoid." She set out to do that, almost at a crawl.



# Modern Painting

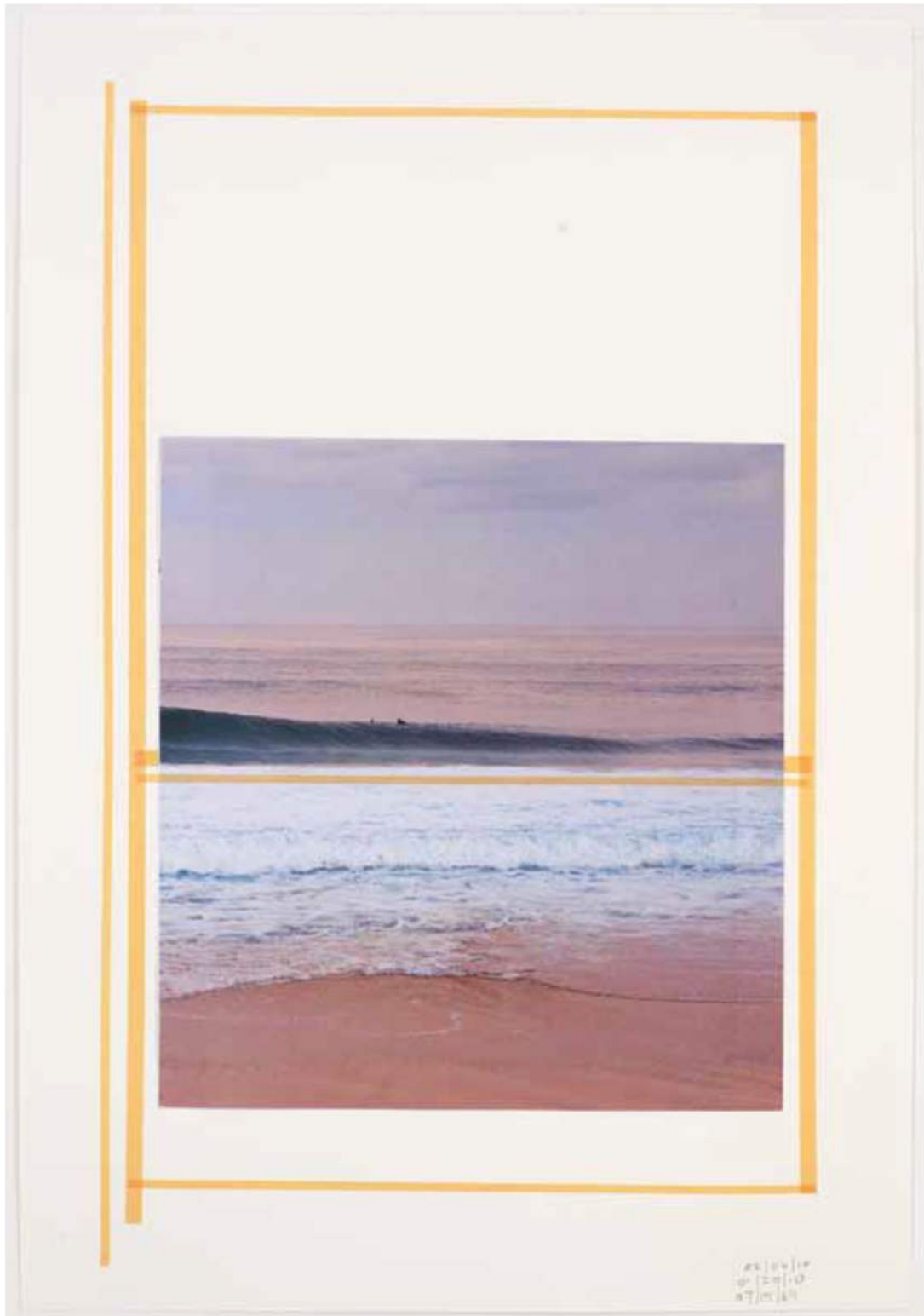
---

# Modern Surfing

Ann Pibal



*Untitled (Surf Drawing, Dawn), 13" x 19" 2010*  
All images courtesy of the artist.



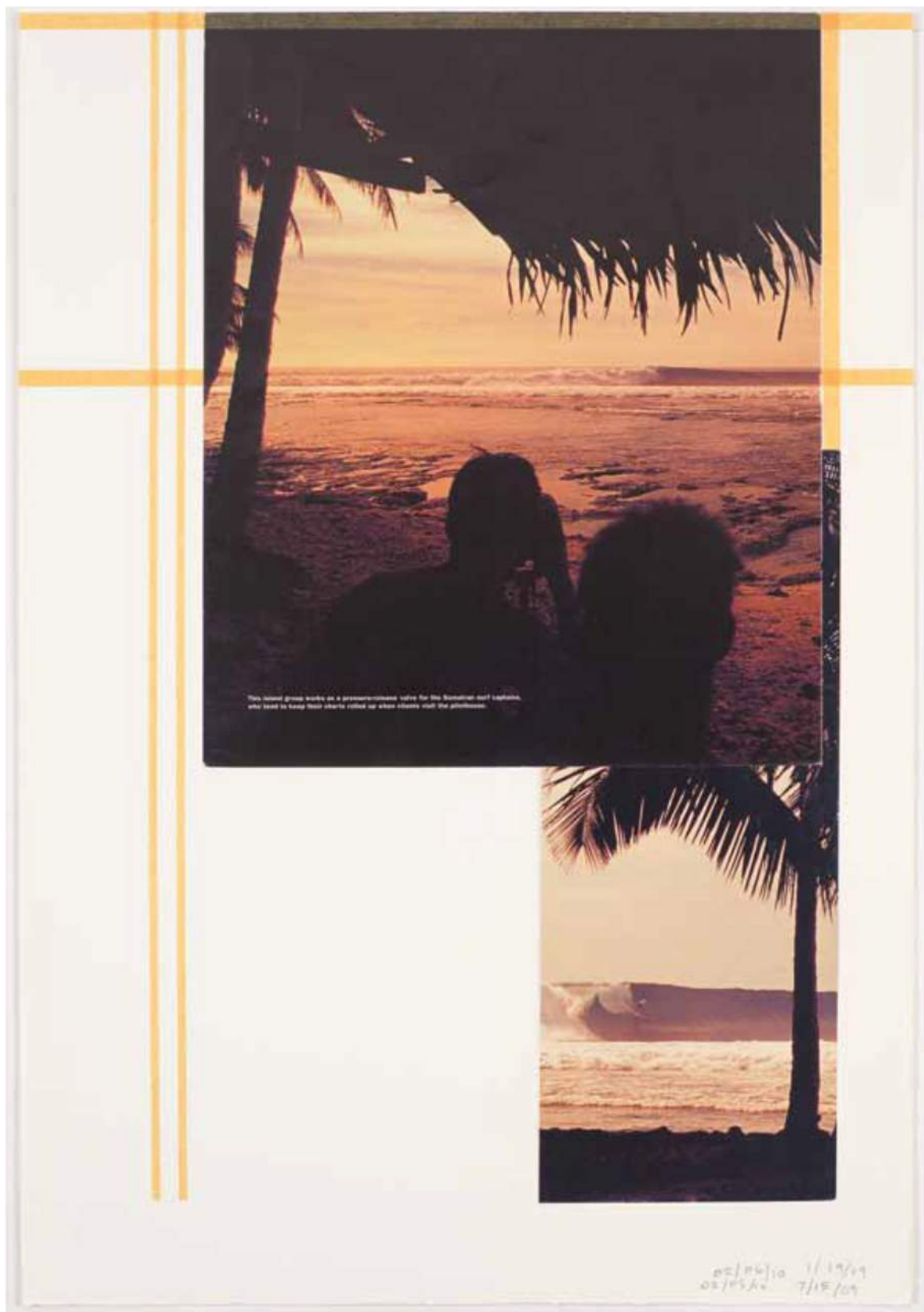


*Untitled (Surf Drawing, Dusk), 13" x 19" 2010.*

Untitled (Surf Drawing, Windy), 19" x 13" 2010.







Untitled (Surf Drawing, Profile), 13" x 20" 2010.

Untitled (surf Drawing, Pipe), 13" x 20" 2009.



My husband, Colin Brant, and I spend a couple of months each winter in Southern Baja. The first time was in 2009, when we packed up our three-year-old, our art supplies, our deadlines and some peanut butter and headed south. We'd made previous trips to Baja; youthful outdoor wanderings complete with sleeping bags, new friends and pipes carved from apples. But this time we weren't looking for adventure as much as to flat-out escape New York. We rented a house with a garden and studio space in Todos Santos, a small coastal town favored by retired ex-pats and creative types, which on our previous trips we'd considered a great place to do laundry and take a shower but not much else. This time, with its genius collision of gritty details and luxury amenities including a Montessori school for our daughter—it ended up being the perfect far-away place, and we now think of it as home away from home.

Todos Santos attracts a lot of surfers. These tanned, bleached, athletic types are easy to spot around town, especially in the afternoons or on days when the surf is small. That first winter we learned that most of them, in other guises, are artists, landscapers, web designers, seasonally flexible freelancers. A few are year-round residents, making a go of small-town Mexican life. In every case they're people who, in one way or another, are going to great lengths to be in the water, for whom a morning without surfing is not satisfactory. All of them, it seemed to me, were also unusually relaxed. I envied them, but it was disorienting at first to be surrounded by people who were actually competitive about how much time they were able to spend not working. To me, habitually high strung, this was a welcome and yet annoying reversal of the New York art world's stress-equals-success lifestyle.

Frustrated watching the action from the beach and supremely inspired by the handful of accomplished women surfers in Todos Santos, I started taking lessons from the go-to instructor-about-town, Mario. In the beginning, I learned simply that surfing is a lot harder than it looks—getting smashed as I did repeatedly in the whitewater, and at first only catching bigger waves when Mario pushed me onto them with a super-powered shove.

I was also curious about the aesthetics and history of surfing; it all immediately seemed like fertile territory for the studio. I was thrilled when I found, in a café give-and-take library, a generous pile of vintage issues of *The Surfer's Journal*. I poured over them on my daily visits for juice and Internet access, and gradually pilfered every last

one, bringing them to my studio to study and read, and eventually to dismantle and cut to pieces for use in my drawings.

Within these pages I discovered the prophetic story of Laird Hamilton finding Bill Hamilton, I learned about Mavericks, about the spectacle of tow-in surfing and the legendary death of Mark Foo. I read about long-ago adventures in mainland Mexico and Honduras, countless stories about groups of young men—who were now probably the age of my father—braving the elements and “local” politics, eating out of cans and out of the sea. I studied one photo after another of surfing as spectacle: images taken by men of men watching men surfing at sunrise, sunset, and in all weather conditions. There were also pieces highlighting the aesthetics of surfing old and new, profiles of famed surfboard artisans in pristine sea towns who must have died with lungs full of fiberglass, epoxy, and the tar of so much THC. Many issues of *The Surfers' Journal* profiled surfers who also made art, painters of a beautifully virtuosic *plein air* variety—“Eucalyptus School”, as Philip Guston put it. Perhaps ultimately and foremost, those pages held the majesty of the ocean, expert photographers having captured repeatedly and in every imaginable variation, the beauty of the water itself.

Never did I see, in that very tall and heavy stack, a story that profiled a woman. There was the wife of the man who had built the amazing house in Costa Rica, who was surrounded by her husband's handmade furnishings as she sat nonchalantly for the camera alongside two beautiful blonde daughters. There were the occasional, and totally delectable, girlfriend shots, and a story about “girls” surfing on a small day alongside some local children from a remote island somewhere. There was also the glaring absence of non-white protagonists on these pages, except for an enormously compelling story about a black surfer who rose to prominence in the 70's.

So, what was I so interested in here—aside from the romanticized portrayal of mostly handsome, privileged young men adventuring without shirts and dressing up like sea mammals? It wasn't just the scruffy coifs and sparkly eyes looking out from those pages, but the overall dreamy effect and fantasy of it, and—ultimately for me—a palpable desire to transcend a regular way of living on land, in a house, burdened with things like earth-bound gravity and employment.

These traveling surfers, essentially dropping out to drop in, were otherwise ordinary guys

(really, I'm not overstating it—pretty much just guys) enthusiastically interacting with the formidable power of nature, and not afraid to talk about the experience with romantic language. These guys, the ones in the magazines, and many I met in Todos Santos, were dedicating vital chunks of their lives to an activity with little value beyond the intrinsic. In unusual cases, fame is possible, but it's a kind of recognition, however, that really only amounts to a fleeting notoriety among this small and specialized group. Surfers and the surfing lifestyle began to seem a lot like artists and the artists' lifestyle to me, complete with the social cache and coded language of the insider, and dominated by intensely patriarchal energy.

I wrote to a friend, "Surfing is the ultimate Modernist sport, perhaps even more so than poetry." I was intending to provoke a laugh, but I meant it; I wasn't sure exactly what it meant in the literal sense, but intuitively, I meant it.

It's easy to draw comparisons, of course: image-making and surfing are ancient activities—surfing surely as old as swimming in any ocean, and creating an image as old as picking charcoal from a fire. When I considered the specifics however, the surf movement as popularized cultural phenomenon really only gained momentum in Hawaii and California in the mid-50s through the 60s, just at the time Americans were also taking pride in a new group of abstract painters to emerge in New York. Both played an enormous role in the shaping of the cultural demeanor of the post-war United States and both presented an iconic image of optimism and bravado, projecting the potential and power of the individual, evoking the sublime, the mysterious, nothing less (truly) than the conditions of life and death. All of this was accomplished, in both cases, while side-stepping the expectations of mainstream lifestyle, and apparently having a terrifically good time.

One could argue the two also followed tandem trajectories as cultural barometers through the 70s and 80s. As Andy Warhol turned a mirror on popular fascination with the superficial and the horrific, Francis Ford Coppola wielded surfing as evidence of unfettered American Imperialism and a naive, prideful, monocular vision. The surf scenes in *Apocalypse Now* present an orgiastic conflation of surf reverie with unfathomable violence—apple pie-faced, Californian optimism now forever translated as a driving desire for conquest, and ultimately innocence lost to irony and collective guilt.

And, in the 90s and onward, artists and surfers went pro in numbers never before imagined—to me a contradiction in terms in the most basic sense. For the professional surfer or artist, the core of the impulse or inquiry is easily subsumed by a desire to please an eager marketplace.

At present, both surfing and the art world have hopefully reached their dark energy spectacle pinnacles, with media encrusted helicopter tow-in surfing perhaps not that different from the extremely priced art object, both fabricated primarily in service to wealth and notoriety, and not necessarily that of the individual artist or surfer. For the art collector on the international circuit or the elite luxury traveler contracting with an airborne surf guide combing offshore breaks in New Zealand, the rarefied and hard-won readily turns banal commodity.

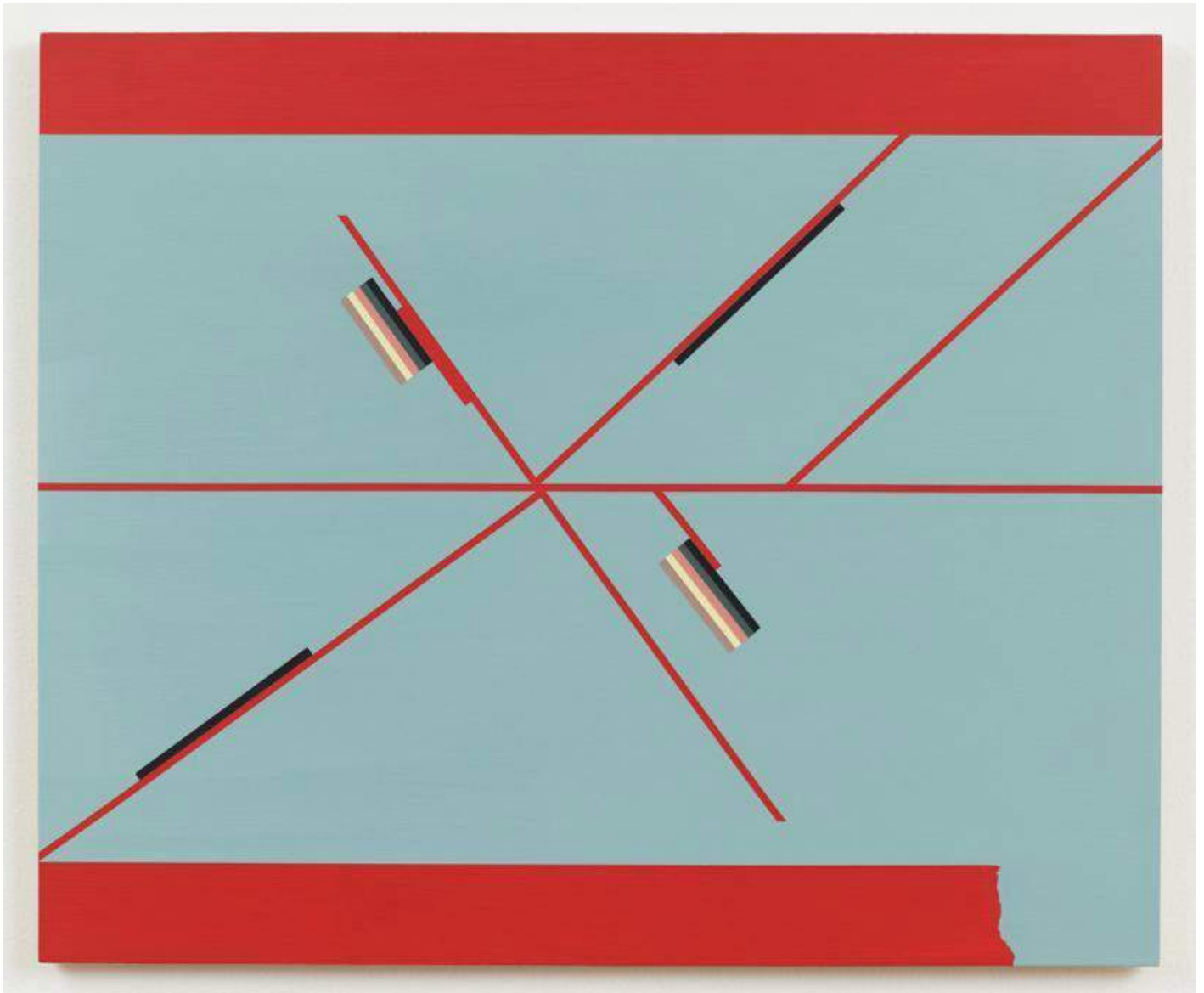
The painter David Reed once told me his theory that swimming is the experience in life that's closest to abstraction; that when the body is submerged in water the perception of its boundaries, literally its physical limits, necessarily becomes altered. In order to contend with abstract images, it follows, one must likewise suspend an understanding of the limits of language, similarly allowing for knowledge to be forged in alternate zones. And finally, that both the experiences of abstraction and of submersion in water are akin to sex: the ultimate "losing" of one's self to the other, losing an awareness of the edge of the self in the interest of expanded experience.

For my part, these analogies are amplified when applied to surfing. I've found the anticipation that builds while waiting for a wave and the subsequent satisfaction of actually catching one is an enormous physical release. The thrill of a ride's intensity coming and then going, the distortion of time and space, and inability to truly collect into perception what precisely happened. These sensations may only partly explain the addictive habits of dedicated surfers, whose skill is gradually earned through the notorious, ultimate-strength reinforcement of intermittent conditioning continually provided by fickle waves, crowded breaks, and the intense physical challenge of it all.

Even now as a relative beginner, I can feel this desire driving me forward—an unreasonable craving to experience the rush all over again—perhaps much less complicated, but definitely not unlike the desire with which I return day after day, to my studio.

## GALLERIES

# What's up at Boston-area art galleries



"EXTS" BY ANN PIBAL.

**By Cate McQuaid**

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT   APRIL 16, 2013

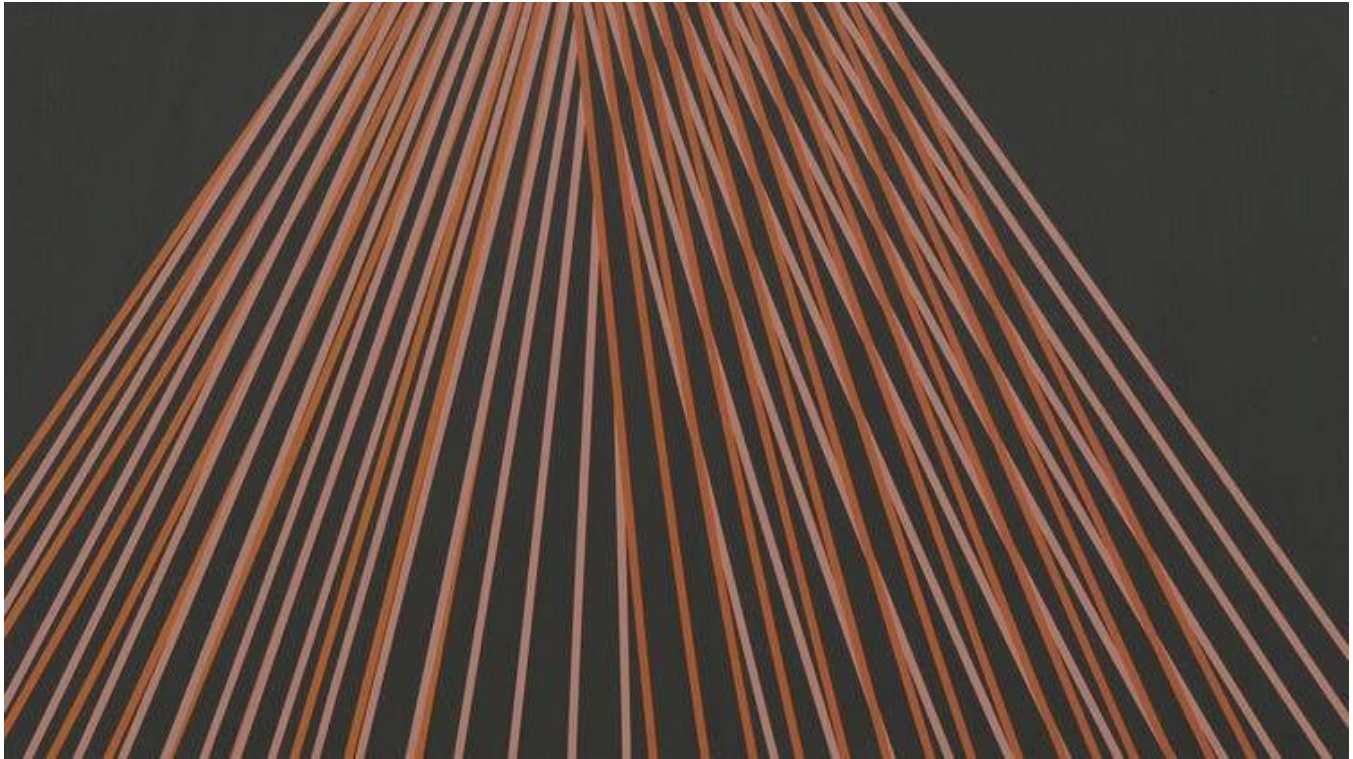
Each of Ann Pibal's succinct abstract paintings moves the eye nimbly over the picture plane. Sharp angles, crisp lines, sometimes tangy color values, and, in her most recent pieces, breathy brushwork all portray a quizzical intent. She's like a physicist scribbling equations over a white board, puzzling out vital, small-scale unknowns.

Out with the oil paint, she began working with only Color-Aid paper and acrylic paint. She reduced her gestures to blocks of color. She set constraints and posed questions. She developed very simple procedural processes based on such moves as doubling images, doing the same study twice at a different scale, and mirroring images.

How the paintings are made offers important insight into the apparent but contrary relationship to formalism. Formalist painting traditionally follows a rigorous idea and methodology through in a serial manner. An idea is proposed and worked through, relationships of color, line, and form are carefully examined through many iterations. These paintings take a different path. They are painted on beautifully crafted honey-comb aluminum panels that are prepared in Massachusetts. All panels are slightly different in size (thus avoiding continuity) within a range that is mostly under 30" in any measurement, although at the time of my visit there were also several new mid-sized panels in process. The panels are first painted in a starter color and several panels are worked on at once. Ann deliberately counters any direct efforts at having the paintings become serial, and the painting process is distinctly direct, improvisational and non-compositional. There is little or no editing or painting over once the base coats are developed and the lines and shapes are introduced. The use of color is also intuitive and improvisational, choices are made spontaneously. Initially, with this work, Ann was determined to avoid spatial reference and worked entirely with flat paint and colors. Recently she has allowed herself to perform brushy paint handling and spatial illusion. She has largely ceased to worry about many of the political and referential concerns that sometimes tied up her earlier work. This, too, might be understood as a developmental step. We are, in a sense, required to wrestle with the context of our efforts during a significant formative stage. At some point one hopes for the burdens of self-conscious worry to lift and the work to obtain its own momentum.

When asked about formalism, Ann replies that, "the idea of formalism is often poorly and narrowly understood." When asked what her paintings are really about she answers, "swimming in the ocean at night." This response initially baffles me, but once I think it out, it makes sense. This response offers the clearest explanation for why it is that these apparently sparse and formal paintings offer something so fresh and sensuous.





“Petit Roi,” 2005

This imaginatively conceived exhibition takes its title from Champfleury’s 1867 short story of a similar name, whose protagonist, having lost his money, amasses memories of clouds and sunrises as he once amassed art objects. Curated by Valérie Rousseau and Barbara Safarova, the show is a heterogeneous gathering of works by 18 artists, each of which, in some way, relates to the heavens.

An accompanying catalog classifies the artworks according to their points of view. In pieces belonging to the first category, the sky is seen from the position of an earthbound observer. Under this heading are Henry Darger’s incantatory weather journals, and an abstract composition of radiating red and orange lines by contemporary painter Ann Pibal that conjures sunbeams breaking through clouds. The second grouping features aerial perspectives, as in Arthur Mole and John D. Thomas’s 1918 photograph of soldiers assembled to form a living picture of the Liberty Bell, and Zdenek Kosek’s maplike inked diagrams, through which he charts his effect on the world’s weather. And in the third category, works such as Janko Domsic’s Spirograph-like drawings of gigantic, see-through angels, their feet on the earth and their hands touching the sky, present the firmament as the focus of spiritual aspiration or a screen for otherworldly visions.

A bonus is the show's inclusion of artists lesser-known in New York, among them Montreal photographer Alain Paiement, represented by an overhead view of a trashed room in a junkies' squat, and indigenous Australian artist Dorothy Napangardi, in whose dream paintings gridded lines of dots trace the journeys of ancestral beings. Negating distinctions between insider and outsider, fine and vernacular, Rousseau and Safarova's exhibition puts the emphasis on what matters most in art: visual interest, conviction and a singular perspective.



# Like Watching Paint Thrive

## In Five Chelsea Galleries, the State of Painting

By ROBERTA SMITH JUNE 28, 2012

Painting is a lot of things: resilient, vampiric, perverse, increasingly elastic, infinitely absorptive and, in one form or another, nearly as old as humankind. One thing it is not, it still seems necessary to say, is dead.

Maybe it appears that way if you spend much time in New York City's major museums, where large group shows of contemporary painting are breathtakingly rare, given how many curators are besotted with Conceptual Art and its many often-vibrant derivatives. These form a hegemony as dominant and one-sided as formalist abstraction ever was.

But that's another reason we have art galleries. Not just to sell art, but also to give alternate, less rigid and blinkered, less institutionally sanctioned views of what's going on.

Evidence of painting's lively persistence is on view in Chelsea in five ambitious group exhibitions organized by a range of people: art dealers, independent curators and art historians. Together these shows feature the work of more than 120 artists and indicate some of what is going on in and around the medium. Some are more coherent than others, and what they collectively reveal is hardly the whole story, not even close. (For one thing there's little attention to figuration; the prevailing tilt is toward abstraction of one sort or another.)

A few of the shows take a diffuse approach, examining the ways painting can merge with sculpture or Conceptual Art and yield pictorial hybrids that may not even involve paint; others are more focused on the medium's traditional forms.

All told, these efforts release a lot of raw information into the Chelsea air, creating a messy conversation, a succession of curatorial arguments whose proximity makes it easy to move back and forth among them, sizing up the contributions of individual artists as well as the larger ethos.

### **Everyday Abstract — Abstract Everyday**

A good place to start thinking about the expansive possibilities of painting is this show at the **James Cohan Gallery**, one that is not explicitly about painting but that nonetheless includes a lot of works of a definite pictorial nature. Organized by Matthew Higgs, director of the alternative space White Columns, it charts a literal-minded kind of abstraction that uses common materials and, often, painting as a jumping-off point.

Representing 37 artists, the show reaches into the past for Hannah Wilke's small, delicate chewing-gum reliefs from 1975 that are evocative of female genitalia, and for an Andy Warhol 1978 "Oxidation Painting," its gaudy green-gold splatters achieved by having his assistants urinate on canvasses covered with copper paint.

Recent efforts include paintinglike wall pieces like Alexandra Bircken's striped rectangles of crocheted yarn (a skeletal homage to Robert Rauschenberg's "Bed"?) and Bill Jenkins's wire bed frame threaded through with short snakes of rope (Jackson Pollock?). There are works that suggest three-dimensional paintings, including a thick pylon of bright bundled fabric by Shinique Smith and a free-standing sheaf of painted fabric and paper by Nancy Shaver.

Other standouts include Udomsak Krisanamis's 1996 "Acid Rain," a swirling painting-collage of black and white; Gedi Sibony's "The Two Simple Green Threes," whose stenciled motif suggests a rehearsal for a quilt; and a painting on paper by David Hammons in which splashes of pink Kool-Aid evoke the nearby Warhol. There are lots of illuminating connections to be drawn among the works here.

## **Context Message**

The robust, even wholesome physicality of Mr. Higgs's show finds its complement in "Context Message," at Zach Feuer, a rather more barbed presentation of what I would call painting, quasi-painting and anti-painting. With works by about 40 artists (including some collectives and collaborations), the show has been organized by Tyler Dobson and Ben Morgan-Cleveland, two young artists who run the small, forward-looking gallery Real Fine Arts in Greenpoint, Brooklyn.

It starts off winningly. At its center hang two beautiful quilts, one by Lola Pettway, the other by Mary Lee Bendolph and Ruth P. Mosely, all from the acclaimed quilters' collective of Gee's Bend, Ala. The works surrounding these two amazing pictorial objects oscillate erratically among the ironic, the sincere, the subversive and the snarky.

R. H. Quaytman, known for cool photo-based works, contributes a small, sweet but rather generic oil portrait of her husband. The great blues guitarist and self-taught painter John Fahey (1939-2001) is represented by a lively gestural abstraction.

The canvasses of Merlin Carpenter, Bjarne Melgaard and Michael Krebber all add fairly obvious twists to ironic art-world self-reference with images and texts copied from the Internet. In between, paintings by Alistair Frost, Margaret Lee and Michele Abeles, David Diao and Martin Kippenberger all reward attention.

This show never quite comes together, but that may be its point. Its scrappy waywardness gives a vivid picture of the general unruliness in and around painting right now.

## **Painting in Space**

A similar lack of focus afflicts this show at Luhring Augustine, but not quite so fruitfully. Packed with well-known names, it is a benefit exhibition for the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., and has been organized by Tom Eccles, the center's executive director, and Johanna Burton, director of its graduate program. Among the 26 artists here the three who explore

the show's titular theme most actively are Martin Creed, represented by a big latticelike red wall painting; Rachel Harrison, whose bright, patchily painted plastic-foam sculpture comes with a length of searing orange carpet; and Liam Gillick, the subject of a show that opened at Bard last weekend, whose spare painted metal sculptures suggest geometric paintings extruded into space.

Otherwise, videos and sculptures by Tony Oursler, Pipilotti Rist, Haim Steinbach, Mark di Suvero, John Handforth and others mainly squander an interesting concept: Just about anything seems to qualify as "painting in space." Paintings of a more wall-bound, canvas-based sort, by artists like Josh Smith, Amy Sillman, Glenn Ligon and Sarah Morris, range through current abstraction, but that's not the same.

### **Stretching Painting**

The 10 artists in "Stretching Painting" at Galerie Lelong don't so much push the medium into space as meddle with its physical properties at close quarters, on the wall.

Sometimes the exercise is disarmingly simple, as with the magnified brushwork and pale colors (diluted with plaster) of Alex Kwartler's two large paintings on plywood. Sometimes it is startlingly obsessive, as with the work of Gabriel Pionkowski, a young artist who unravels canvas, colors the individual threads and partly reweaves them into stripes or jacquardlike patterns; or Donald Moffett's wildly suggestive combinations of furlike paint surfaces on emphatically perforated wood.

Kate Shepherd and Jim Lee indicate new possibilities for the modernist monochrome. Assembled by Veronica Roberts, a New York-based curator and scholar, the works here can sometimes feel a bit small-bore. This is relieved by Patrick Brennan's "Boomtown (A long road home)," a big, bristling collage festooned with small paintings, and Lauren Luloff's "Flame Violent and Golden," which seems pieced together from textile remnants that are actually hand-painted on different scraps of cloth, using bleach. It has some of the scenery-chewing exuberance of Julian Schnabel, which is quite refreshing.



## The Big Picture

A penchant for small, modestly-scaled works that is often evident in these shows is at its most extreme at Sikkema Jenkins in “The Big Picture,” a slyly titled show of works by eight artists whose efforts rarely exceed 20 inches on a side.

An implication here is that small is not only beautiful but also might actually be radical, or at least anti-establishment, in a time of immense, often spectacular artworks. Another suggestion is that there remains plenty to be done with paint applied to small, flat rectangular surfaces.

These arguments are made effectively and repeatedly, whether by Jeronimo Elespe’s “Segundo T,” whose scratched patterns suggest a text or a textile as much as a painting; Merlin James’s resplendent “Yellow,” which simply pulses with small, well-placed blooms of color; or Ann Pibal’s latest, more forthright collusions of brushy and hard-edged abstraction. Through quietly inspired brushwork alone, David Schutter breathes his own kind of life into landscape-suggestive monochromes, while John Dilg brings the canvas weave to bear, almost pixelatedly, on his cartoon-visionary landscapes.

Robert Bordo, Josephine Halvorson and Ryan McLaughlin all make the case that art exists foremost for close looking and internalized experience and nothing does this better than painting. Other mediums can do it just as well, if we’re lucky, but not better.

For the moment three solo exhibitions supplement the conversation among these group shows in nearly mutually exclusive ways. In Cheyney Thompson’s installation (through Saturday) at Andrew Kreps (525 West 22nd Street) postwar gestural abstraction and Conceptual Art collide to bracing effect in a series of gaudy but weirdly methodical canvasses of identical height whose widths are proportioned to the walls on which they are displayed; never has Mr. Thompson’s sardonic skepticism about painting and its processes looked so fierce or decorative.

At Derek Eller (615 West 27th Street) André Ethier’s small canvasses (also through Saturday) mine the overlap between modernist and folk painting with a vibrant insouciance and could easily have been included in the Sikkema Jenkins show. And in her Manhattan gallery debut at Thomas Erben (526 West 26th Street) Whitney Claflin presents, through July 28, busily painted, also small canvasses enhanced by collage-poems, jewelry, sewn patches and feathers; they announce painting’s ability to absorb all comers in a whisper that is also a joyful shout.

Montevidayo | “Ann Pibal and Rebecca Wolff: As Is/So Is” | Geoffrey Cruickshank-Hagenbuckle | April 24, 2012  
(Online)



Ann Pibal’s paintings subdue ruled angle geometrics on off-color fields. Gracing aluminum panels (13×20”) they hint at signifieds. Muted El Lizzitsky, maps—but just, some say windows.

Pibal states, “It’s easier to talk about structure than color.” Yet discussion turned in part to hue, hemming her into tight corners with terms like decorative and pretty. In truth, Pibal’s palette, its choices and composition, first practice to deceive. They skirt crowd pleasers. (Will it sound like I smoke Crack if I cite Ed Ruscha?) Slyly implying Design, she evades Pantone numbers, pastels, and equivocating shades. Her lime is swamp, while plage revisits laxatives, and dawn is No Tell Motel rouge. She confuses, then eludes. I mean this in the best possible way.

Pibal presented these in Power Point at As Is/So Is, Triple Canopy’s poet and painter cage match (cozy up) with poet, novelist and Fence editor Rebecca Wolff. Moderated by Lucy Ives, its title quote from Horace refers poetry to painting. Part of a set including a recent récit at MoMA by Ariana Reines, this home base stand, staged in one agreeably useful, high-ceilinged “white box” room, was attended by fifty. Sound and vision tech operated flawlessly, effacing itself.

Triple Canopy opened in January with a weekend long marathon reading of Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans*, by over 100 poets. Its project space will edit, curate, publish and present art wed to literature in person, pixels and print. "When you consider where or how writing exists today, it must dialogue with image, perhaps even in a tense, competitive way (Certainly it won't act as a polite caption!) One thing aired during Ann and Rebecca's exchange was the question of what words can do to a picture, particularly as regards a painting's title and picture plane\*. Many editors at Triple Canopy are involved in expanding our notions of reading; pairings like *As Is/So Is* permit us to look again at ways a poem or painting asks to be read." (Lucy Ives)

Rebecca Wolff spoke poems echoing the visuals. She's a magus. Her poetry is honest, fierce yet elegant, keeping secret formal laws. Quality is its content. "The king is content." (From: *Content is King*) It cannot be rephrased, only reiterated. So too, her canny demurral to treat art with words suspends in "un-identifying relation." Together Pibal and Wolff proposed a "sideways glance" allied with "a generous image," not perhaps lush or evocative, but giving illicit takes, where "pleasure" and "satisfied" breathe.

We may appear near Ranciere here, but *As Is/So Is* steered clear of posturing plus all power blab: the ambiance, alert cogent extemporizing. Our players' sensibilities, humor, flavor and intelligence shone with no pretense.

After, in house Q & A addressed brushstroke and painterly gesture, their suppression, imitation, expression. Chat back continued over open dinner invites out accepted by 15. Topics ranged from dress code on Kentucky Derby Day, replete with cell phone photos of "to die for" saddle shoes, through Anthropologie to trailers for novels.

\*Confessed solipsist Wolff had even liked naming her children.

UNSETTLED AND PERPETUAL

*Robert Storr calls you a “latter-day modernist constructivist rather than a post-modernist deconstructionist” in the essay “Dense Pack” in your book from Meulenstein gallery. What do you think of that title?*

I don’t know about the labels, but I do understand my inquiry to be inherently geared with a kind of stubborn buoyancy that comes from a mostly headlong driving forward (modern in this way, sure, but I mean this more on the level of personality). Boot-strappy, perhaps not cautious, sometimes argumentative.

My engagement with my work is fully steeped in precedent, but I don’t prioritize backward looking, or a reliance on the past to construct meaning, or try to recast a story that is presupposed to be already “understood.” I’m more interested generally in a proposal that is about forward motion, something unsettled—yes, but also perpetual. Something glowing with the light of transition rather than something smartly dusty.

*Your palette is so stunning and simultaneously off-key. How do you decide which colors makes sense in one piece?*

Color creates, ultimately, situations that are mostly irrational. As hard as I might try to design color groups or take notes from observations, the color necessarily becomes activated only within the parameters of a given painting. It is an intuitive and emotionally charged activity.

*Do you find colors when you look around, or is it just you and the paint in your studio? I ask because we live in a place where color can be so palpable, even flagrant. I remember driving through the mountains with the leaves aflame, wondering, Is this what painters experience all the time?*

I am overwhelmed, or significantly distracted at least, by color in the world, and do see my studio life as an excuse to attempt to really engage with it. Color is a force of nature whether it is describing a leaf or a candy wrapper.

*I detect rebellion in your work,  
perhaps having to do with color and  
scale?*

Initially yes, after first arriving in NYC in 1998, I made a deliberate decision to work on a small scale and with the non-hefty object. It was important to me to work on a domestic scale and also with colors that might be more rooted in design precedent than in the history of art. I also made many paintings that were direct intersections with the very heavy patriarchy one deals with in painting—especially in geometric painting. It is also a conscious choice on my part never to repeat a format size or an image, to build what I think of as an index of possible solutions, rather than an iconic “answer.” I have been working on a larger scale recently, and I think now these things are somewhat less important to me, or at least they have shifted. There are only a small number of women who have worked with hard edges in painting, and this is significant to me, as it was then, when I started.

*What made you decide to use metal  
panels instead of canvas? Is it the  
fluidity of the surface? The way that  
a metal background skirts that line  
between fine and commercial arts? Is  
it a way to wrest a very masculine,  
minimalist material for your own?*

Yes, yes, yes. I like working on these panels for all of these reasons. They are constructed of a honeycomb aluminum sheeting, and the sides are filled with poplar, which I think tempers the potential severity of the metal. Practically, they have the advantage of being very lightweight, so I can travel with them and also make larger ones that are easy to handle. Above all, the honeycomb material is very rigid, which affords me a thin panel, a slight object—to me, this is very important.

*I love it that Robert Storr says your  
work finds the sublime “in zones that  
are close to the hand, intimate zones  
where predominantly close-valued  
hues are lit up by flashes of saturated  
color as lightening bolts illuminate  
the desert at dusk.”*

I love that too. And I love RS.

Color and light, of course, don’t exist without the other. And I do try to create a sense of naturalistic light in my paintings, in this way hoping to correlate the abstract situation to the personal, to the sensual and bodily. As I already mentioned, the glowy light of transitional times, literally the morning and evening light, for me, these shimmering, dusky conditions are easily



metaphors for the inquiry (or of consciousness) itself—the shifting, evolving, the chasing after seeing and knowing. Compositionally too, I like to invent situations that suggest movement, repetition, or something in the process of being built or, conversely, dismantled. Again, something unsettled and perpetual, something reflecting and checking back in with itself—like thinking.

In terms of lightness, I want to lift things toward physical lightness too—investing the work with as much efficiency of effort and use of material as I am capable. I want the work to look unencumbered and not fussy.

*You spend some time painting in Mexico in the winter months. You also split your time between Brooklyn and Vermont, where you teach. Does geography affect your work?*

Moving around a lot has definitely become a critical aspect of my studio routine. What affects me most about the different locations isn't so much the physical environment, as in color and light (or at least so I think), but the intensity and speed of a place. I don't work much in the city anymore, but in Brooklyn I feel like one puts up an antennae and simply tunes in the energy of all those working in such close proximity—it's a real high. In Vermont, we go to bed earlier, get up earlier, cook more, tend to a garden. There is a feeling of hiding out, a hermetic, fertile adjacency. In Baja, it is simply a sense of escape. The Internet, other services won't always work, and language doesn't even work as well (at least not for me, my Spanish stinks). The usual daily expectations and obligations are necessarily held at arm's length, and this of course creates new possibilities and challenges all around.

*Do you draw your paintings before you begin them? There is frisson between balance and imbalance in your work. Do you let accidents happen?*

I always start a painting by laying down one color, or a field of mostly one color. Then I place pieces of tape down, moving them around repeatedly until I feel satisfied with a drawing. After that, I lay down another color and repeat the process. I also make thumbnail drawings and other works on paper, but those only rarely are translated directly into a painting.

*The tone of your work is rigorous, intellectual, precise. Robert Storr calls your recent work “concentration incarnate.” It’s also witty. When I look at HMLP, for instance, I’m so delighted by those pinks. Am I right that there is humor in the immaculateness?*

*One of your paintings, EPTO, you described to me as “brushy.” There’s an exciting confusion between what is the background and the foreground.*

*I know you are a professor and a mother. How do you find ways to work on paintings when you can’t be in your studio?*

*Do your other activities—like gardening or teaching—affect your work?*

*Is there a painter you think about when you work? Someone who spurs you?*

Yes, thank you, yes. I hope there is humor in them—I try to put it there and experience it there. A visual pun or sleight of hand makes me very happy when I can find one.

*EPTO* is a case of trying to balance a direct, almost off-handedly decorative brush mark with a darker mood or subject matter. The conflation of mystery and a banal gesture. I think of the pinks in that painting as somewhat abject, kind of fleshy but without vitality—for me this isn’t one of the more humorous paintings, it represents the opposite end of the project.

It’s pretty simple really, it involves a lot of midnight oil and determination. And a belief in the adage about better service in the busy restaurant, I guess. My amazing husband Colin Brant, who is also an artist, and I try hard to manage things as efficiently as we can.

I do a lot of teaching, and I have ever since I got out of grad school. It has evolved into an enormous asset to my studio life primarily because designing courses gets me deeper into my reading lists than I might otherwise manage. I do love it, but it can be absolutely too much at times. Gardening is meditative and restorative and endlessly frustrating—a continual reminder that you cannot control the big picture no matter how hard you try.

Also related to my initiation into the city, discovering the work of Mary Heilmann and Dan Walsh was entirely liberating to me. I saw in them, especially in Mary, an ability to sidestep the bogging down of narrative and justification.

The ability to lay out just what needed to be and with purpose—not much else. In fact, to make subject of this activity exactly. Both of them make paintings that have a performative quality, but aren't necessarily about gesture.

I also discovered at that time the work of Moira Dryer whom I, sadly, never met. She was able to balance an engagement with the big questions with humor and a practical ease with materials that is unusual. She combined image and object, illusion and surface with apparent effortlessness. I think about her work all of the time.

More recently, Charline von Heyl is someone whom I really admire, same with Jutta Koether. I recently discovered the paintings of Maria Lassnig. All three of them blow me away, so very tough—brutal even, and at the same time containing unconventional virtuosity all around.

After these thoughts, the list goes on and on.

*When you were young, was there a moment in which you realized you were an abstract painter? Or what led you away from realism?*

I grew up in Minneapolis, going to the Walker. My favorite painting—or at least the one that made the biggest impression on me—in the museum was Chuck Close's giant, photo-realistic *Big Self Portrait*. In it he is all hairy-chested with a cigarette dangling out of his mouth. Funny and imposing, both formally and with regard to narrative all at once. There was a lot of hullabaloo around a Picasso exhibit in 1980, when I was ten. I remember my impression then, considering them both, that it really didn't matter how you made a picture, but I definitely got the message that it was important to push the question around. As it happened, the next week in my after-school art class, I tried out some synthetic Cubism. I was working on a still life of mostly bottles, using dark charcoal and angular facets. When the teacher came around to my place to take a look, she said something to the effect of how "bold"

*You studied poetry when you were at Iowa, and I've heard that your students read poems in your courses. Are there poets you go to when you are painting?*

*You started using these wonderful titles about two years ago like HMLK, TWLN, DRFP, RNKT. When I first read them, I tried to figure out what they might mean. Then I remembered what H.D. says in her long poem The Walls Do Not Fall: "I know, I feel / the meaning that words hide; // they are anagrams, cryptograms, / little boxes, conditioned // to hatch butterflies..." Could you talk about those evocative titles?*

and "masculine" my drawing was. I took it as the biggest compliment one could possibly get. I was soaring. Abstraction = bold and masculine; bold and masculine = good. I guess I've been thinking about that one for a while now.

At Iowa, Jorie Graham allowed a few of us painters to enroll in the poetry seminars—it was an incredible experience, of course. Listening to her comparisons of Milton and Wordsworth was fundamentally mind-blowing to me at the time; her teaching was an almost operatic performance. She demanded so much intellectually, in her dissections of language, and at the same time she was always imploring everyone to "lay their bodies down" on poems (...) "lay the body down whole," or something to that effect. In these sessions, analysis and intuition seemed easily forged together.

For me, finding structures in poetry was critical in opening up ways to see form in visual art in more complicated ways, and yes, I try to get my students to realize this too. I've always envied poets—so much permission—a system rooted in intense observation but liberated to create meaning through sideways glances and flagrantcies of attitude.

Wow, that is beautiful. Amazing.

These titles emerged at a time when, I think, I started to allow for images that were more enigmatic—to engage more directly with the idea of a more open-ended resolution. The titles can be read in more than one way, creating an impression that might shift around, or might ultimately remain opaque or nonsensical. With them I intend to create something that operates parallel to the image—perhaps a miniature poem?



Front Cover: *FLS2* (2011, Acrylic on Aluminum, 14.25" x 17.5"), reproduced in grayscale to show full composition





Back Cover: *FLFM* (2011, Acrylic on Aluminum, 16.25" x 12.75"), reproduced in grayscale to show full composition

ARTIST, TREASURES BOOKS ON ART, COOKING

# Ann Pibal



MICHELE MCDONALD

**By Amy Sutherland**

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JANUARY 04, 2014

Artist Ann Pibal lives in Vermont, but she still has a home in Brooklyn, NY. This fall she started to discover audio books, which make the drive go faster and have gotten her more into fiction. The abstract painter is the winner of the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum's 2013 Rappaport Prize, an annual award of \$25,000 given to a contemporary artist with New England ties.

**BOOKS:** What are you reading currently?

**PIBAL:** I am an admirer of the writings of artists Philip Guston and Gerhard Richter and wanted to puncture back into the 19th century. I discovered “The Journal of Eugene Delacroix,” the French 19th-century painter. It’s incredible. He had an almost eerie ability to see how his work will be seen in the future. It’s really inspiring.

**BOOKS:** What other artists’ writings have you read?

**PIBAL:** Anne Truitt’s “Daybook.” It’s such a moving account of making art in the context of a daily life. I was so struck by it that I got angry I hadn’t read it before. Where were the people who should have told me about this book?

**BOOKS:** Do you read beyond art?

**PIBAL:** Most of my reading is art related. My studio is filled with art books. They are almost like friends. Everything from books about design and architecture to books by the painter Barnett Newman. I’ve been really looking at “Color Moves” by the Russian artist Sonia Delaunay.

**BOOKS:** Do you have a big library?

**PIBAL:** I have an enormous library. My family never had a lot of extra money when I was growing up in Minneapolis but there was always money for art supplies and books. I still have that. Even when I can't afford it I buy any book that I want. I have stacks and stacks of books.

**BOOKS:** What's on top of the stacks?

**PIBAL:** I've got a book on the contemporary artist Jorge Pardo published by Phaidon ; a book about Forrest Bess, who was kind of an outsider artist, by Clare Elliott ; and a beautiful catalog for a 2002 exhibit at Centre Pompidou in Paris of plant drawings by Ellsworth Kelly and Henri Matisse.

**BOOKS:** Do you know any artists without a big library?

**PIBAL:** No. It goes with the territory. Artists may lean toward being collectors. I'm often trying to deaccession stuff in the rest of house but the book collection goes untouched. I have a couple of books that are really valuable. I thought I should put them up for auction but I couldn't do it. One is a rare catalog, "3x An Abstraction," about the work of Agnes Martin, Hilma af Klint and Emma Kunz. I will never sell that.

**BOOKS:** Do you collect any other kind of books?

“

*I discovered 'The Journal of Eugene Delacroix,' the French 19th-century painter. He had an almost eerie ability to see how his work will be seen in the future.*

**PIBAL:** We have an elaborate collection of gardening books, everything from how-to-grow-a-carrot to books on the history of gardening design. We also have a lot of cookbooks. They are also very visual like art books. I still buy them though when I cook I usually just log on to epicurious.com. I just bought "Cooking at Home with the Culinary Institute of America." Other than art, I think I've read all of Joan Didion's books. I'm also interested in a naturalist called Carl Safina. I liked his book about industrial fishing, "Eye of the Albatross," and "Voyage of the Turtle," about leatherback turtles. I'm not naturally passionate about fiction though I have tried. However, I did listen to the audio version of the recent novel "A Dual Inheritance" by Joanna Hershon and liked it. I read some poetry. I know a lot of poets. My

friend Camille Guthrie's newest book, "Articulated Lair," is inspired by the work of the artist Louise Bourgeois.

**BOOKS:** What are you going to read next?

**PIBAL:** I'm on sabbatical next year. I've been cooking up this idea about flying to Buenos Aires and driving back. I have a copy of "The Savage Detectives" by Roberto Bolano. Maybe I need to read that.

Amy Sutherland

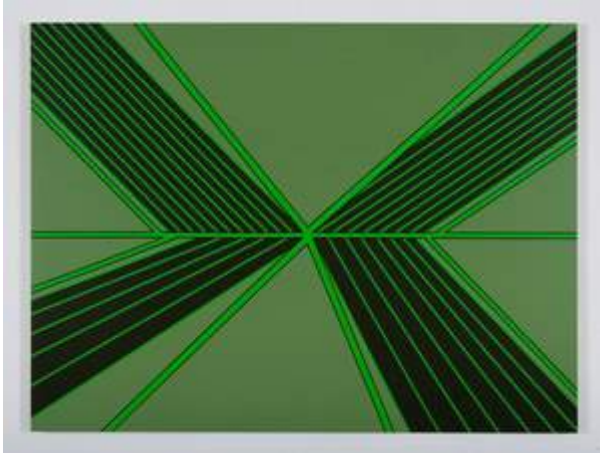


# Spanning the Geometric Spectrum

By JENNIFER RILEY | May 15, 2008

PAINTERS MARJORIE WELISH AND ANN PIBAL BOTH MAKE GEOMETRIC ABSTRACT WORK, BUT THEY ARE OPPOSITE IN nearly all aspects of intention, approach, and affect.

[Click Image to Enlarge](#)



Ann Pibal, 'FTHRWT' (2007).

Max Protetch

Ms. Welish is a New York-based poet, critic, and painter whose current show, "Painting as Diagram," at Björn Ressle features easel-size, sharp-edge, pristine Modernist paintings. Since the late 1970s and early '80s, Ms. Welish has done paintings in response to historical paradigms informing Modern art, and this exhibit is a continuation of her research in art in which she considers how art might be read as well as seen.

The show brings together three recent series of paintings that demonstrate the artist's fascination with different levels of meaning and different levels of language. The work recalls architectural plans, ideas, and schema; it includes many diptychs with information that radiates from the right and left panels, with the

gap between often integrated as line or color. These are intellectualized yet playful and witty paintings, ordered with a language of line and geometry. The forms, shapes, grids, and primary colors recall Modern masters such as Mondrian, Malevich, and Rodchenko, and the conceptual conceits bring to mind American contemporaries such as Johns and Lasker.

The salon-style installation works particularly well for the newest series of works, titled "Blueprint," which has 15 panels in combinations of triptychs, diptychs, single-panel pieces, and works on paper. Here, many aspects and elements of an idea are presented simultaneously, underscoring the chart-and-graph-like characteristic of the project's title, "Painting as Diagram."

One of the understated achievements is how the colors succeed in a range of duties: Sometimes they create sensory perceptions, or yield conceptual solutions, or yield pragmatic solutions. In "Indecidability of the Sign: Red, Yellow, Blue 22," for example, a thin strip on the right edge of the painting is divided into three equal parts announcing the primaries red, yellow, and blue. In that location, the colors look like samples of themselves.

Ms. Welish paints with an economical collection of mark types and techniques ranging from scribbling and smearing to careful painting of taped-off shapes, areas, and lines. Smears are not gestures, and lines show little evidence of the artist's hand. Like architectural drafting, which is codified, Ms. Welish's vocabulary is far less expressive and intuitive than it is a rich, analytic, and systemic corollary of thought.

\*\*\*

Ms. Pibal is also a New York-based artist; her solo debut at Max Protetch offers 14 small- to human-size, surprisingly colored acrylic paintings on aluminum. The compositions are made using a range of geometric motifs, with images that recall such diverse sources as album cover illustrations and fragmented views of architectural structure. Yet it is her expressive and articulate use of color that sets this work apart.

Ms. Pibal layers one or two systems over a machine-smooth, colored ground using a grammar that implies space or atmosphere, and compositions that suggest views from different vantage points. A sense of motion and distance is achieved by skewing the fragmented rectilinear structures so they appear to be leaning, folding, or at times receding with the use of strong perspective lines. In the large painting "AERIE" and in the intimately scaled "BNKRS," red frame-like structures are shown as if captured by the artist in mid-step as they animatedly attempt to slip offstage.

Titles are often given to paintings with corresponding images. "Pool" for example, is a large painting from 2007, with a luminous, chemical-blue ground color that is divided horizontally by a section of a striped structure. It recalls a swimming pool, albeit imaginatively and abstractly. Some titles, however, such as "FTHRWT," "QTTRQ," and "CSHDN" — apparently ordinary words minus the vowels — are meant to underscore the notion that the work approaches this same condition of evolving language without locking into a fixed statement.

Ms. Pibal's paintings playfully engage abstraction's short but loaded history. Her use of striped motifs, concentric Xs, and thin lines inscribing space and outlining forms brings to mind signature moves of American artists such as Frank Stella, Feitelson, Krushenick, and Frederick Hammersley, yet Ms. Pibal has carved out a new space for herself. In their subtle animation of geometric form and the uncanny coupling of unnamable colors with a believable sense of light and atmosphere, these paintings feel like direct, celebratory responses to being in this world at this time.

---

## ART REVIEW

# *Youth and the Market: Love at First Sight*

---

By Michael Kimmelman

March 18, 2005

THE second "Greater New York," the youth-besotted, cheerful, immodestly ingratiating jumbo survey of contemporary art, has opened to the predictable mobs at P.S. 1 in Queens. It roams from roof to basement, weaving in stairwells, a ramshackle behemoth.

The first installment, five years ago, arrived with deft timing, in competition with the 2000 Whitney Biennial. Fixed on recently emerged artists, it seemed fresh and a bit scruffy, even if it wasn't. Whitney Biennials and their equivalents, creaky relatives from a bygone age, too ecumenical and tradition-bound, increasingly supported a brand of installation art custom-made for hothouse festivals and their transient clientele but otherwise largely unwanted, unmarketable and wearying.

Then "Greater New York" happened, a messy, unformed rival and gambit, upbeat, offering multimedia efforts but with a stress toward paintings -- well-behaved, clever, snappy paintings by young artists, of the sort making some headway in galleries. These were works suited to the dawning of a new art market boom.

As an act of civic boosterism, "Greater New York" also advertised a local horde of insouciant twenty-somethings, eclectically steeped in rock, 60's revivalism, personal codes, surrealism and cartooning, among other things, and serving up dollops of blooming sophistication and charm. Skill was a big selling point: a shambling, winking sort of virtuosity, not too heavy, easy to buy into, and drawing from old art and pop culture as if interchangeably.

Five years later, in the usual way that everything even moderately successful in art is instantly institutionalized, "Greater New York" has returned bearing some of the expectations previously heaped onto the starchy biennials. As a sign of the changed times, this opening seemed intended to coincide with last weekend's blowout art fair. It is said that fairs have now become the new art festivals, but it's equally true that the big museum surveys increasingly resemble fairs.

As before, "Greater New York" is organized by a curatorial team from P.S. 1 in conjunction with its parental partner, the Museum of Modern Art. It has already prompted counterestablishment protests: a clutch of women picketed the opening, noting the 2-to-1 ratio, male to female, among the 167 artists selected.

The show peruses a scene whose wide stylistic range, persistent teenage infatuations and overall dexterousness are firmly entrenched characteristics of the marketplace. Craft and finesse are de rigueur. Descendants of Amy Sillman, Shahzia Sikander and Elizabeth Peyton perform ever-greater feats of willowy elegance. Gallerists and their client pools of hedge-fund optimists, competing for the latest hot list, troll university campuses for budding talents. Last time, there were hardly enough Chelsea galleries to go around. Now there aren't enough artists. Some of the show's wall labels, I noticed, have galleries hastily scrawled in pen, as if the artists, buoyed by their inclusion here, were suddenly snatched up in the interval between printing and pasting up the names.

The show services this giddy scene -- with its abundant gifts but, on the whole, its short-lived prospects -- while still trying to present itself as a frisky, freewheeling and independent overview.

Actually, it's a mirror of the current power structure, which isn't all bad. Some galleries are predictably favored (these included Kreps and Feature last time; now they include Feature, Team, Maccarone, Postmasters, Canada and LFL); as are a few art schools, like Columbia and Yale, from which earnest and cunning students, not even yet graduated, are emerging already branded with signature styles. There's something rather depressing about such youthful professionalism, even while it is undeniably impressive.

Meanwhile, a smattering of discoveries, some having come over the transom of an open call (more than 2,000 artists sent in their works to be considered), lightly flesh out the roster. A strain of fashionable camp and sex is notably skipped over. Carping will of course come from insiders jockeying for authority over the choices. That's the blood sport of all surveys, whose other purpose is to validate trends.

Drawing is the new painting. There's one much-promoted trend. Everybody draws so preposterously well now that it's almost boring. Degrees of nuance have multiplied -- the nuances of calculated hedonism, packaged with an occasional fillip of politics. Sincerity is also in. Depth is, however, hard to come by, which is a big source of disappointment. But then, I suppose depth is always hard to come by, depending as it does on a cultural climate more patient and skeptical, certainly, than the current one.

If I sound grudging it's partly because it is impossible not to feel implicated in the vast apparatus of this bullish market, from which the show, and hence its coverage, whether good or bad, cannot escape. No reasonable art lover resents good artists and dealers making a

buck, of course. But to imply that the embrace of youth is a virtue in itself seems a bit craven and the survey's purview, reiterating marketplace emergence as a standard of value, is in many ways comically solipsistic and narrow. This is only to state the obvious and to sound like a spoilsport.

So let me move on to the relative pleasures at hand, which include Aida Ruilova's percussive video loop, one of her syncopated sorts of mad chants, just 20 seconds long, and also Dana Schutz's "Presentation," a big, dark-witted, strangely peopled panorama of sour colors and ham-fisted panache, vaguely reminiscent of Ensor, making a case for her painterly ambitions.

In a show full of drawings, Dominic McGill's humongous walk-in scroll is at least unavoidable, a kind of finicky, sinister timeline of half a century's global plots and catastrophes, ending, like a children's book illustration, in a black forest of spiders and smoke. There are other feats of sheer industry. Yuken Teruya's cut-out shopping bags (Tiffany's, McDonald's) with tiny paper trees are nothing short of miraculous, playing on nature versus commerce, while Tobias Putrih's sculptures, made of layers of corrugated cardboard, which turn transparent when seen against the light, have an architectural magnificence.

There are various trendlets running through the show. Henry Darger meets the Little Prince. Dystopian nature. Gaudy America. Music: David Ellis's "Granny (Drum Painting Project, Version 5.0)" is a Rube Goldbergian machine, in the vein of Tim Hawkinson's oddball contraptions, incorporating gourds, subway tokens, bells, paint cans, record turntables and various animal hides, all of which are almost too neatly put together but work nonetheless. It is the elaborate yin to David Moreno's yang: "Stereomo," two simple speakers on slender poles that slowly rock back and forth to minimalist music.

Mining late modernism is an area of wide currency, encompassing Karyn Olivier's trompe l'oeil construction of a cheaply ornate coffee table supporting a plain white pillar, and Marco Breuer's drawings, if that's what to call them: delicately scratched sheets of photographic paper, making multicolored stripes. Ann Pibal's small striped paintings, à la Jo Baer, also fit this broad category; as does Corey McCorkle's circular hole cut into a wall, letting light into a dark room, a riff on James Turrell; and so does Banks Violette's Goth-inflected shiny black stage with strip lights, which reflect as a kind of Frank Stella stripe painting, or like a Gerhard Richter mirror, in a facing black panel.

I don't grasp why there's so much buzz about some of what's here, like Jen DeNike's dual track video of frolicking teenage boys or David Opdyke's intricate sculpture of a miniaturized aircraft carrier cum shopping mall or Paul Chan's double-sided computer



animation. And Justin Faunce's meticulous, kaleidoscopic painting, owing in style to Lari Pittman, and lightly dosed with social politics, seems unexceptional in its fastidiousness.

I suspect that artists like Gedi Sibony, whose arrangement of junk seems to aspire to Richard Tuttle's fine-tuned work but falls flat, aren't well-served by group samplers, which can distort and often reveal nothing about an artist. Surveys amplify extremes best: what's catchiest, loudest, simplest, biggest or, sometimes perversely, smallest.

For which reason I inevitably lingered over trifles like Oliver Michaels's video made with a camera strapped to a swiftly moving toy train whose tracks amble in and out of a building. And Kate Gilmore's video gag of extracting herself from a cement leg cast. And Shannon Plumb's jittery silent film versions of television commercials. And also Christian Jankowski's much more elaborate, noirish effort, a brief film of an artist's 16-millimeter film being screened before a crumbling office tower, the mood over the top, the message oblique.

I mean oblique as praise. Much new art seems tightly packaged, ready-made for the market. The attraction of artists like Wade Guyton or Seth Price or Guy Ben-Ner or Carol Bove has something to do with their resistance to easy absorption. Ms. Bove's arrangement of 60's paperbacks and photos on shelves is a conceptual twist on still life, and her curtain of tiny beads is both laborious and delicate, shifting with the light through a nearby window and flirting with your inattention.

It's good, in this context, to find a selection of Steve Mumford's painted dispatches from Iraq, plainspoken journalistic pictures of a throwback kind. They announce a mature artist looking closely at what is urgently unfolding around him. Their traditional sobriety stands out in a show that, like the burbling young art world now, seems gladly co-opted and almost too able to please.

"Greater New York 2005" remains at P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, 22-25 Jackson Avenue, at 46th Avenue, Long Island City, Queens, (718)784-2084, through Sept. 26.

A version of this article appears in print on , Section E, Page 37 of the National edition with the headline: ART REVIEW; Youth and the Market: Love at First Sight