

GROS

CURENTS



Linnea Spransy, Nobel Savage, 48x60 inches, sumi ink and acrylic on canvas

Crosscurrents in Contemporary Abstraction

Corey Antis
Hannah Barnes
Katherine Bradford
Jennifer Moses
Jill Nathanson
Linnea Spransy
Dan Sutherland

Curated by Joshua Welker and Suzanne Dittenber

January 10 - February 7, 2014

Taylor University Metcalf Art Gallery
236 W. Reade Avenue
Upland, IN 46989

Years ago, when I was an undergraduate painting student, I was talking with a much-loved professor, a painter of tidy still life paintings, and he made an interesting and curious remark: "If I could paint any way other than the way I do, I'd paint like Frank Auerbach," surprisingly naming a 20th century artist known for messy, thickly impastoed portraits and landscapes. Quite a difference! At that point, struggling to make any meaningful use of paint at all, this struck me as an odd thing for someone I admired to say. It seems less so now. It strikes me that it is reasonable to wonder, does there exist for every artist a natural way to use materials in order to make an authentic expression? Or should one simply have a good idea for painting and go to it, unconcerned with personal habits and tendencies? Is there a useful difference between who I am and what I make on the one hand, and who I could be, what I could make, on the other?

This might be a good way to start thinking about the artists in *Crosscurrents in Contemporary Abstraction*, artists who might look at that last question, and answer that no, there is not a useful difference and one can be both natural in one's working and making, and also make extensive use of any stratagem coming from outside of those natural tendencies. This is the quality I see as intriguingly unique about the work of these seven artists. Each displays real comfort with duality, an ability to make artwork that embraces both sides of the various divides, opposing constructs and either/or propositions that artists, historians and philosophers tussle over.

This acceptance of duality is something contemporary artists actually talk quite a lot about. One artist tells me about thinking about paintings as objects and as illusions, that the painting is something and it's about something. Linnea Spransy writes about making rules

for her practice or, favoring a more scientific language, a series of controls, and improvising within these controls. Spransy and other artists speak of using both intentional and arbitrary mark making. Katherine Bradford has stated that she sees balancing the formal and narrative elements of her paintings as an act of mental juggling. Jennifer Moses uses the hybrid word "tragicomic" to describe the effect of her paintings.

Another dualism always worth talking about is the division between intellect and feeling, and I am interested in something the artist Agnes Martin had to say about it, from an essay titled "Beauty is the Mystery of Life": "It is quite commonly thought that the intellect is responsible for everything that is made and done. It is commonly thought that everything that is can be put into words." But Martin comes from an era more comfortable with absolutes. Artists and other thinking persons, faced with opposing conditions, had to choose one over the other, as Martin does when she goes on to write in the next paragraph, "Our emotional life is really dominant over our intellectual life, but we do not realize it." I find it difficult to imagine that any of the artists in this exhibit would be willing to accept the notion that either side of our experience—the emotional or the intellectual—truly dominates the other.

There are ways that paintings do address the intellect. There may be an aspect of a painting that triggers some idea of a story. In paintings, story does not mean image alone, with a good guy and a bad guy and someone moving from one place to another. It can be a story of the artist making decisions and actions in the studio, performing the painting. It can be a story about progress in art, if the work takes part in some evolution of taste and value. It can be a story about the object itself,

accumulating layers during its time in the painter's studio, fascinating in the way a much-graffited urban overpass is fascinating, or a medieval manuscript scraped clean and used over and over (from which comes a word with many contemporary applications, the term "palimpsest" is used to describe any object that visibly reveals its own history, and it is a quality that several of the artists in this exhibit cultivate in their work).

It's useful to remember that—outside of an art gallery—abstract concepts are any commonly accepted ideas not related to a specific instance or object. Justice, Charity, Courage, Innocence, Balance—I cannot see them, cannot sniff them, cannot touch them, but I am much, much happier believing I live in a universe where these exist. Frequently, Abstract Art is an attempt to address these and other, subtler concepts like the sublime, the uncanny, the bittersweet, or the aforementioned tragicomic without relying on recognizable imagery, which artists know involves a lot of distracting association.

On the other side of the divide, there are ways paintings address the emotions, intuition or even the physical body. Paintings have a physical size, shape, color, value and texture, and these attributes produce illusions of depth and movement, can attract or repel, can make us feel balanced or off-balance, larger, smaller, warmer, cooler, near, far, calm or agitated, familiar or strange. Corey Antis writes of his works as "reminders of scale" and about engaging with a subjective experience of proposed sights, structures and objects. Other artists find color is an especially powerful element. For Jill Nathanson, color exists simultaneously as both energy and matter. Hannah Barnes calls it seductive and strange, optical and performative.

Add to that list another useful pair of opposing concepts, known and unknown. In the essay “Visions Resistance to Language”, painter and critic Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe suggests another way that the visual in art affects us. He writes, “I should like to propose that sight knows only surprise and recognition. One either sees something one has seen before or one does not.” Linnea Spransy writes in her artist’s statement specifically about both rules and surprise. Antis, Barnes, Bradford and Dan Sutherland often make use of simple or common forms made surprising through abbreviation, juxtaposition and obsessive re-statement.

To anyone who might at this point still find themselves unable to find the purpose or value of abstract painting in general, I recommend reading Thomas McEville’s essay “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”. McEville, writing with feeling and intellect, gives readers many ways of looking at and finding content in art—scale, material, temporal duration, from social or political context, from its relationship to art history, etc. It is a list that applies to all sorts of art, contemporary, historical, representational, abstract, naive, highly conceptual and on and on, and everything in between. Thirteen ways of looking at art might come in handy right now, viewing paintings mostly lacking in representational images. The purpose or the content of these works is not immediately apparent. The viewer is asked to find content. Finding content, I think, can mean finding value and finding value can mean finding reasons to look at and be inspired by art.

In his conclusion, McEville writes this: “A work that features contradictions among its levels of content thereby gains yet another level [of content] involving concepts like paradox, inner struggle, tension and

negation of meaning process. “That is a list of attributes that sounds unquestionably exciting—words to describe an award-winning film actor’s performance rather than an abstract painting. Note however, that some of these same words turn up in statements by Jennifer Moses and Dan Sutherland.

Now, if I could write in any way other than the way I do, I might be inspired by McEville’s idea of overlapping and interpenetrating layers of content to make a scholarly, philosophical conclusion. There might be an argument that, in their eager embrace of dualisms, these artists might be searching for some post-dualistic approach to art-making, maybe a metaphor for a contemporary open and flexible worldview. The thing is, the idea of trying to contain these paintings through some rigid interpretation seems wrong. Being the writer I am, I prefer to simply suggest an approach to looking at this art—not the only approach, just a start. What if there are 13 other ways to relate these paintings to your own experience? 14 ways? 15 or 20 ways?

I wish to leave you with at least a starting point, a short poem by Rainer Maria Rilke, “Archaic Torso of Apollo”. Present in Rilke’s loving look at a particular Greek sculpture are the known and the unknown, the possessed and the lost, original intent and accumulated significance, power and weakness, perfection and disfigurement, an awareness of the object itself and the long, long narrative it possesses. There might be in that list a good place to start looking at these paintings by Corey Antis, Hannah Barnes, Katherine Bradford, Jennifer Moses, Jill Nathanson, Linnea Spransy and Dan Sutherland.

“Archaic Torso of Apollo”

*We cannot know his legendary head
with eyes like ripening fruit. And yet his torso
is still suffused with brilliance from inside,
like a lamp, in which his gaze, now turned to low,*

*gleams in all its power. Otherwise
the curved breast could not dazzle you so, nor could
a smile run through the placid hips and thighs
to that dark center where procreation flared.*

*Otherwise this stone would seem defaced
Beneath the translucent cascade of the shoulders
And would not glisten like a wild beast’s fur:*

*Would not, from all the borders of itself,
Burst like a star: for here there is no place
That does not see you. You must change your life.*

Christopher Lowrance

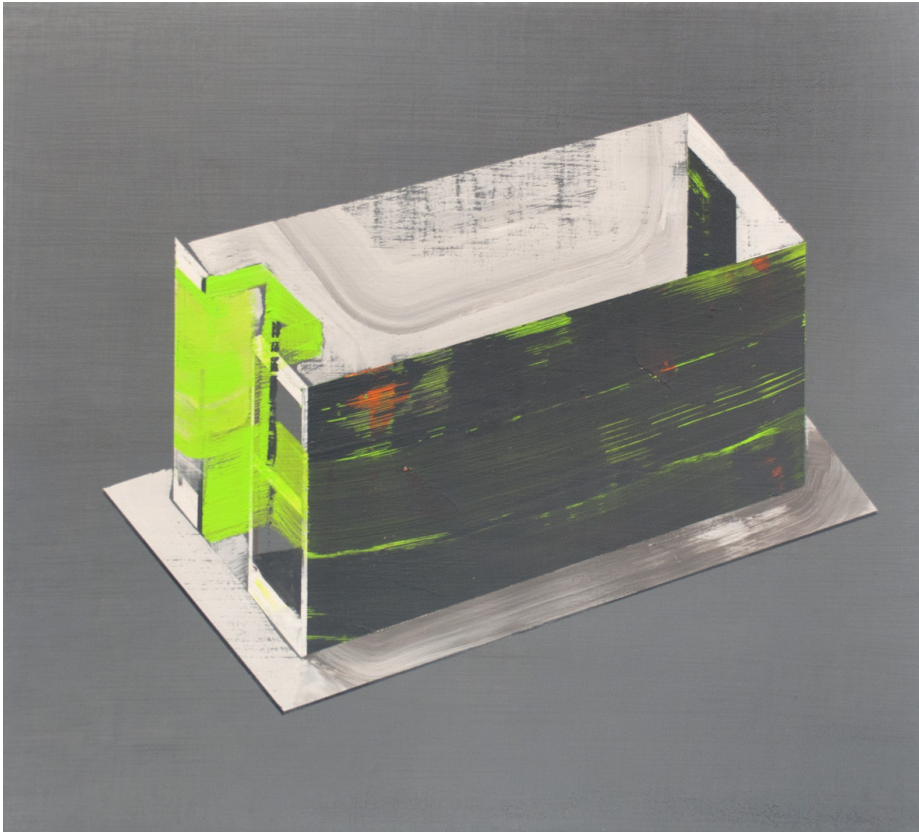
Kansas City, Missouri

January 28, 2014

<http://mwcapacity.wordpress.com/>

Cory Antis

1. These are propositions of sites, structures and objects.
2. It is the subjective experience of space—architectural, psychological and material—that brings these works together to become events.
3. These events are a reminder of our scale, time and representation—the endpoints of our environment.
4. These events point to their representation but do not arrive there.
5. A similar vocabulary connects the work, reinforcing the way it is made: by layers and the joining of materials, and by the abbreviation of the mediated image.



Model, 16x18 inches, Acrylic, flashe, casein on jute, panel

Hannah Barnes

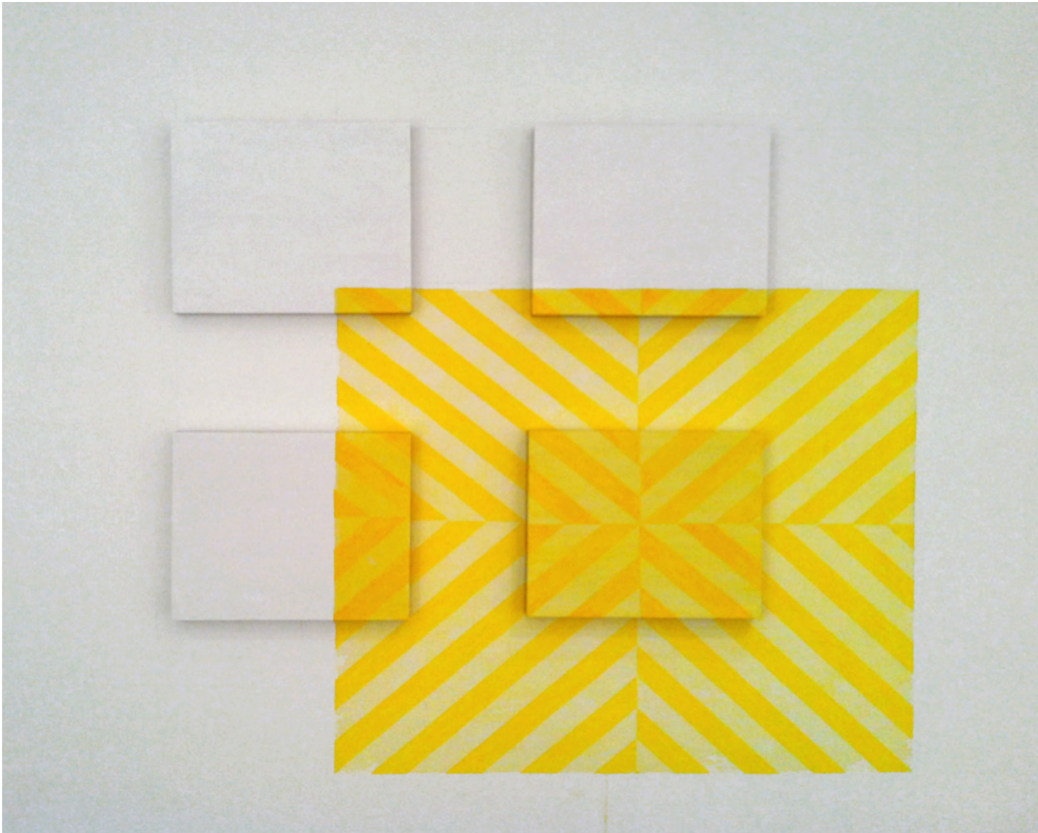
My work engages the interplay of drawing and painting to explore ideas of structure and fragmentation, surface and depth, and the rejection of overt meaning in images. My practice is informed by a desire to entertain contradiction and employ opposing strategies. I am trying to carve out a space in which images can be formally nuanced yet conceptually rigorous, anonymous yet personal, flamboyant yet intimate.

My present work consists of ephemeral investigations in watercolor on wood panels, walls, and paper. I am fascinated by how transparent watercolor can become fluid and materially complex (like painting), yet also profoundly indexical (like drawing). In the works on panel and wall, wood or gypsum act as fragile surfaces with a finite capacity for absorbing material and process; as decisions accumulate, the surface breaks down. This work surface foregrounds touch, trace, and mark, and renders process transparent.

In my works on panel and paper, absorbent surfaces serve as sites for the unfolding of spontaneously generated structures and systems. The watercolor I use to articulate forms is asked to function in a variety of ways—as atmospheric wash, transparent plane, delicate structural line, saturating stain. The relationship between the brittle surface and the fragile, ephemeral wash is important to the content of the work—these images are meant to feel as though they arrived accidentally and could vanish just as suddenly. I intend this implied instability to relate back to the concept of fragmentation and the problem of surface vs. depth, two ideas which my work constantly returns.

The visual elements of my work draw on a preexisting repertoire within abstraction—circles, stripes, squares, planes. I see these elements as ‘assisted ready-mades’—anonymous forms filtered through a personal sensibility. There is an overlap between an idiosyncratic, autographic impulse and a restating of found signs. In other words, my visual vocabulary is mediated—salvaged from elements of my visual landscape—yet is fashioned to address personal experience.

I see color as a structural building block and a passageway into subjectivity. In my work, color functions both to seduce the viewer and to create a sense of strangeness. Color acts optically and performatively, creating aberrant, fugitive sensations of vibration and push-pull and resulting in subjective sensations such as humor, melancholy, discomfort, and delight. It also acts emotionally through the suggestion of saturation, staining, bleaching, erasure, and trace to conjure themes of desire and longing, pleasure and regret.



Wall Drawing 6.13, watercolor, wood, latex paint

Katherine Bradford

“Squares, stacks, rectangles, stripes—all refer to ocean liners floating on the sea. I’ve reduced these ships to their essential form with special emphasis on the smoke stacks because I love to see those chunks of color. Other things I love: repetition, framing, direct mark making and balancing a painting between looking like an abstraction and at the same time having it refer to the concrete world.”



6 Wobbly Liners, 36x24 inches, acrylic on pierced canvas

Jennifer Moses

The paintings in this exhibition represent formal and conceptual artistic choices. The paintings attempt to reconcile the visual influences of an urban environment with the monumental rock faces and vast landscape of New Mexico. The cartooned and animated abstract images reflect the end point of a series of choices and possibilities. Often the images are blocked with shapes and revealed by the excavation of past decisions. The work tells tragicomic tales of paths taken and not taken, possibilities seized or lost.



StARBURST II, 12x12 inches, oil on wood panel

Jill Nathanson

Color is used everywhere to enhance or sell, but its nature is mysterious. It is energy seen divided into hues and can be activated to feel dynamic and unified to become light-like. Painting is the visual exploration of its ways. Color as paint becomes light in matter. In these paintings and works on paper from 2007-9, I explored luminosity, the liquid-like experience of color modulation and the dynamic relationships of colors placed to slide over and sometimes off the rectangle.



One Half Non-Diminished, 24x24 inches, acrylic on canvas

Linnea Gabriella Spransy

Using strict rules, I construct images on the belief that limits have an eerie capacity to generate surprise...even freedom. Chaos and emergent system theory tell us that these limits need not be elaborate, or even obviously visible; in fact, it is often the most humble and self-evident limits, which, in time, behave in the most sophisticated ways. They form bizarre chandeliers of crystal, guide the catacomb construction of ant colonies, the spread of cities, and the swoop of flocks. All, often, with eerie similarity. Awareness of these limits does not guarantee predictive power, or the ennui of omniscience.

This is good, and fascinating.

And it is through this means that I make my work: every piece is the manifestation of a predetermined scheme—a system of small limits with a clear beginning and end. Using abstract symbol (what I call ‘modules’, much like number and letter forms) in a mode of familiar, naturalistic construction, these pieces of visual script are allowed to accrue and to display their peculiar surprises. In this way, an unlikely path of discovery is opened in the midst of certainty—though every step is predetermined and the end known from the beginning, the final form remains enigmatic. Though I have accumulated an extensive archive of ‘research drawings’, end results are stubbornly, delightfully immune to absolute prediction.

Add to these systems environmental pressures (in this case, cataclysmic spills of paint flung over fully realized systems) and the flexibility and regenerative capacity of a given set of rules is tested even further. The system must then respond and rebuild using fragments of surviving information. Images generated this way hover near familiarity but are unable to declare themselves. They occupy both the micro and macroscopic view. They are both geologically slow and disastrously swift.

Working this way, I have become convinced that intelligence can be essentially understood as the ability to create or recognize pattern; perhaps patterns themselves are a form of intelligence—intelligence capable of surprise, without breaking a single rule. Which, in the end, is a satisfying contradiction, an energetic tension of philosophical forces hospitable to constrained freedom and consistent astonishment.



Ignition, 48x60 inches, acrylic on canvas

Dan Sutherland

I desire my work to look, on first inspection, like a group of mismatched forms and devices culled from familiar traditions of painting. Ideally, each painting then becomes a portrait of sorts, paradoxically embodying the posture, countenance and vulnerability of someone you know well: a lover, an intimate friend or family member.

I am drawn to paint's penchant to accept nuances of the hand. Paint's potential chromatic range, amplified by the continuums of thickness, degree of transparency and the long list of historic / contemporary pigments and additives allow for incredible subtleties which can directly relay the impulses, temperament and therefore the subjectivity of the maker.

In the studio I count myself a tinkerer, and as such, the process for generating each work is inefficient and inconsistent. Most of the works in this exhibition began with an initial drawing (in paint) made while looking at constructed models, still lives or photographs. Each drawing then became a scaffold or matrix into which grew proactive and reactive maneuvers that I hope produced idiosyncratic packages that are impossible to unpack visually.



Red Dragon, 18x14 inches, oil on canvas

About the Artists

Corey Antis' work has been exhibited in national and international exhibitions at the Rebekah Templeton Gallery, Greenlease Gallery at Rockhurst University, Booster and Seven Gallery, the Vox Populi Gallery, Three Walls, Heaven Gallery, Jenny Jaskey Gallery, the D.C. Arts Center, Greenstone Gallery, Hunter College, the Rhode Island School of Design, the Frieze Projects Art Fair, the Stray Show and SPACE Gallery, among others.

He received a B.F.A. degree in painting and a B.A. degree in English from Cornell University, as well as an M.F.A. degree in painting from the Tyler School of Art, Temple University. He currently lives and works in Kansas City.

<http://www.coreyantist.com/>

Hannah Barnes' paintings, drawing, and installations have appeared nationally in such places as the Academy of Fine Art and Design in Wrocław, Poland, the Institute of Contemporary Art in Portland, ME, the Richmond Museum of Art in Indiana, the Shore Institute for Contemporary Art in Long Branch, New Jersey, and Work Gallery in Brooklyn, NY. She has been awarded residencies at the Vermont Studio Center, the Heliker-LaHotan Foundation, the Calumet Artist Residency, and the Pace House Residency. Born in Massachusetts, Barnes lives and works in Indianapolis, IN and teaches painting at Ball State University.

<http://hannahbarnesart.com/home.html>

Katherine Bradford attended Bryn Mawr College and holds an MFA from SUNY Purchase. Her work is held in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Portland

Art Museum (Maine), and the Farnsworth Museum (Maine). She lives in New York City and has a painting studio in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. She has been the recipient of numerous awards including the Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant, Guggenheim Fellowship and the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant Award.

<http://www.kathbradford.com/>

Jennifer Moses lives and paints in Boston, Massachusetts. She is currently represented by the Kingston Gallery and the Clark Gallery. Moses has been included in group exhibitions across the country and throughout New England. Her work has been reviewed in Art New England Magazine, The Boston Globe, The Boston Herald, Sculpture Magazine and The Roswell Daily Newspaper. In 2011 her work was included in the Northeast edition of New American Paintings. Moses has received numerous awards and was recently invited to Yaddo in Saratoga Springs, NY. She was a fellow at the Roswell Artist in Residence, in Roswell, NM. She holds a BFA from Tyler School of Art and an MFA from Indiana University. Moses is a Professor of Art at the University of New Hampshire where she has taught for twenty-four years.

<http://www.jennifermosespainting.com/>

Jill Nathanson was born in New York and received her BA from Bennington College and her MFA from Hunter College. In 1982, as a recently graduated young painter, she was selected by Anthony Caro to participate in the first Triangle Artist's Workshop, held in Pine Plains, New York. Nathanson has been exhibiting in solo and group shows since 1981, including several curated

exhibitions at The Painting Center and other New York locations. Recent touring exhibitions of works exploring analogies between color and Kabbalah have been seen at the Philadelphia Museum of Jewish Art and at Yale University, among other venues. Her work is in numerous private and public collections. She is represented by Messineo Art Projects/Weyman Contemporary in New York. Nathanson's work is included in the National Academy Museum Annual, 2012. She lives and works in New York.

<http://jillnathanson.com/>

Linnea Spransy graduated from Yale in 2001 with an MFA in painting, and her work has been exhibited throughout the United States and internationally at numerous academic institutions and galleries and is featured in corporate collections. She is represented by Byron Cohen Gallery in Kansas City, Missouri and currently lives and works in Los Angeles, California.

<http://www.linneagabriella.com/>

Dan Sutherland received his M.F.A. from Syracuse University and his B.F.A. from James Madison University. He is currently an Associate Professor at the University of Texas at Austin, where he has been teaching painting and drawing since 1991. Before moving to Austin in 1996, Dan lived in San Antonio. He has exhibited in the Bay Area, Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Antonio, Houston and Fort Worth and is represented by Moody Gallery in Houston, and David Shelton Gallery in San Antonio.

<http://www.dansutherlandstudios.com/>



Dan Sutherland: Blue Profile 2012 oil on aluminium 3x4½ inches

