

# THE ABSTRACT



# studioe

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#### COVER

16. Petra Sairanen*I/Bomb*, 2021Oil, gunpowder, frit and reflective glass beads on canvas48 in. diameter

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23. Mark Sengbusch Blue Bird, 2019 Acrylic on Baltic Birch plywood 30 x 25 x 19 in.



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# THE ABSTRACT NOW

**Colleen Bratton** 

Jason Stopa

Ken Kelly

Marc Mitchell

Mark Sengbush

Mel Prest

Petra Sairanen

Rebekah Goldstein

Von Coffin

#### JUNE 14 THROUGH JULY 31, 2025

presented at studio e gallery Seattle, WA

Co-Curated by Dawna Holloway Owner and Director of studio e gallery, Seattle WA and Scott Malbaurn Executive Director of the Schneider Museum of Art, Ashland, OR

Exhibition Essay by Barry Schwabsky

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20. Mark Sengbusch Pankot Palace, 2024 Acrylic on Wood tiles on panel with Artist's Frame 22 x 34 in.



# FOREWORD

We are pleased to present *The Abstract Now*, a group exhibition co-curated by Dawna Holloway, owner and Director of the studio e gallery in Seattle, WA and I which highlights the work of artists from around the U.S., including Seattle based artists; Colleen Braton, Ken Kelly and Von Coffin, New York based artists Jason Stopa and Mark Sengbusch. From Fayetteville, AR; Marc Mitchell, out of San Francisco brings us Mel Prest and Rebekah Goldstein and lastly, from Portland, OR; Petra Sairanen.

We are excited about the collaborative effort between the Schnieder Museum of Art and studio e. Since 2014, studio e has nurtured the creative community in Seattle, giving artists the opportunity to share their work, provide engaging talks, and execute special projects. The gallery works with a range of artists from young and emerging to well-established artists such as Joe Feddersen, Fay Jones and Cappy Thompson. The gallery's history demonstrates that the work shown often ranges from formalist work to current practices that blur the line between the fine arts, craft, and design. Similarly, *The Abstract Now* puts forward a spectrum of abstract artists where we see roots and overlaps in geometric abstraction, color field painting, and found object assemblage. The linkages between these artists vary and a narrative begins to form where we see color, shape, texture, and technique that extends into the sensibilities of each artist.

I would like to thank the artists in this exhibition for making their artworks available, Dawna Holloway of studio e gallery for the exciting collaboration, and Barry Schwabsky for contributing an insightful essay for the exhibition. In addition, I'd like to acknowledge the Schneider Museum of Art's staff and support team, Maureen Williams, our Museum Preparator and Gallery Manager, Emily McPeck, our Associate Director of Administration and Communication, our student staff and our Museum Council; Cindy Barnard, Roberta Bhasin, Sandy Friend, Michele Fulkerson, Mary Gardiner, Vivian Stubblefield, School of Art & Communication Dean, Andrew Gay, catalog design by David Ruppe and printing by Brown Printing in Portland, OR.

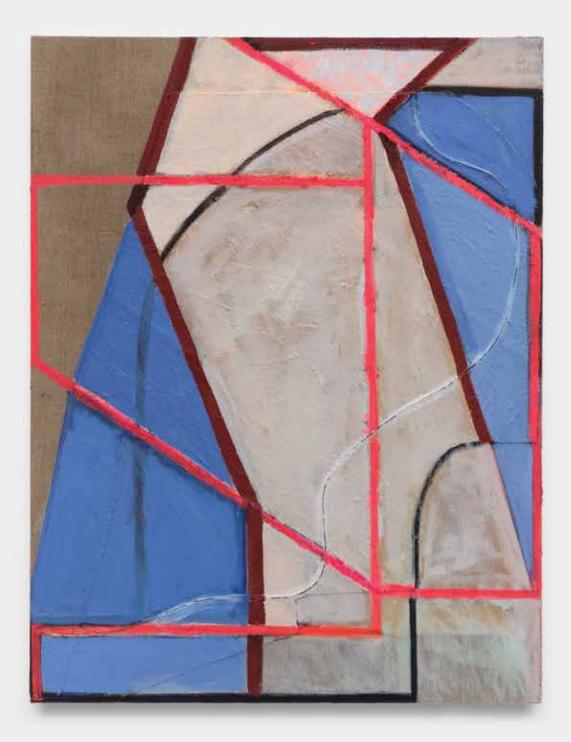
Scott Malbaurn Executive Director Schneider Museum of Art Ashland, OR

# FOREWORD

ince opening studio e in 2014, the gallery has always been as much about creating a space for discovery and experimentation as supporting its stable of artists. Consequently, collaboration is a mainstay of our program and we routinely invite curators, writers, designers as well as non-gallery artists to share the space. I like to think that this expansiveness also serves to enrich the Seattle art community. When Scott Malbaurn approached me about collaborating on a show about hard-edge abstraction, I was game. Scott and I met a few years ago when a Schneider Museum of Art exhibition featuring several of my gallery artists traveled to Ashland, OR where Scott serves as the Executive Director. Like me, Scott trained as an artist but, unlike me, he still maintains a painting practice. Scott is an outside the box thinker who is always seeking ways to expand the Museum's reach; this time, he wanted to bring a Schneider Museum of Art exhibition to the urban center of Seattle, WA.

Working on *The Abstract Now* opened my eyes to a type of abstraction that connects to opticality, rigorous craft, and psychic space. In the process of developing the show, I discovered that the genre also provides a context for the work of one of my gallery artists, Ken Kelly, who is featured in the exhibition. Besides Scott and I as cocurators, this project has involved collaboration with the artists as well as art critic, Barry Schwabsky, who wrote the essay for the accompanying publication. Barry, Scott and I conducted remote studio visits with each of the artists--nine in all. Learning about and processing it with Barry and Scott has been an incomparable experience for me. I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to them both as well as to the artists, whose work I am proud to present. I hope visitors, whether to the gallery or via the pages of the catalogue, will share in the experience of discovery this project has given me.

Dawna Holloway Owner & Director studio e gallery Seattle, WA



04. Rebekah Goldstein *Call It Like We See It*, 2024 Canvas, molding paste and oil paint on linen 26 x 20 in.

# ESSAY

#### THE ABSTRACT NOW

Barry Schwabsky

once wrote that a group show of abstract artists is something like a church of atheists. There's something that feels self-contradictory about it, in that they seem most united only by what they are not. After all, what makes an artwork abstract? Presumably, that it does not present a picture of anything, or only does so in a very schematic or otherwise attenuated manner. Fine, but there turn out to be innumerable things to do in art beyond making pictures. Do those many activities, or the many kinds of objects that result from them, form a class unto themselves?

I'm not convinced. With that in mind, I am tempted to offer a provisional definition of abstraction in art that is somewhat different than those we have been used to applying: abstraction is an art that, when faced with an existing rule, convention, or presupposition about what art is or must be, or how the artist should go about making it, says: You don't have to do *that;* the artwork does not have to be *that*—whatever "that" is. Only in the first instance does "that" mean "pictures of people, places, and things such as we see or might see around us." Beyond that, the impulse to abstraction opens up a world of implicit or explicit conventions to be abrogated if need be: Does a painting really need to be made with paint? Not necessarily. Must it be done on a rectangular support? Who says?



12. Von Coffin #88, 2024 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. pvc sheet, resin, acrylic, magnets 3 x 3 x 13.875 in.



07. Jason Stopa Sunrise, Torres de Satélite, 2022 Oil on canvas 28 x 23 in. Courtesy of Morgan Lehman Gallery Shouldn't it hang on the wall? Maybe, maybe not. And it's flat, right? Hmmm, let's see...

That's not to say that, collectively, the work of abstract artists amounts merely to a mere anarchy or chaos of conflicting positions. Their differences may reflect a coherence of their own—a coherence secured, not by the formation of a fixed category, but by networks of overlapping similarities, relationships, and differences. Certain works will turn out to share their rejections and acceptances, but such shared characteristics do not add up to a definition of abstraction.

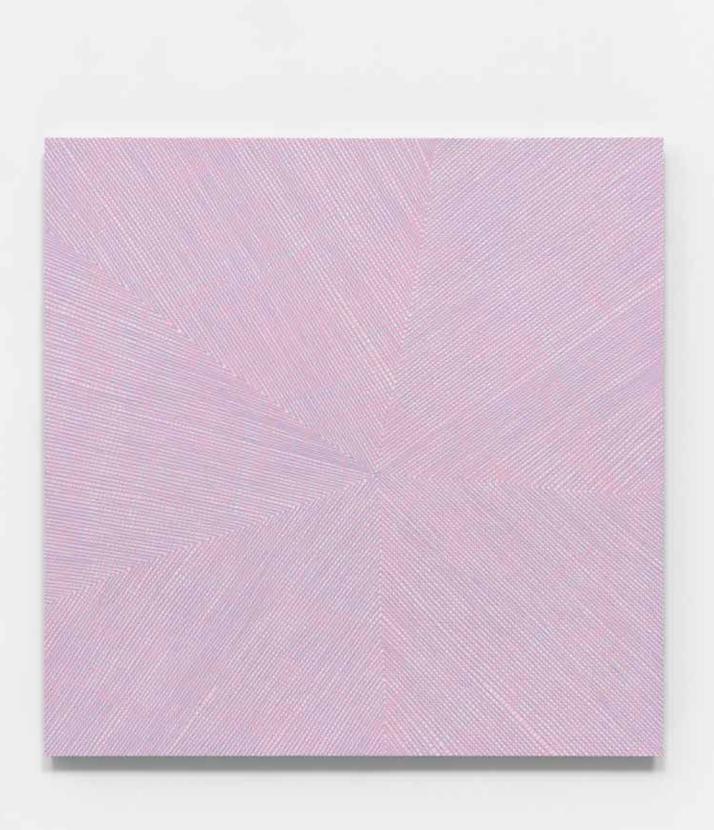
In this sense I can say that some of the art in this exhibition is congruent with much of the classic modernist abstract painting that emerged in Europe and the United States over a century ago—the abstract art of Robert and Sonia Delauney, Arthur Dove, Wassily Kandinsky, František Kupka, Kasimir Malevich, and Piet Mondrian, among others—but only some. Jason Stopa's *Sunrise, Torres de Satélite*, 2022, seems to refer directly to that moment, just before World War I, of energetic discovery, the origin of abstract art. Its simple forms in brilliant color evoke a dynamism that is more temporal than spatial, particularly in its broad central band where, in three phases, a multiplex circular element seems to be composing and recomposing itself in cinematic phases. As much as it evokes art history, this work is also a kind of meditation on its own history, as its vivid hues are translucent enough to reveal something of their own layering. In an interview with Jarrett Earnest, Stopa once defined painting as a "performative space"—though it may appear to be a stable object, it reminds the viewer of the way it came into being through time, and its lively chromatic insouciance aims to share the painter's pleasure in that process with the viewer.

Ken Kelly is probably Stopa's nearest neighbor among these nine artists, given their shared preference for simple planar forms and blunt, relatively unshaded color, but the similarities bring out the differences—for one thing, that Kelly's palette is warmer, mellower overall than Stopa's: Kelly's color hums, you might say, where Stopa's zings. And then, in place of Stopa's architectonic construction, Kelly's forms have a kind of sweep to them that keeps whispering to me about the slow, steady, inexorable forces of nature—wind, water, and so on—and the organic or organic-seeming shapes that arise from it, like the meandering course of a river or the line of a rolling hillside. The large white form that dominates Eye might remind you of a Matissean torso, but here, that wouldn't be what you'd normally call a figure—just another natural form molded by the natural forces that the painter emulates without seeking to represent. His ultimate concern may be how to fix such fluid forms within the four strict lines, seemingly so alien to them, of a rectangle.





15. Ken Kelly *Eye*, 2025 Acrylic on Canvas 36 x 48 in. Mel Prest's work dissolves the tangible forms that Stopa and Kelly enjoy. Only one contained shape is left, namely that of the underlying support: a square. Each square is crisscrossed by intersecting freehand colored lines whose interactions generate phenomenal structures that exist only in the eye, not on the physical surface itself. Think of the moiré and other visual effects used in the Op art of the 1960s; though it might not seem obvious, these are remote progeny of the optical mixing of color developed by the Impressionists as they sought greater chromatic vibrancy and luminosity than the old masters' techniques permitted. Unlike the Impressionists, Prest is not concerned with depicting the natural scene, but she is explicitly inspired by nature: "the magic of fleeting color phenomena like mirages, rainbows, the movement of the sky and the ocean." In that, sense I might say that, although their works don't resemble each other in the least, Prest's paintings embody a close-up view of things that Kelly's evoke at a distance.



06. Mel Prest *Lilac Orchid*, 2024 Acrylic on wood panel 48 x 48 x 2 in.



17. Petra Sairanen *We Two*, 2024 Acrylic, oil, marble dust, reflective glass beads, and gunpowder on canvas 14 x 11 in.

Although Petra Sairanen has made sculpture that incorporates pictorial elements related to her paintings, the paintings themselves, like those of Stopa, Kelly, or Prest, respect the rectangle (while also adding another, less common traditional format, the tondo) and the plane. And yet the plane is subtly questioned by her use, alongside paint (whether oil or acrylic) of other kinds of materialsnotably gunpowder, but also marble dust, glass beads, and frit (the solid matter to be melted down to create glass). These materials allow for optical effects distinct from anything paint can produce (and vice versa) but their presence also emphasizes the fact that, like most paintings, Sairanen's are assemblages of stuff on a surface-that they are material before they are (and in order to be) visual. Nonetheless, they emphatically are visual, as Sairanen's repeated use of arrayed lines of predominantly bright hue—a sort of randomized rainbow—accentuates.

All three of the artists I've mentioned accept the rectangle—or its special case, the square, or that other familiar regular form, the tondo—as a given for their work. Rebekah Goldstein alludes to it by refuting it: Her sometimes eccentrically shaped paintings (here represented by the small Ghosted, 2023) seem to be haunted by memories of Renaissance perspectivism, but they keep turning the diagonals used to indicate spatial recession within the image into planes that keep folding and unfolding into the work's literal flatness. Illusionistic space is both conjured and dismantled, creating interpretive conundrums that, as Goldstein has said, can be seen as "metaphors for how we look at the world around us, how we feel in our bodies, and how we orient ourselves to a given environment." Even when, as in Breathless in *Bayview*, 2024, she sticks to the rectangle, she seems to open it up, creating illusionistic apertures that remind us that the painting remains open to the world around it.



05. Rebeka Goldstein *Ghosted,* 2023 Oil paint, paper mâché, molding paste, and cardboard on panel 16 x 11 in.

Where Goldstein torques and twists pictorial space, Marc Mitchell's shaped paintings deal with space more aggressively, breaking into pieces and recombining them. What I like about the title of his painting Dow Prong Road, 2023, is that it sounds like a fabricated word mash-up, except that a quick Google search informs that there really exists a road with that name, in the state of Wyoming. The painting itself really is a kind of pictorial mash-up, made up of crisply defined zones of mutually contradictory patterning, mostly linear, sometimes completely flat and sometimes venturing into perspectival space-for instance in the righthand segment, where green and yellow lines seem to depict fields receding toward the horizon, under a sky with billowing clouds. Agriculture was, perhaps, the first of humanity's projects to artificialize nature; Dow Prong Road seems to put us somewhere near the conclusion of that endeavor.



01. Marc Mitchell Dow Prong Road, 2023 Acrylic on shaped panels 40 x 51 in.





21. Mark Sengbusch *Cheyenne Mountain,* 2024 Acrylic on Wood tiles on panel (Diptych) 66 x 83 in. The paintings of Mark Sengbusch also feature noncongruous zones of similar yet disconnected patterns. Cheyenne Mountain, 2024, takes what Sengbusch calls a rising moon shape—about two-thirds of a circle with a straight bottom. But what's crucial, although you might not notice it until you get close to the painting, is that each wavy-edged zone of color (the painting contains over a hundred of them) is a separately painted wooden title. It's as though Sengbusch has substituted the idea of tile for that of the brushstroke, and made a painting that is constructed like a puzzle rather than straightforwardly painted. And yet as a work such as Blue Bird, 2019, shows, the painted tile is only a step away from an element in a construction that no longer aligns along a single plane, but becomes part of a three-dimensional sculptural assemblage.

23. Mark Sengbusch Blue Bird, 2019 Acrylic on Baltic Birch plywood 30 x 25 x 19 in.

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Like Sengbusch, Von Coffin assembles paintings—or are they reliefs?—out of monochromatic elements. The artist refers to them as "sconces"; I can't help thinking of Pez dispensers (not a world away from the Jelly Belly jelly beans that Coffin cites as inspiration for their color palette). The works are tall, slender yet chunky wall-mounted objects, as deep as they are wide (in this selection, at least, all 3" x 3" x 13.875"). The container or frame is as important as the assemblage of smaller elements it houses: vertical arrays of color chunks-eleven horizontals in No. 90, 2024, for instance, or two rows of skinny verticals in #85, 2025, even a single vertical ivory-colored bar with a greenish tint glowing along its sides in No. 89, 2024. Coffin speaks of how the food industry "translates" flavors into colors, and Coffin further translates such colors into objects-paintings if you will or polychrome sculptures if you won't-but the resulting beauty transcends a critique (let alone a celebration) of consumption.



Even more than Coffin's sconces, whose accent on the frame keeps ideas of painting firmly to the fore, Colleen RIC Bratton's wall-based works refute the distinction between sculpture and painting. Bratton speaks of herself as a sculptor and installation artist, yet the chromatic intensity of her Belly Button Supernova, 2022-though "painted" only with found fabric and charred wood—is completely convincing as a shaped painting. It functions on a scale of the imagination and not that of literal space. Protector, 2023, by contrast, though it also features an assemblage of found fabrics, leans more on its sculptural physicality, yet the seven raylike arms that swirl out from it occupy the wall by painterly more than by physical means. Again, imaginative scale is paramount: The work exists not so much in its 28-inch diameter as at the scale of a cell, a seed, or maybe a galaxy.



18. Colleen RJC Bratton *Protector*, 2023 Found fabric, acrylic on wood, Marigold seeds 28 x 28 x 2 in.

FACING PAGE: Detail







14. Ken Kelly *Cave*, 2025 Acrylic on Canvas 36 x 48 in.



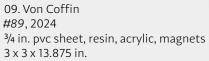
11. Von Coffin #84, 2024 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. pvc sheet, resin, acrylic, magnets 3 x 3 x 13.875 in.

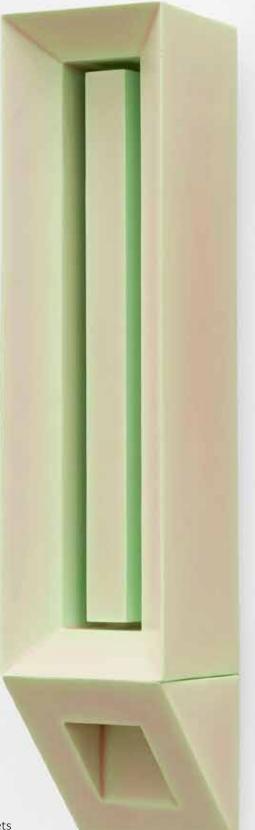


10. Von Coffin #85, 2024 <sup>3</sup>/4 in. pvc sheet, resin, acrylic, magnets 3 x 3 x 13.875 in.



13. Von Coffin #87, 2024 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. pvc sheet, resin, acrylic, magnets 3 x 3 x 13.875 in.







03. Rebekah Goldstein Breathless In Bayview, 2024 Oil on Canvas 65 x 52 in.



02. Marc Mitchell Lower Piney Road, 2023 Acrylic on shaped panels with in-laid plexiglass 40 x 50 in.

22. Mark Sengbusch Leaf Lean, 2024 Aluminum 11.5 x 11 x 9 in. Edition of 5 and 2 Aps

#### MEL PREST IN THE EXHIBITION FLAT FILES



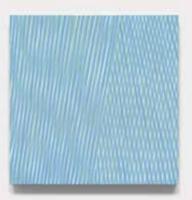
27. *Bison*, 2024 Acrylic on wood panel 12 x 12 x 2 in.



28. *Bison 2*, 2024 Acrylic on wood panel 12 x 12 x 2 in.



29. *Blue Field*, 2024 Acrylic on wood panel 12 x 12 x 2 in.



26. Forget-Me-Not Cloud, 2024 Acrylic and mica on wood panel 12 x 12 x 2 in.



25. *Sun Spell*, 2024 Acrylic on wood panel 12 x 12 x 2 in.



24. *Tiger*, 2024 Acrylic on wood panel 12 x 12 x 2 in.

### MARC MITCHELL IN THE EXHIBITION FLAT FILES



30. Ucross (Big Horns+Road), 2023–2024 Acrylic on Rives BFK mounted to panel 14 x 10 in.



43. Ucross (Violet sage), 2023–2024 Acrylic and silkscreen on Rives BFK mounted to panel 14 x 10 in.



42. Ucross (Summer sage / Heatwave), 2023–2024 Acrylic and silkscreen on Rives BFK mounted to panel 14 x 10 in.



31. Ucross (Circles Hike), 2023–2024 Acrylic on Rives BFK mounted to panel 14 x 10 in.



37. Ucross (Mid-day sage), 2023–2024 Acrylic and silkscreen on Rives BFK mounted to panel 14 x 10 in.



38. Ucross (Night sage), 2023–2024 Acrylic on Rives BFK mounted to panel 14 x 10 in.



32. Ucross (Coal Creek Sage/Yellow Dots), 2023–2024 Acrylic and silkscreen on Rives BFK mounted to panel 14 x 10 in.

41. Ucross (Sage Pink), 2023–2024 Acrylic and silkscreen on Rives BFK mounted to panel 14 x 10 in.





36. Ucross (Hobgoblin), 2023–2024 Acrylic on Rives BFK mounted to panel 14 x 10 in.



33. Ucross (Coal Creek Soft), 2023–2024 Acrylic on Rives BFK mounted to panel 14 x 10 in.



34. Ucross (Diamonds), 2023–2024 Acrylic on Rives BFK mounted to panel 14 x 10 in.



40. Ucross (Pet rock hike), 2023–2024 Acrylic on Rives BFK mounted to panel 14 x 10 in.



35. Ucross (Dusk Storm), 2023–2024 Acrylic on Rives BFK mounted to panel 14 x 10 in.



39. Ucross (Night Storm / 2 ponds), 2023–2024 Acrylic on Rives BFK mounted to panel 14 x 10 in.

## CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

#### MARC MITCHELL



Dow Prong Road, 2023 Acrylic on shaped panels 40 x 51 in.

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2.

Lower Piney Road, 2023 Acrylic on shaped panels with in-laid plexiglass 40 x 50 in.

#### REBEKAH GOLDSTEIN



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Call It Like We See It, 2024 Canvas, molding paste and oil paint on linen 26 x 20 in.



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#### MEL PREST



Lilac Orchid, 2024 Acrylic on wood panel 48 x 48 x 2 in.

#### JASON STOPA



Sunrise, Torres de Satélite, 2022 Oil on canvas 28 x 23 in. Courtesy of Morgan Lehman Gallery

#### VON COFFIN



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#### MARC MITCHELL IN THE EXHIBITION FLAT FILES



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