

## It's alive! 'Painting Zombies' challenges the death of painting

By Sheila Regan  
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Image by Ann Tarantino

Painting Zombies: Permanence/Impermanence," the new exhibit now up at the Katherine E. Nash Gallery at the University of Minnesota, doesn't actually have any zombies in it. Instead, a press release for the show states that the title nods satirically at the notion of resurrecting a supposedly dead art form.

Wait. Painting is dead? Since when? Well, French painter Paul Delaroche allegedly proclaimed it dead in 1839 when he saw the first daguerreotype (although whether he actually said this is debatable). In 1921 Russian avant-garde artist Alexander Rodchenko declared the end of painting with his exhibition of three canvases: red, white, and blue. In recent years critics such as Douglas Crimp have espoused the notion as well.

It's not that the works presented at Katherine Nash are bad -- there are some that are quite stunning, especially Ann Tarantino's pieces, which she says on her website were made by blowing ink through a straw, controlling her breath to tease the ink into "almost patterns" which she later embellishes with paint and ink. Part Rorschach test, part fanciful wonderings of the imagination, these pieces made good use of negative space, had detailed patterns, and eye-catching colors. Her *Red Head* painting was especially delightful.

There were also some artists that played with the scope of the form, presenting pieces that used textiles, for instance, or photography. Ryuta Nakajima, who co-curated the exhibition, had a stunning installation called *Self World* that included photographs of bugs on discs that were really gorgeous, and Andy Messerschmidt's painting/textile hybrids such as *Pleistocene Workhorse Blues*, and *Kalt, Dunkel, Mai* was especially compelling.

The press release for the exhibition states: "We originally wanted do an exhibition purely from a painters' perspective--what are painters looking at in contemporary society and what are we contributing?--but then we found ourselves looking at artists who are playing even with the notions and structures of painting." This begs the question: If you have to merge painting with another art form in order to make it relevant, what does that say about a regular painting? Maybe I'm old fashioned, but I really don't have a problem with paintings done on canvas, if they are done well.

Maybe it's all just a semantics issue. What does it matter if something is called a painting or a sculpture or mixed media as long as it's a really cool thing that is shown in a gallery?

Some of the pieces in the exhibition just didn't work, like Ry Fryar's odd dog pastel dog paintings. Or Steven Hampton's paintings that look like he just took the leftover almost-dried oil paints from his palette and smushed them all on a canvas.

Lesson learned: Perhaps the important point is that it doesn't really matter what form a piece of work takes -- whether it be painting or photography or a hybrid -- it just has to be good.

The opening reception for "Painting Zombies" is Friday, November 19 from 6 to 8:30 p.m. The exhibit runs through December 15 at the Katherine E. Nash Gallery (405 21st Ave. S., Minneapolis). For more info, visit [www.nash.umn.edu](http://www.nash.umn.edu).