

GALLERY JUNE 30, 2020 PAUL LASTER

6 American Galleries Highlighting Abstraction



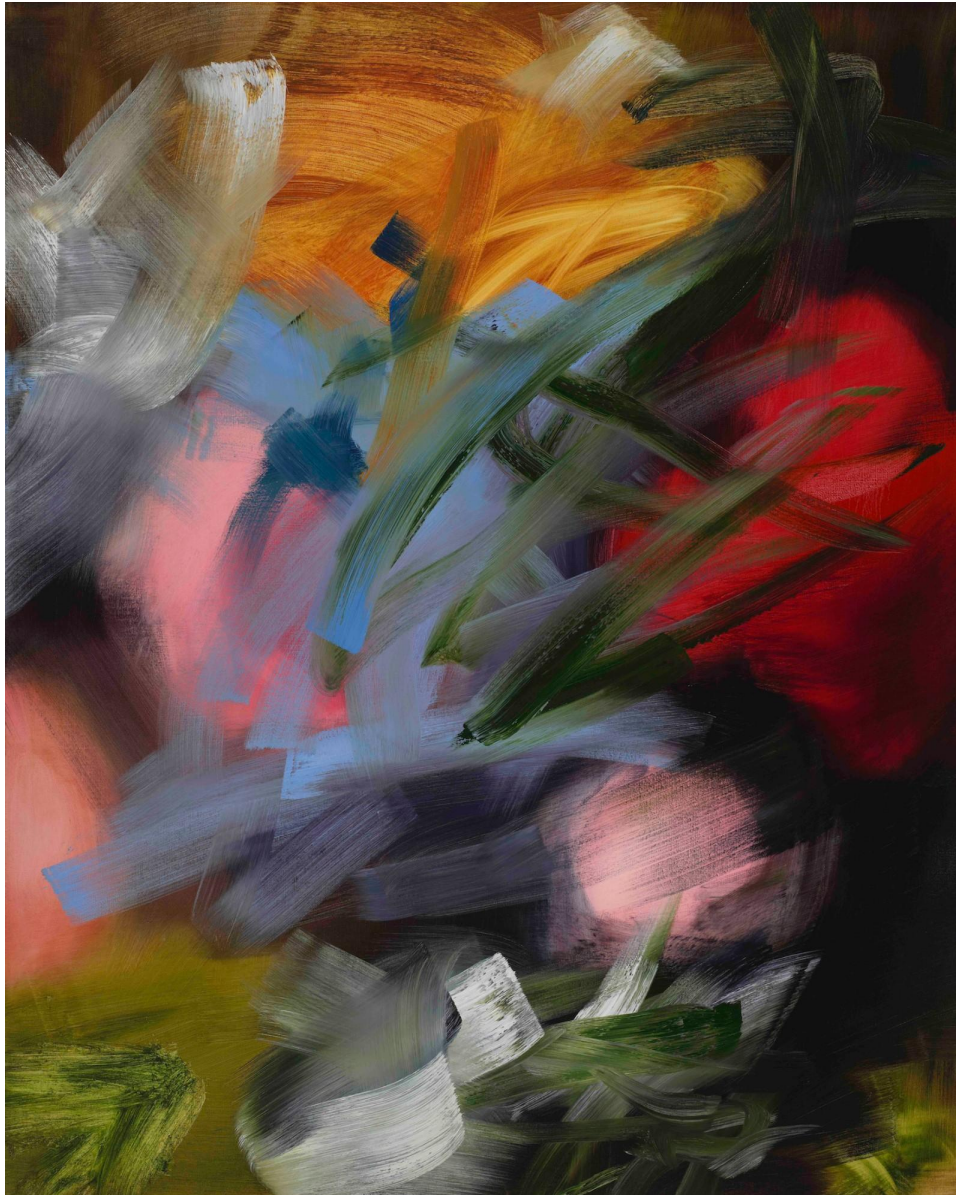
COURTESY HIRAM BUTLER GALLERY, HOUSTON

Kate Shepherd, *April, May, June, etc., etc., Upended Floor (Mud, Blood)*, 2020.

As art exhibitions have begun to reopen amidst the continuing coronavirus pandemic, we've discovered that a number of American galleries are highlighting abstraction, even though figuration is what's generally trending today.

Whether it's a stylistic shift or merely a coincidence, we'll have to wait and see in order to further evaluate, but what we can uncover now is that regardless of gender or age, abstraction still holds a fascination with artists and continues to convey a pictorial language that takes viewers beyond their day to day existence.

Rounding up six recently opened shows in Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles, Houston, New York, and Miami, we offer a contemplative tour of some of the ways artists are using abstraction today.



COURTESY DAVID KLEIN GALLERY, DETROIT

Elise Ansel, *RR Flower Detail I*, 2019.

Elise Ansel: Palimpsest

David Klein Gallery, Detroit

June 20–August 22, 2020

Best known for her gestural transformation of Old Master paintings by celebrated male artists, who have represented women in either an idealized or sexually objectified way, Elise Ansel uses the pictorial language of abstraction to communicate an equivalent point of view with a bit of a feminist twist. Having exhibited her improvisational interpretations of alluring works by such revered masters as [Rembrandt](#), Rubens, and Vermeer at galleries in New York and London, the American artist was invited by the gallery to respond to works at the Detroit Institute of Art, which has an impressive collection of European art.

Besides beautifully translating classic canvases by Lorenzo de Caro and Nicolas Poussin and a 15th-century altarpiece by the Master of the St. Ursula Legend in the collection, Ansel found two masterpieces by female “Old Mistresses” that were ripe for multiple renewals. “Gesture breathes life into the paintings,” Ansel writes in a statement for the show’s e-catalogue, and her energetic painterly process takes Rachel Ruysch’s luscious still life painting *Flowers in a Glass Vase* and [Artemisia Gentileschi](#)’s portrayal of *Judith and Her Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes* to new, colorfully rich realms of artistic expression.



COURTESY ANDREW RAFACZ, CHICAGO

Cody Hudson, *What's it Like to be Alone (In This Body, In This Lifetime, I Wanted it Now)*, 2020.

Cody Hudson: I Have No One But You

Andrew Rafacz, Chicago

June 23–August, 2020

A jack of all trades and master of many, Cody Hudson is a talented artist and designer with a knack for elemental, poetic shapes. Equally embraced by the fine art, street art, and industrial design worlds, Hudson creates spirited paintings, sculptures, murals, graphics, and fashions. Exhibiting lively paintings and sculptures presenting biomorphic forms within the ambiance of boldly painted walls and shapely murals, the artist turns the gallery into a garden of graphic delights.



COURTESY ANDREW RAFACZ, CHICAGO

Installation view of Cody Hudson's *Still Life Painting Based on me Sitting in the Basement Crying (You Said the Hills Too Steep to Climb)*, 2020.

His abstract works reference animals and plant life, with details and features being defined by flat, monochromatic elements that come together like pieces in a puzzle. The paintings

on linen often leave portions of the canvas untouched so that the color of the linen becomes a playful part of the composition, while the powder-coated, cut-metal sculptures use the negative space defined by their surroundings to bring them to life.

Highlights in the show include the pink and blue canvas *Still Life Painting Based on me Sitting in the Basement Crying (You Said the Hills Too Steep to Climb)*, with its shifting, interconnected abstract shapes creating a loosely constructed narrative over a wall painting that repeats and doubles its presence and the ironic steel sculpture *What's it Like to be Alone (In This Body, In This Lifetime, I Wanted it Now)*, which from one direction resembles a bird grabbing a morsel and from the other looks like a person peering into the abyss.



COURTESY PARRASCH HEIJNEN GALLERY, LOS ANGELES

Edith Baumann, *Pattern Recognition No. 44*, 2020.

Edith Baumann: New Painting

Parrasch Heijnen Gallery, Los Angeles

May 22–July 2, 2020

Creating sublime abstractions since the 1970s, Edith Baumann makes meditative paintings, where things come together and interact in simple, precise, and poetic ways. Developed over periods of time, her abstract canvases employ monochromatic and geometric forms to subtly construct paintings with a pulse. Completely nonobjective, they use patterns to create energetic fields of floating forms.

In her second show with the gallery, Baumann presents six new paintings with overlapping horizontal shapes juxtaposed with an early, monochromatic canvas consisting of three different, solid blue, vertical bands. The new abstract paintings, which are titled *Pattern Recognition* and accompanied by a number to identify each individual piece, mix hard-edged geometric shapes overlaid with softer, light brushwork that mimics the underlying forms while beautifully veiling their existence.



COURTESY HIRAM BUTLER GALLERY, HOUSTON

Kate Shepherd, *April, May, June, etc., etc., Upended Floor (Mud, Blood)*, 2020.

Kate Shepherd: April, May, June, etc., etc., Upended Floor (Mud, Blood)

Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston

May 26–July 31, 2020

New York-based artist Kate Shepherd took the problem of not being able to physically work in her studio and the health risk associated with air travel as a challenge when considering

a solo show at her [Houston gallery](#). Known for her abstract paintings that have their origins in 3D digital modeling programs, Shepherd decided to virtually design an exhibition, that she visualized at a distance, as a suite of three wall paintings within the gallery's windowed space, which would be viewed while social distancing from an enchanting garden entrance.

Painted on site by others, the artist's three murals extend what she charmingly calls the brown, mud-colored floor of the gallery onto the walls so that the dimensions of the space are illusionistically increased and its floor plan is dramatically altered. Three blood-red rectangles, which simulate paintings that extend from the floor, rest on the walls at skewed angles to shift the perspective of the viewer.

In a statement for the show, which the artist recited in an accompanying video, Shepherd conveyed, "...isolation gives me the chance to focus on what's before me," a sentiment that's unconsciously shared by the audience, which must remain on the outside looking in.



COURTESY HOLLIS TAGGART, NEW YORK

Bill Scott, *The Imitation of Sound*, 2019.

Bill Scott: A Prolonged Moment

Hollis Taggart Gallery, New York

June 15–July 24, 2020

Showing solo at the gallery for the eighth time since 2004, Bill Scott presents his signature abstract paintings, which are colorfully derived from visions of nature, and a series of vibrant watercolors—a medium that he recently revisited after decades of setting it aside—that follow a similar path. Exuberantly achieved, Scott's paintings and watercolors employ line, color, and shapes to recreate nature in a raw yet fascinating form.

"I paint an imaginary garden that originates in my remembrances of childhood," the artist declared in the show's accompanying catalogue. "My family never had an actual garden, per se. The front and back yards of my childhood home were unkempt and overgrown. Although that is long in my past, I am aware that I never ever stopped trying to create a painted image of the imaginary paradise where, as a child, I longed to be."

Canvases like *The Imaginary World* and *The Imitation of Sound* delightfully transport our eyes through splotches of color and layered lines as we navigate Scott's painterly environments, while such watercolors as *The Fleeting Dream* and *Before Before Was* further abstract the details of his energetically invented realms.



COURTESY EMERSON DORSCH, MIAMI

Karen Rifas, *1162*, 2019; *Three Fold (4119)*, 2020; and *1545*, 2020.

Karen Rifas: 20/20

Emerson Dorsch, Miami
June 13–August 29, 2020

Working with the architecture of the gallery, Karen Rifas has created an immersive environment with geometric paintings and sculptures that purposely interact with the dynamic structure of the space. A painter, sculptor, and installation artist, Rifas fuses her interest in the modernist art movements of De Stijl, Russian constructivism, [the Bauhaus](#), minimalism, and Latin American abstraction to create a style of art that's compellingly her own.

"In my practice I find that there is a beauty in structure and geometry," the artist said in a statement. "It is this space in which my artistic play occurs. Today, in my works on paper, this is a space to explore the delicate balance between what we know and what we believe we know. Here unfolds a surreal, abstract and fascinating world of color and form."

Large-scale paintings on paper, which are simply titled with numbers, use color and form to construct shifting geometric worlds within their two-dimensional, rectangular planes. The use of bright contrasting and gradating colors create balanced spatial changes the move the mind and eye around the contained pictorial space and then connects them to the architecture of the pristine white box.

And with just three folded-aluminum, powder-coated floor sculptures, the artist gives the illusion of the paintings' powerful triangular shapes being freed from their colorful surfaces to magically mingle—or metaphorically converse—with the viewer.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Paul Laster is an artist, critic, curator, editor, and lecturer. He is a contributing editor at *ArtAsiaPacific* and *Whitehot Magazine of Contemporary Art* and writer for *Time Out New York*, *Galerie Magazine*, *Harper's Bazaar Arabia*, *Architectural Digest*, *Cultured*, *Garage Magazine*, *Ocula*, *ArtPulse*, *Observer*, *Conceptual Fine Arts* and *Glasstire*. He was *Arkrush*'s founding editor, started *The Daily Beast*'s art section and was art editor of Russell Simmons' *Oneworld Magazine*, as well as an Adjunct Curator of Photography at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, now MoMA PS1.