

# SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

Curated by Mark Wethli

MARCH 5 - APRIL 18

KAREN GELARDI

DUANE PALUSKA

LAEL MARSHALL

STEVEN ALEXANDER

CELIA JOHNSON

DON VOISINE

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THE CURATOR  
GALLERY | CHELSEA

520 West 23rd Street  
New York, NY 10011

[www.thecuratorgallery.com](http://www.thecuratorgallery.com)

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## SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

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Some Assembly Required is an exhibition of work by six contemporary artists whose art shares an outwardly similar vocabulary of geometric forms but which transforms this language through the unique ways in which each artist's work is assembled. While Karen Gelardi, Lael Marshall, and Duane Paluska use literal methods of assemblage to create their art, Steven Alexander, Celia Johnson, and Don Voisine "assemble" their work in a metaphorical sense by underscoring its constructed (and constructivist) qualities.

Taking its title from the familiar phrase found on the labels for everything from tricycles to bedroom furniture, Some Assembly Required points to a similar stipulation for artists who employ geometry, which might be thought of as a kind of "kit" from which their work is constructed. While the narrow range of platonic forms found in plane geometry might seem too limiting for some, for these artists (and for others like them) geometry's neutrality and universality is what leaves it most open--but also most challenging--to creating new meanings and visual experiences.

For artists working in this vernacular, geometry is to their work what haystacks were to Monet or bottles were to Morandi; not what the work is about or even what defines it but simply the constant through which other ambitions, forms of expression, and visual experiences can be tested and realized. Unlike haystacks and still-life objects, however, geometric forms are inherent to the flat surfaces and rectangles that they're most often painted on, allowing them to work as both subject and object.

The fact that artists such as the ones in this exhibition continue to discover new horizons and to create works of surprising and enduring beauty one hundred years after the first geometric and non-objective paintings were being made speaks to its limitless possibilities; evidenced as well by the recent resurgence of geometric abstraction in contemporary art.

As for the artists in this exhibition, who were chosen for their differences as much as their similarities, it's their unique approaches to this formal language that sets them apart. While each of these artists works with formal limitations of one kind or another, Karen Gelardi and Duane Paluska narrow these parameters to a virtual algorithm, but for very different reasons. For Gelardi, a limited number of modular elements combined and recombined through a standardized process are a way of modeling a new relationship between artist, consumer/collector, and custom means of production, while for Paluska they serve as a creative challenge and a meditation on the possibilities of form and space, both two and three dimensional.

Lael Marshall narrows her options, but not in a systematic way. Her transformations of ordinary dishtowels into works of great elegance, guileless sophistication, and visual wit are more intuitive than conceptual, while also acknowledging their origins in the everyday world.

While all three of these artists use raw fabric in their work, Gelardi and Marshall use cloth exclusively, but diverge in Marshall's use of thrift store items and Gelardi's use of linen by the yard. These two artists stake out very different positions in terms of their studio practices, with Marshall working in solitude in her Bushwick studio, and Gelardi coordinating a workshop of fellow artists in Portland, Maine.

There are likewise interesting connections to be found in the work of Steven Alexander and Celia Johnson, particularly in their use of saturated colors (plus an occasional grey), visible working marks, polished surfaces (which their work shares with Duane Paluska's), and most notably their abraded paint surfaces, which offer glimpses of earlier layers of color. Nevertheless, the jewel-like intimacy of Johnson's pieces, as well as their street smart sensibility, akin to Stuart Davis, are a world apart from the hushed and Rothkoesque radiance of Alexander's paintings.

Like Don Voisine, both Karen Gelardi and Duane Paluska activate their compositions with diagonals, but use this dynamic element in very different ways. For Voisine it sets up very subtle compositional pressures in relation to horizontal and vertical, like the stored energy in tectonic plates, a loaded scissor jack, or gently deflecting planes. In Gelardi's work the diagonal has the unequivocal and reassuring look of Helvetica type, and for Paluska, diagonals activate the work almost entirely, contending with the plane of the wall on which they're hung.

As colorists, Voisine is a master of the many hues and tonalities of black, but also isn't afraid to use colors that one might find in the latest spring collection; the perfectly repeating colors in Gelardi's work almost whisper their CMYK numbers, while in Johnson's they appear and reappear like a director's favorite actors; Alexander and Paluska like their colors intense but just slightly muted, with moments of efflorescence; and Marshall achieves the unlikely feat of making a found color all her own.

In each of these examples, as well as many other cross-overs and contrasts that one could name, lies the theme of this exhibition. The strengths these artists bring to their work is not in their use of geometry alone—which is something of a given--but how these timeless forms are assembled and developed that constitutes the many and varied rewards their art has to offer; even as they invite the pleasurable prospect of "some assembly required" for the viewer as well.

Mark Wethli  
February 10, 2015

## CELIA JOHNSON

Celia Johnson's paintings, which read like collages at first glance, are in fact meticulously crafted encaustics. Based on both digital and analog studies, the visual tensions between their positive and negative spaces, layered forms, idiosyncratic focal points, and vernacular palette of both neutral and saturated colors create clockwork mechanisms of form, space, light, and movement. Despite their precisionist aesthetic and calibrated sense of form and design, their intimately worked surfaces and confectionary color (particularly her signature use of lemon yellow and candy apple red) are celebrations of the joy of making. Activated by compositions that seem more self-generated than imposed, each painting reads like a two-dimensional automata whose job it is to combine and recombine the elements of the painting, but caught in a moment of stillness. Plotted on a tracery of hidden axes--some active, some vestigial--and reminiscent of fragmentary letter forms, fabric designs, die-cut industrial materials, modernist biomorphic art, and a host of other associations, the shapes in Johnson's paintings mask, reveal, and subtract from one another to create a space that seems defined as much by what has been taken away as what remains. This sense of time, form, and space caught in the balance accounts for the paintings' visual drama, in which their animated imagery works in counterpoint to their annealed and gem-like surfaces to create a bright, energetic, and very human form of geometric expression.



*Blazon 05*, 2014  
Encaustic, alkyd on wood panel  
8 x 6 inches







*Blazon Series, 2014*  
 Encaustic, alkyd on wood panel  
 Each work is 8 x 6 inches

*Blazon 02*, 2014  
Encaustic, alkyd on wood panel  
8 x 6 inches



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**The Curator Gallery** is a fine art gallery in Chelsea that collaborates with notable guest curators for each exhibition. Founded and underwritten by **Ann S. Moore**, the retired Chairman and CEO of Time Inc., the gallery's mission is to bring exposure to hardworking artists, as well as to educate and expand the pool of engaged, serious collectors. Seminars on how and why to start an art collection are offered to groups on Wednesday evenings and water color classes are offered to the public on Saturdays.

**Mark Wethli** is a painter from Brunswick, Maine, where he is also the A. LeRoy Greason Professor of Art at Bowdoin College where he served for 22 years of his 30 year tenure as the Chair of the Bowdoin Visual Art Department. His work is included in numerous private and museum collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Portland Museum of Art. This is the second exhibition Wethli has curated at The Curator Gallery.

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