

Positive Joy

TAKING DIFFERENT BUT COMPLEMENTARY ROUTES, MARRIED ARTISTS DONALD MARTINY AND CELIA JOHNSON MEET AT THE INTERSECTION OF COLOR AND FORM

BY LINDA KRAMER

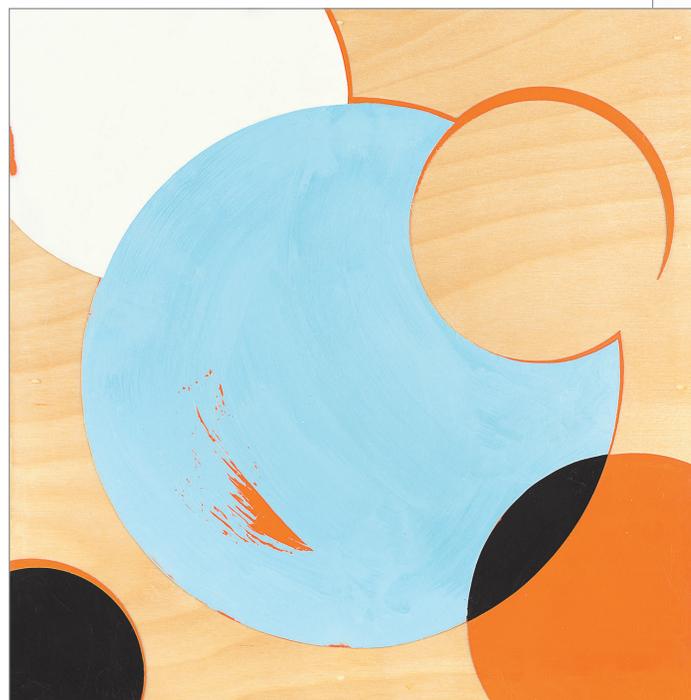
Donald Martiny, a renowned abstract expressionist artist who lives in Chapel Hill, is represented by galleries in the U.S., Europe, and Australia and is collected around the world. In 2015, two of his works were permanently installed at One World Trade Center. Too large to fit through the doors, they had to be created onsite while thousands of visitors watched.

For a more intimate view of Martiny's unique work, Triangle residents can visit *Juxtaposition*, a new exhibit with Celia Johnson, which runs at Artspace through October after an opening reception Friday night. Together, the married couple is creating a sprawling installation with a profound visual language.

Martiny describes himself as a gestural abstractionist. His works are non-representational, heavily textured three-dimensional shapes that he creates on the floor. It's a physically taxing process. Martiny uses brushes, brooms, mops, and his hands to push paint into abstract swoops. The power of pure paint, combined with simple but strong, emotive strokes, is a dazzling convergence that immediately connects with viewers, unbound and unrestricted by the shape of a canvas.

Johnson has her own following. She is represented by the Giampietro Gallery in New Haven, Connecticut, and has shown in New York City and Paris. Yet this is only her third showing in North Carolina, and only her second joint showing with her husband.

Since childhood, Johnson has been intrigued by moving around shapes and colors to create puzzles. Her well-organized geometric compositions blend modern sophistication with clarity and economy. Her brightly colored encaustic works of pigmented hot wax are layered onto wood



An encaustic painting from "Cycels" by Celia Johnson (left) and "Kpati" by Donald Martiny (right)

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panels as inlays. The flat, layered color fields reflect the minimalist images of the sixties.

In his book *How to Paint Sunlight*, poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti quotes Edward Hopper as saying, "All I wanted to do was paint sunlight on the side of a house." Johnson pulls this concept off ingeniously with bright compositions that spring from her inner self, armed with a brush loaded with light.

"I have a modernist interest in the play of color and form through the application of liquid paints, hot glowing wax, and inks,"

Johnson says. "Many influences blend simultaneously in my works, although no single reference is immediate. I am directly influenced by nothing, yet feed on everything."

Martiny and Johnson practice strict personal discipline in their art. Their routine is to get up every day and go to work, ten hours a day, seven days a week. As Chuck Close once said, "Inspiration is for amateurs." These artists don't wait for it; they do it.

Through their works, the couple hopes to inspire the healing, meditative joy that only art can provide. "If art can change one's

mood, it can change behavior, which can result in both personal and social change," Martiny says. His work, though conceptual, is also simple: see, feel, and respond.

"[*Juxtaposition*] celebrates a mutual and joyful color palette of compatible hues that we selected to use as an anchor point for a conversation between our works," Johnson says. Though the couple has different approaches—his work is large and textural, hers smooth and exacting—they reach for a similar experience: the positive joy of color.

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