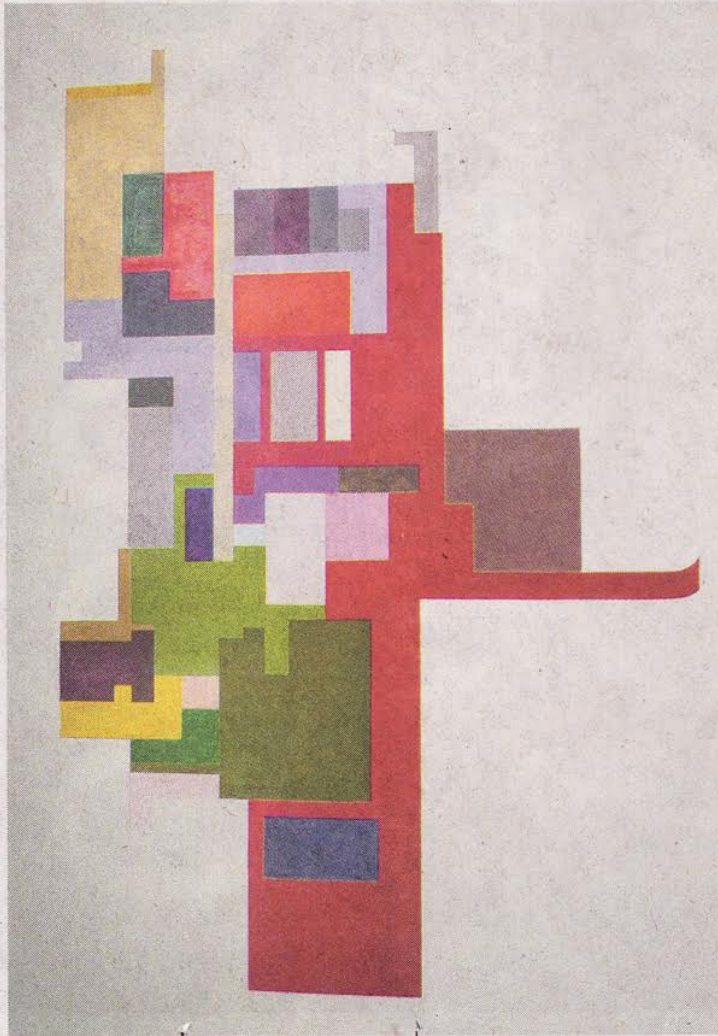


CSU show examines the many dimensions of flatness



STEVEN LITT | THE PLAIN DEALER

Artist Julie Langsam painted her abstraction — inspired by the floor plan of Marcel Breuer's 1971 addition to the Cleveland Museum of Art — directly on the wall on the Galleries at CSU for the exhibition "Holding the Wall."

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The great American art critic Clement Greenberg argued in the early 1960s that the task of modern painting was to recognize and exploit the true essence of its nature, which was that paintings, before anything else, are flat.

That theory encouraged "Color Field" artists such as Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis and Jules Olitski, all of whom painted big flat shapes and colors on paintings that dominated any space in which they appeared.

Lo and behold, flatness is back, but this time in service to a wide variety of visions in contemporary painting.

That's one conclusion to be drawn from "Hold the Wall: Trends in Contemporary Painting," an exhibition at the Galleries at CSU, aka Cleveland State University, in PlayhouseSquare.

Organized by artist, author and Cleveland Institute of Art adjunct professor Dan Tranberg, the show's title takes its name from a favorite expression

REVIEW

The Galleries at CSU

What: "Hold the Wall: Trends in Contemporary Painting."

When: Through Saturday, June 22.

Where: 1307 Euclid Ave., Cleveland.

Admission: Free. Go to csuhio.edu/artgallery or call 216-687-2103.

rule, as are the more calculated and fastidious passages of impasto (heavy) paint in the abstractions of Dana Oldfather.

Closer to the show's central sensibility are the erudite, razor-edged geometric abstractions of George Schroeder, whose exquisitely minimal surfaces attune the eye to subtle changes in surface textures that seem micrometers deep.

Sarah Sutton, who paints quasi-abstract images that resemble piles of mashed-up magazine pages, also produces surfaces that are flat and smooth. Julie Langsam contributed a geometric abstraction inspired by the floor plan of Bauhaus architect Marcel Breuer's 1971 Education Wing at the Cleveland Museum of Art that she painted directly on one of the gallery walls. Her palette of flat, dull, sour greens and purples seems to sink into the surface itself. That's one way to hold the wall.

If there's a complaint about the show, it's that it feels just a bit too restrained and punctilious. Surely there are artists out there who'd like to hold the wall by letting it rip. When it comes to realizing its theme, the exhibition offers only a partial answer — albeit a tasty one — to the very big question of how contemporary artists might achieve wall power.

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