

Six women explore gestural painting at Museum of Contemporary Art Jacksonville



JACKSONVILLE, FLA.- Abstract

Expressionism has historically been defined by male artists who rose to fame in post-World War II America. While women were practicing unique modes of painting alongside their male counterparts, they were given little emphasis or attention within the canon of art history both then and now.

“Confronting the Canvas: Women of Abstraction,” on display June 4 through September 4 at the Museum of Contemporary Art Jacksonville, a cultural institute of the University of North Florida, does not attempt to rewrite history, but instead it identifies and gives prominence to emerging and mid-career women working in the field of gestural abstraction today.

Maya Hayuk, *Desert Stargate*, 2012. Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 48 inches. Courtesy of Cooper Cole.

Consisting of six contemporary painters and approximately thirty works, this exhibition explores the manner in which these women appropriate both the physical, dramatic processes and the expressive freedom of direct gesture at the core of action painting, redeploying the now-historic style to boldly advance the abstract painting of our time. “Confronting the Canvas” is not necessarily a revisionist perspective of the New York School but a report from the front line about the current state of abstraction by women painters living and working in New York today. Curated by Assistant Curator of Exhibitions Jaime DeSimone, “Confronting the Canvas” is one of the first museum exhibitions to focus solely on contemporary female painters.

KELTIE FERRIS

New York-based artist Keltie Ferris employs a spray gun to paint, or in her own words “bedazzle,” a canvas. By doing so, she transforms a two-dimensional surface into pulsating layers of mark and color. Often discussed in terms of graffiti or the digital age, Ferris’ experimentation with dots, splats, streaks, and swirls in yellows, pinks, purples, blues, even white, harmonize throughout the geometric fields.

MAYA HAYUK

With their symmetrical compositions, intricate patterns, and lush colors, Maya Hayuk’s paintings and massively scaled murals recall views of outer space, traditional Ukrainian crafts, airbrushed manicures, and mandalas. Hayuk weaves visual information from her immediate surroundings into her elaborate abstractions, creating an engaging mix of referents from popular culture and advanced painting practices alike, while connecting to the ongoing pursuit of psychedelic experience in visual form.

JILL NATHANSON

The color field paintings of Jill Nathanson are rich with contradiction as they explore color energies, material versus immaterial, as well as tensions between form and color. Process oriented, she embarks on a thorough practice of creating studies from torn plastic colored sheets before finalizing placements and hues. Nathanson then pours polymer gels of handcrafted oils and acrylics into elegant, fluid paintings on panel.

FRAN O'NEILL

The paintings of Australian-born Fran O'Neill rely upon a construction/deconstruction equation, where she uses her physical body to produce, alter, destroy, and recreate oversized gestures. Layer upon layer, O'Neill applies paint only to swipe, smear, and remove it with her body or another material. Her paintings are as much as an additive process as a subtractive one, where at times she reinvents imagery on the same canvas. Most recently, her large-scale gestural paintings capture one movement within a square canvas.

JACKIE SACCOCCIO

In 2008, abstract painter Jackie Saccoccio first began an ambitious body of work relating to portraiture. Her "improvisational portraits," as she refers to them, are borne out of her interest in Renaissance and Mannerist portraiture. In her quest to reinterpret portraiture, she researched the materials, such as mica, utilized by Renaissance painters. Evolving the practice, Saccoccio's surfaces are freckled with mica and translucent varnishes, creating multilayered planes of shifting forms. In these large-scale paintings, Saccoccio's process includes tipping, dragging, and shaking the large-scale works over one another, where liquid pools of color, directional lines, and translucent orbs coexist. Saccoccio is also the inaugural recipient of MOCA Jacksonville's Brooke and Hap Stein Emerging Artist Prize, awarded in March 2016.

ANKE WEYER

German-émigré Anke Weyer extends the practice of gestural abstraction by attacking a blank canvas with pure gusto. One sees how her instinctive approach surfaces in spontaneous, bold, and expressive brushstrokes that document the process of painting. In the large vertical compositions, Weyer's bold, expressive brushstrokes and intense colors vibrate off the canvas.