

Avery to Warhol Self-Guided Tour

The Joy of Color, Line, and Shape: Abstract Art – Examine the visual components and properties of abstraction and the appeal of this visual mode for certain artists



Judy Pfaff

American, born England (b. 1946)

#2 Melone, 1987

From the series, *Six of One*

Paint and color woodcut

Gift of John M. Booth

What are some of the details you notice when you look at this print? Do you see any commonality in these different parts of the collage?

Judy Pfaff typically creates innovative, large-scale installation structures. She takes colors, forms

and gestures derived from Abstract Expressionism and projects them into three-dimensional installations.

#2 Melone derives from a three-dimensional installation wall sculpture of carved plywood that the artist assembled, rearranged, and then printed on paper. In this artwork, Pfaff turns a wooden sculpture into a printed paper collage filled with color and art forms. The print has affinities with both three-dimensional and two-dimensional forms. The shapes have elements in common with commercial signs and cartoon-like drawings. Do you see any implication of that here?

#2 Melone is from the *Six of One* series from 1987. Some of the others in the series are *Manzanas y Naranjas (Apples and Oranges)*, *Cena (Dinner)*, *Margaritas*, and *Melone* – (*cantaloupe, honeydew, watermelon*), a theme of fruits and vegetables. She integrates precise systems with wonderful improvisations. Do you see an example or two here?

“I’m at war with conventions. I’m against what’s expected, what’s safe,” she says of herself. Art critic, John Dorfman, says, “Pfaff’s works balance wild exuberance and carefully planned structure.” In your view, how does *#2 Melone* encompass the artist’s and critic’s sentiments?

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Pat Lipsky
American (b. 1941)
Persian Fantasy, 1970
Acrylic on canvas
Gift of the Carter Hopkins
Family

When you first looked at this painting, which element of art did you notice first: colors, lines, or shapes? Why drew you to that particular element?

Pat Lipsky was raised in New York City by an artist mother and an engineer father. She received a BFA from Cornell in 1963 and a MFA from Hunter College.

Lipsky was considered an Abstract Expressionist because her paintings were not representational but rather an exuberant means of personal expression. Also considered a “color field” painter, she used a stain technique, sponging acrylic paint onto raw canvas creating a watercolor effect on a huge scale. She identified with Swiss-born artist Paul Klee’s quote, “Color and I are one, I am a painter.” How is Lipsky using color to express her inner spirit, to become one with her artwork? What might she be saying to her audience?

Gaze at the painting and notice its seeming simplicity. Do you become more absorbed as you feel her liberating spontaneity as well as her disciplined judgement? Lipsky’s paintings reveal and express her emotions, complexity, and her nature in an electric current of visual experience.

Lipsky once said, “We look at works of art as single large units—but they’re actually composed of hundreds, of thousands of individual tiny units, each one a decision. It’s those units that I’ve been experimenting with throughout my career.” Look at this painting again and consider how many decisions she made with each color, line, and shape. Are there any decisions that you would do differently? How?

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Dan Christensen
American (1942-2007)
Paloverde, 1977
Acrylic on canvas
Gift of Yola and Arthur Steinman

Let this painting become your focus for a few moments. What catches your eye first? How does looking at this painting make you feel?

This “calligraphic-stain” painting is a work by Dan Christensen. From 1976 to 1988, the artist used many interesting and unusual tools to draw and apply color to his canvas, including pressure sprayers, squeegees, and turkey basters.

To make these stain paintings, he placed his canvas on pieces of carpet on the floor and poured paint onto the surface, spreading it with rollers. He then added layers of color, creating the stained effect. The artist’s touch is always visible, which creates a physical and sensory response to the work. How does knowing the artistic process change your perception of this painting?

Christensen’s use of calming pastel colors and thin, misty white makes this visually compelling. What happens when the colors pop out of their white veil? Which color do you like best? The title of this work is *Paloverde* which is Spanish for green stick or a type of green tree. Does anything here remind you of a certain season or time? Does it make you want to linger?

When asked about the literal meaning of his works Christensen would reply with a question of his own: “Would you ask the same about a great symphony or would you rather experience it?” By allowing ourselves to experience this painting while bringing our own perceptions along for the trip, we can begin to hear it sing with quiet energy.

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Norman Liebman
American, b. 1933
Little Boy Blue, 1994
Enamel, oil stick, and oil on
canvas
Gift of Harold Strickland

Tour the colors of *Little Boy Blue* with your eyes. Start with blue, then golden yellow, black, and gray. Notice the subtle shifts in the shades. Finish by noticing the white space. What other colors do you see?

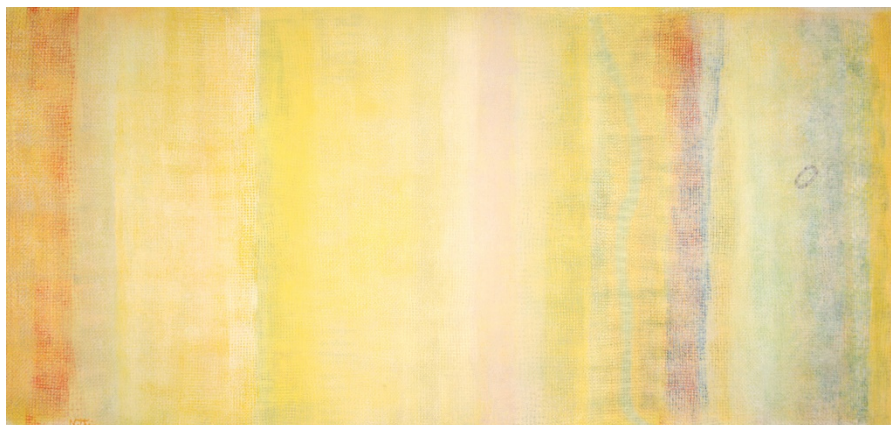
Norman Liebman is a classically trained artist and began his

formal art training at age 13. He was educated at Rutgers University and the Chautauqua Art Institute of New York. Ultimately, he became a surgeon, practicing medicine for over thirty years. What aspects of Liebman's training and education as an artist do you see in this painting? What evidence of his career in the medical field do you see? Does knowing Liebman's background change the way that you view this artwork? How?

A fellow artist and art critic said of Liebman's work, "There is a thoughtful lack of control in his art." Looking at *Little Boy Blue*, do you agree with this assessment? Why or why not? Further, Liebman intentionally infuses his artworks with a variety of emotions; he's stated that these emotions come from his years as a surgeon witnessing the joys and sorrows associated with being a medical professional. What feelings would you say the artist has included here? How does looking at this painting make you feel?

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Robert Natkin
American, 1930-2010
Bath Apollo I, 1976
Acrylic on canvas
Gift of Mr. and Mr.
Donald B. Harris

Focus your eyes first on the verticals in this painting. Now, what do you see within the

muted spaces between those verticals? This painting has no hard edges. Why do you think the artist did this?

Robert Natkin is celebrated for his mastery of the interplay of color and light, which is evident in this painting from his Apollo series (1962-69). Natkin also combines shapes, color, texture, and light to create patterns and ambiguity. He has been described as both an Abstract and a Lyrical Abstractionist, who are primarily nonrepresentational and spontaneous in their creative processes. Others group him with the Color Field style, with artists who use large swaths of color to fill the canvas. How does this painting reflect all of these descriptions?

Notice how the vertical strips of varying thicknesses interact with the counterpoints of textures and gradient shifts in color. Natkin's painting tools include brushes, palette knives, cloth, netting, and sponges to provide an almost stenciled appearance. These techniques provide visual complexity and contemplation. What do you find most interesting about this painting?

Natkin attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where he discovered the work of semi-abstract artist Paul Klee who famously wrote "Art does not reproduce the visible, but makes visible." This ideology greatly influenced Natkin. Do you agree? Does he make anything "visible" to you?