

II Emerging Artists Redefining Abstract Painting

By Alina Cohen | 6 January 2020

The divide between abstraction and figuration is a false, but helpful, dichotomy. Painters who are primarily concerned with the interactions between color, line, and form also make marks and shapes that may suggest body parts, landscapes, and objects traditionally relegated to still lifes. Even monochrome paintings can conjure familiar settings: A gray canvas might evoke a rock face, while a blue one may suggest the sea.

This principle can go the other way, as well. “I would consider myself a figurative painter fundamentally,” artist Louise Giovanelli told me, “but I certainly have a loose idea of figuration—anything that suggests a form, even if this suggestion is faint.”

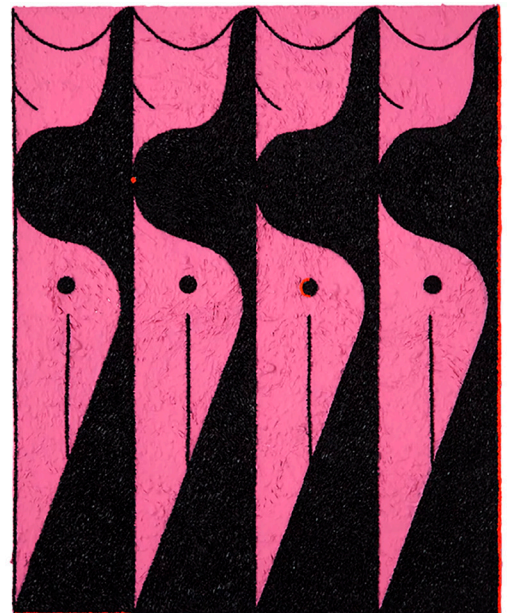
A new generation of painters, all 40 years old or younger, are rethinking what we might call, for lack of a better term, abstraction. For them, labels aren’t important. They’re more interested in the infinite ways paint can be applied to develop suggestive, beguiling, and transcendent compositions. They explore what it means to make a painting in the digital age and use contemporary research to generate new patterns and designs. Despite the diversity of these artists’ practices, a near-mystical devotion to the act of making and a desire to communicate via symbols and hues unites them all.

Tracy Thomason

B. 1984, Gaithersburg, Maryland.
Lives and works in New York.

The gritty surfaces of Tracy Thomason’s oil and marble dust paintings recall stucco siding and the scratched-into exteriors of ceramic urns. “I aim for a clay-like surface to accept scars and constellations through carving into something like a stalactite or initials on a tree trunk,” Thomason said. Her process can be slow or quick, as she employs tools she describes as “surgical” to develop the biomorphic shapes on her canvases. Thomason noted that her grandmother was an artist and a practicing Buddhist. “I no doubt inherited a level of patience from her in making,” she said.

Thomason’s restrained palette conveys a sense of cohesion. With a palette of bubblegum pinks, chalky whites, lemon yellows, and fire-engine reds—mingled with soft, feminine curves—she turns her canvases into sites of strange, female symbologies. The works recall Hilma af Klint’s spiritual communions through painting, or of Joan Miró’s abstract storytelling via repeated, rearranged shapes.



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