

New American Paintings



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Front cover: Madison Smith, *Tommy*, oil on panel Back cover: William Swanson, *Gradient Analysis II*, acrylic on panel

Editor's Comments

This edition of *New American Paintings* is our seventh to focus on the Pacific Coast region. Jessica Morgan, Curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, served as the competition's principal juror. Over eight hundred artists submitted slides for review, making this one of our most competitive editions to date.

Summarizing her overall impressions of the work, Ms. Morgan noted the broad range of subject matter and variety of influences that she encountered. In particular, she commented on the large amount of "design driven" abstraction that was present. Because of its prevalence within the applicant pool, Ms. Morgan was particularly stringent with this type of work. The work of artists such as Tony Beauvy (pp. 6-9) and Cathy Breslaw (pp. 34-37) represent exceptional examples of the increasingly comfortable marriage between high art and design.

Of all the trends in recent painting, none has been as pervasive as the hard-edged, synthetic-colored abstraction that first (re)appeared in the early 1990's. The type of painting of which I am thinking draws heavily from graphic design, computer technologies, and Op Art, and includes Jim Isermann, Jeff Elrod, Monique Prieto and Greg Bogin among its best-known practitioners. A detectable impulse in New York and Los Angeles galleries in the mid-1990's, this brand of abstraction, which is now produced by droves of artists around the country, has gone on to become somewhat of a national "movement." In their eschewal of depth, intuition and touch, in favor of surface, design and overall optical effect, artists producing what has at times been called "super flat" abstraction, have adopted a distinctly post-ironic stance. They produce work that is highly objective, yet still open to the subtle decision making process that informs all substantial art.

Additionally, artists who work with representational subject matter are increasingly being seduced by the "super flat" aesthetic. Some, such as Sarah Morris, Kevin Appel and Julie Mehretu, work between abstraction and representation by using architecture—an abstraction to which we relate on a daily basis—as a point of departure for their highly individual explorations of how we physically and emotionally place ourselves within the contemporary urban landscape. William Swanson (pp. 138-141) produces work in this vein. In his paintings, natural and artificial forms are abstracted and recontextualized into models of the artist's visual experience.

While the abstract forms of architecture have allowed for a safe, albeit logical, exploration of the "super-flat" aesthetic, many artists are now attacking traditional subject matter with the same zeal. Erinn Kennedy (pp. 106-109) makes paintings that are essentially contemporary still-lifes, while Faris McReynolds (pp. 122-125) uses "flatness" as a tool for fusing art historical references and his personal history into "singular moments of poetic conversation."

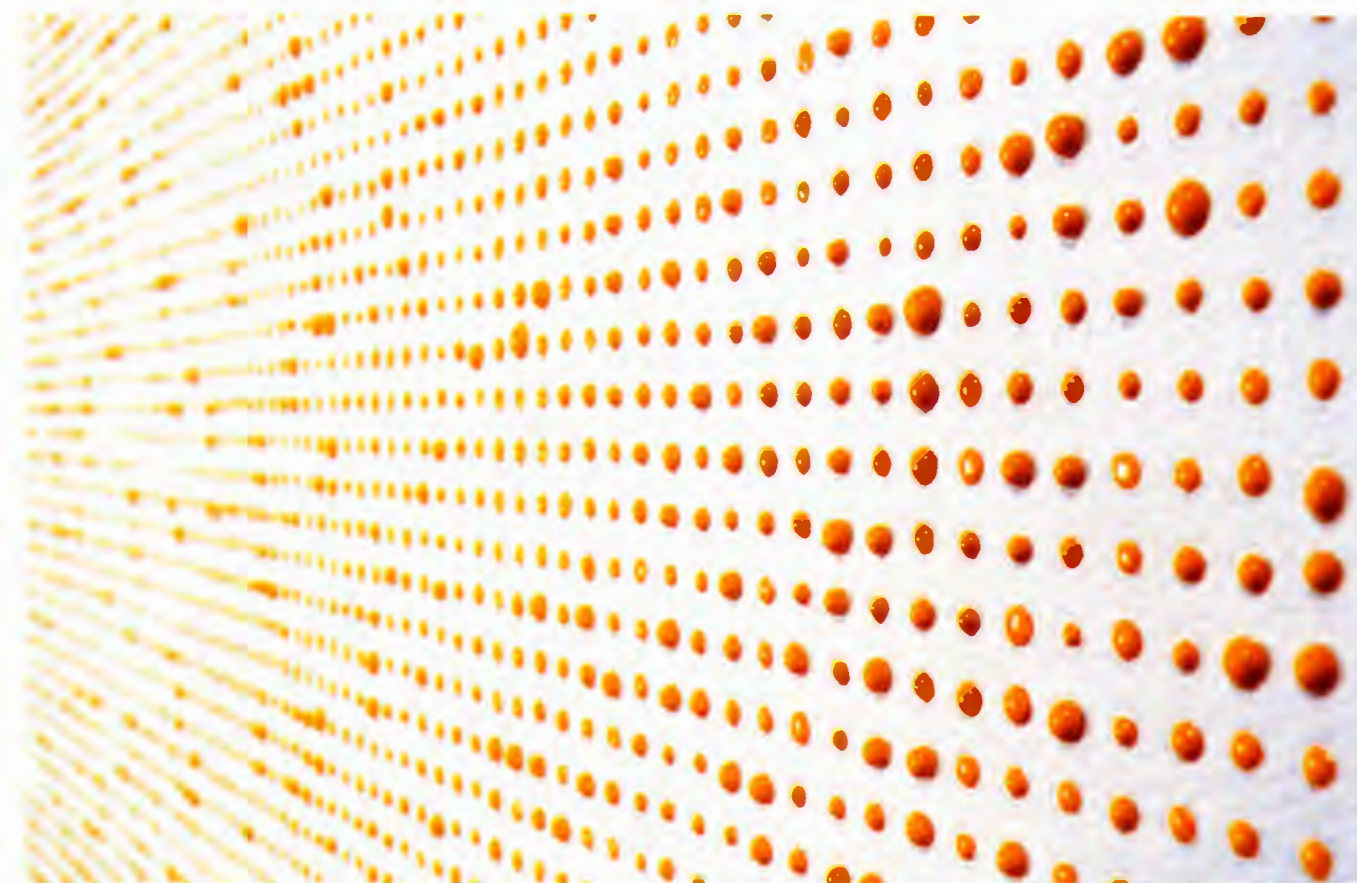
So what is this fascination with flatness? The availability of new and better acrylic and enamel paints, both of which lend themselves to a high-tech finish, has been a major technical enabler. Yet, the issue of flatness is one that occupied a central place in the critical discourse surrounding painting throughout the twentieth century. For proponents of Clement Greenberg's teleologically-driven formalism, paintings' inexorable drive towards a state of flatness was linked to the medium's intrinsic need to define its own area of competence. For Pop artists such as Roy Lichtenstein, flatness was a stylistic choice that allowed for an active and ironic critique of a burgeoning mass media culture.

Today's artists live in a landscape of the flat. Magazines, signs and billboards bombard us with their messages without reprieve. For anyone born after 1950, the television and computer monitor are the windows through which we come to know and understand the world. On their flat surfaces we receive a continuous stream of information and images that vigorously compete for our attention, and which we ultimately discard with the casual press of a button. For a generation of painters bred in this environment, flatness is a fact of life, not a formalist end game, or a tool to irony. It should not be surprising to find an increasing number of artists who have no difficulty believing that meaning can exist on the surface of things.

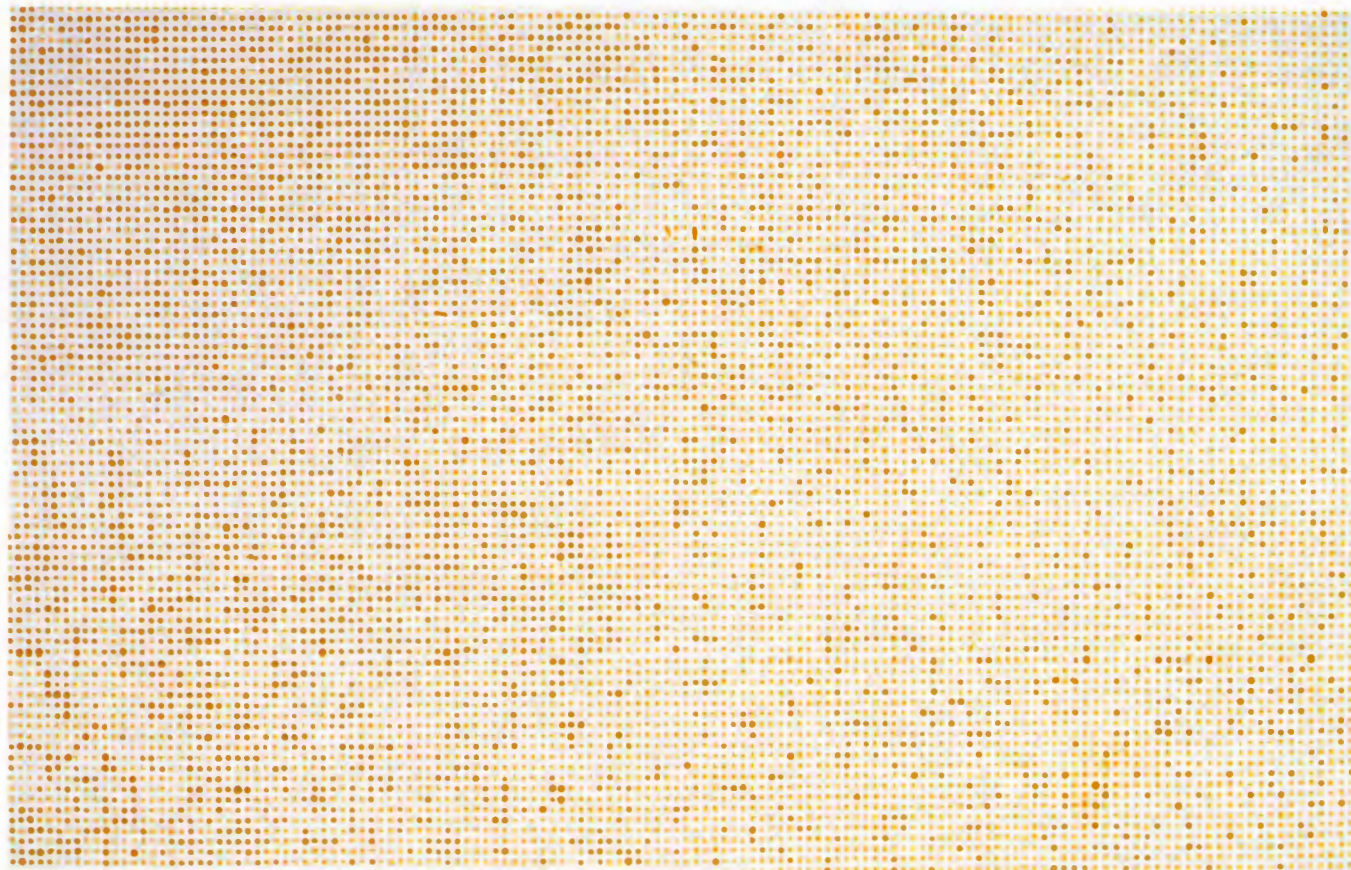
Steven T. Zevitas



LISA LIEDGREN
YELLOW TOWN mixed media on paper (detail)



LISA LIEDGREN
YELLOW TOWN mixed media on paper (detail)



LISA LIEDGREN
YELLOW TOWN mixed media 29" x 41"

Lisa Liedgren

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Born: 1966, Lund, Sweden

EDUCATION:

1993 MFA, Ecole National Supérieure des Beaux-Arts,
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1989 BFA, Beckman's School of Design, Stockholm, Sweden

1987 School of Visual Arts, New York, NY

EXHIBITIONS:

2002 Kittredge Gallery, University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, WA

Bumbershoot Arts Festival, Seattle, WA

2002/01/1999 Bellevue Art Museum, Bellevue, WA

2001 Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA

2000 Man Ray Museum, Paris, France

CoCa Center of Contemporary Art, Seattle WA

Seattle Center Pavillon, Seattle, WA

1999 Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma, WA

1992 D'Accord, Paris, France

1989 European Short Animation Film Festival,
Stockholm, Sweden

COLLECTIONS:

Seattle University, Seattle, WA

Microsoft Art Collection, Seattle, WA

Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA

Washington State Arts Commission, Seattle, WA

American Cancer Society Permanent Collection

AWARDS:

2002 Jurors Award, Center of Contemporary Art, Seattle

2000 Nominee, Betty Bowen Award, WA

1993 Perrier Joët, France

1992 The French Ministry of Culture, France

1992 Langmanska Cultural Foundation, Sweden

1992 The Sweden-France Foundation, Sweden

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Describing my work, I use words such as process, system, construction and rhythm. Creating my visual language I utilize geometry and abstract forms—minimal shapes in relation to one another—to investigate painting as a medium and its absolute potential.

My method of working is systematic and highly process-oriented in that I limit my field of action. It is conceptual—I use form as function. Working with opposites like cause and effect, using my own creative process as subject matter, I deal with the detached and the impersonal, as well as memory and emotion. What is at stake is investigating the infinite possibilities and effects of "making choices" in the context of self-expression, and in doing so I employ formalism as a tool in the process.

What inspires me is a desire to find out what happens when logic and intuition as a visually departure intersects and manifest itself as a pictorial organization? Is there a common generic language or a hidden visual structure in our minds that speaks to us beyond taste and preferences? My fascination, or rather obsession with "looking" explores the idea of what we see depends on how we choose to "look" at it. Our perception to the world around us is created in reference to our experiences and this is how we respond to everything. The beauty of the unstable act of seeing is powerful because it can present and open up other realism of vision—new worlds in the old one.

