

Hard Edges

Soft Focus

Wheaton College Walford Gallery

January 11 – February 02, 2024

Featuring the work of Kaye Lee Patton, Melanie Pankau, and Heather Jones

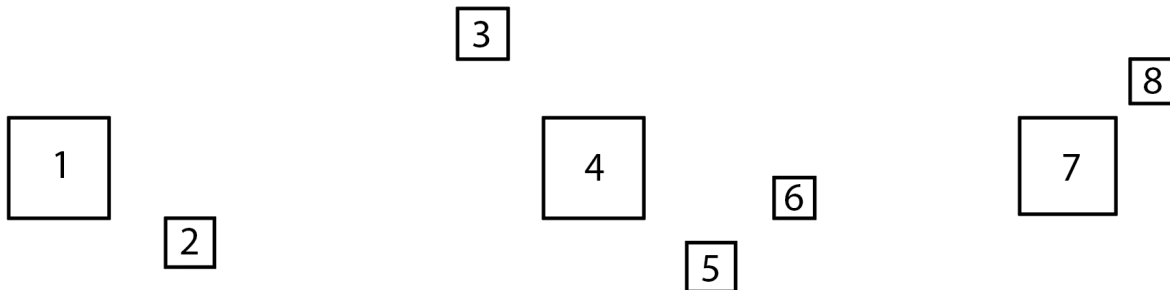
Hard Edges, Soft Focus includes the installation, painting, and textile work of Kaye Lee Patton, Melanie Pankau, and Heather Jones. Each artist's work explores themes of abstraction respectively as they relate to ideas of identity/belonging, physicality/presence, and matrilineal connections to the history/culture of painting.

Melanie Pankau

melaniepankau.com

From Left to Right, All of these works are Acrylic on Panel, 2023

1. *Involution*
2. *Involution (Origin)*
3. *Ascent (Orbit #1)*
4. *Ascent, 2023*
5. *Ascent (Orbit #2)*
6. *Ascent (Orbit #3)*
7. *Ether*
8. *Ether (Source)*



Pankau Artist Statement:

My paintings are guided by my daily meditation practice followed by a process of automatic drawing where geometric forms and diagrammatic structures unfold. For over a decade I have studied a variety of meditation traditions and techniques, and integrate this parallel practice into my paintings that both embody and reveal a contemplative consciousness. I work at the pace of my hand, sketching images cultivated during meditative states. I develop these forms through numerous compositional drawings, refining the surfaces by using copious layers of paint that are buried, sanded, and reapplied into relief-like planes that float over monochromatic backgrounds.

The eight paintings featured in this exhibition consist of three main paintings and their corresponding satellite image(s). The geometric forms offer a visualization of the translation of psycho-energetic* information taken from meditative states. These forms act as containers for meditative qualities of quietude, stillness, and our multidimensional nature. The installation of the paintings is a visual reference to the gestation of unseen forces or creative energy that circles the outer layers of consciousness (of the artist) waiting to be activated and

manifested from an immaterial state to a material object. By extracting and altering the patterns, palettes, and faceted compositions of the larger paintings they orbit, the satellite paintings are the forms' origins—their pre-birth states.

These compositions are non-representational visual statements that counter normative states of self and culture which are fragmented and individualistic. My investigations of the geometric forms unify the dualities of the material and immaterial and create a space for a third meaning to come into being—a restored and holistic sense of an integrated self as part of the collective consciousness.

(*Defined as the links between the human psyche and metaphysical forms of energy.)

About the Artist:

[Melanie Pankau](#)'s paintings are guided by her daily meditation practice followed by a process of automatic drawing where geometric forms and diagrammatic structures unfold. For over a decade she has studied a variety of meditation traditions and techniques, and integrates this parallel practice into her paintings that both embody and reveal a contemplative consciousness. Pankau received her BFA from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design in 1999, her MFA from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee in 2011, and studied at the Bauhaus Universität in Weimar, Germany. Her work has been shown in regional and national exhibitions at venues including: Minnesota Museum of American Art, St. Paul, MN; Thomas Barry Fine Arts, Minneapolis, MN; South Bend Regional Museum of Art, South Bend, IN; Boston Center for the Arts, Boston, MA; Catherine G. Murphy Gallery, St. Catherine University, St. Paul, MN; TuckUnder Pavilion, Minneapolis, MN; McCormick Gallery, Chicago, IL; and at art fairs Art Miami, FL, and EXPO Chicago, IL. She has participated in several artist residency programs including the Vermont Studio Center, the Ragdale Foundation, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. Pankau is a recipient of a Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs Community Arts Assistance Program Grant and two Minnesota State Arts Board Artist Initiative Grants. Her work is represented by McCormick Gallery in Chicago.

Kaye Lee Patton

kayeleepatton.com

In the Olson Gallery (Additional works by this artist on view in Brushaber Commons):

쑥쑥, 무럭무럭 (Dandelions/민들레), 2023

Acrylic on Canvas & Vinyl Decal

The spring time growth and all that is green has provided an energy of excitement after a long hard year. As my walks around the neighborhood became more frequent, the bright heads of dandelions also caught my attention. Maybe it was my relocation to the Midwest suburbs, the sea of bopping yellow dandelion heads amongst the sounds of people buzzing about - seeding, mowing, feeding, weeding. Painting fences, edging flower beds, preventing those weeds.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said “What is a weed? A plant whose virtues have not yet been discovered.” This quote took me back to distant childhood where I remember hearing my grandmother refer to Korean people having the characteristics of “잡초”. She didn’t mean any offense, just as a survivor of wars and colonialism, she was comparing the tenacious spirit that was the embodiment of the Korean people to the groups of plants that are often labeled as “nasty”, “relentless”, and won’t be “rooted-out”.

As I worked through my period of relocation, I reflect on what it means to be rooted and growing as an immigrant. Is there a tenacious spirit inside of me? Can it be acknowledged? Coexist? Cultivated and valued? What does it mean to put down roots? Who creates a place of belonging?

About the Artist:

[Kaye Lee Patton](#) is a visual artist and graphic designer who has passion for creating spaces to engage communities in their diversity and growth. Born in Seoul, South Korea, as Lee Ko Won, she moved to the United States at the age of twelve. Patton is interested in the idea of transience and identity in relation to history, geography, language, and communication. Patton lived and worked as a branding and packaging designer in Chicago before moving to Atlanta to complete her MFA in painting from Savannah College of Art and Design. Patton's career as a graphic designer highly influences her work, as evident in the use of graphic shapes, typography and digital images in her paintings, installations, and projection works.

Her exhibits include *Gathered: Georgia Artists Selecting Georgia Artists* at The Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia (MOCA GA); *WAP Apprentice Exhibition*, MOCA GA; and other various group and solo shows in Atlanta and the Midwest. Patton participated in Hambidge Hive at Colony Square as part of MINT artist in Atlanta and has completed several outdoor murals in Atlanta and other indoor murals in the Chicago area. Since 2020, she has relocated from Atlanta, GA, to Wheaton, IL, where she teaches Drawing, Painting, and Community Art at Wheaton College, IL, as an Assistant Professor of Art.

Heather Jones

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All That's Left To Hold On To, 2020
Sewn Cotton and Grommets

All That's Left To Hold On To is one of the first sewn wall sculptures that I made. I started this series during my residency at Black Rock Senegal where I worked in October 2019. While in Dakar, I found myself noticing clotheslines throughout the city, and while these were utilitarian in nature, I began to see them as exquisite textile installations, deeply rooted in the domestic space, globally as well as locally.

This work is influenced by historic American patchwork and its connection to West African textile traditions, familial lineage, the humble clothesline that stood in my maternal grandmother's backyard, the work of Sam Gilliam, and sacred geometry. In the latter, triangles are thought to symbolize balance and harmony, and can also be related to the body, mind, and spirit. Upward pointing triangles represent raising consciousness.

Working in a monochromatic palette, with a variety of black and white fabrics, the composition is quite strong and graphic against the wall, in contrast to the soft physicality of the material, commercially sourced woven cotton. This body of work interacts with the environment, as the panels softly flow as gentle currents of air move by. They move a bit, almost seeming to breathe in response to the audience in the gallery space.

These works stand at the intersection of representational, abstract, and non-objective art. They are representational as I am using techniques that my ancestors used in their crafts, and they also serve as portraits of a place where many of my ancestors are from, primarily the Appalachian region of eastern Kentucky. While they are representational, simultaneously they are abstracted, as I am tweaking those techniques and using my own visual language to convey ideas of what I have learned from my ancestors. And lastly, they are non-

objective, as I am questioning the role of painting and sculpture in the 21st century, and focusing on formalist geometric abstraction.

At first glance, the draped panels of patchwork fabric may appear very similar. However, upon closer inspection they are quite different. Each exterior panel of the work is constructed from roughly 13-inch squares of fabric that were cut in half diagonally and sewn together, to make a 6 x 6 grid. The grid is comprised of 36 squares, and 72 triangles. The interior panel is made of roughly 20" squares of fabric that were cut in half diagonally and sewn together, to make a 4 x 4 grid. This grid is comprised of 16 squares and 32 triangles.

The title of the work, *All That's Left To Hold On To*, is a line from *Red Hill Mining Town* by U2. I listen to a lot of music while I'm in the studio and I keep a running list of lyrics and words that I hear that resonate with me. All of these potential titles relate in some way to words that I remember my late mother saying to me, or my late grandmothers saying to me, or even things that I have said to my own children. Sometimes they are memories, sometimes advice, but all are minutia, and words of wisdom, that pass from one generation to another.

About the Artist:

[Heather Jones](#) is an artist that uses abstraction and color to comment on matrilineal connections, the historical and socio-political relationship between women and textiles, and explores the relationship between gender, place, time, and culture in her work. Her sewn paintings and sculptures continue the story of geometric abstraction, and she is influenced by artists including Josef and Anni Albers, Ellsworth Kelly, and Carmen Herrera, but also equally by a vast group of unknown female makers from the Southern and Appalachian regions of the United States and their patchwork quilting. The subject of her work is unequivocally feminist: she chooses to work with fabric rather than paint, in reference and reverence to the fact that fiber arts were often the only type of art that women were encouraged to practice for many years throughout history. Conceptually her work focuses on the use of readymade, common material and its elevation to high art; the power of color and shape; and is an authentic connection to the past, both personally and universally. She documents the story of our current world, particularly female narratives often neglected from history. By working within the realm of geometric compositions, Jones creates a universal visual language to tell these stories, using textiles as a reference to issues of domesticity and women's work.

Jones is represented by Contemporary Art Matters, Columbus, Ohio; the George Gallery, Charleston, South Carolina; Moremen Gallery, Louisville, Kentucky; and has work available through David Richard Gallery, New York, NY. She was selected as an artist-in-residence for Kehinde Wiley's inaugural class at Black Rock Senegal, and worked there in October 2019. Her work has been exhibited widely at national and international venues. A native Cincinnati, Jones studied art history at the University of Cincinnati's College of Design, Art, Architecture, and Planning, earning both a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts (ABT). She currently lives outside of Cincinnati, Ohio, on a small farm with her husband and two children.