

Featuring the work of Seong Chun, Lydia Dona, Moira Dryer, Stephen Ellis, Andrea Frank, Angel Haro, Prudencio Irazabal, Harry Nadler, Paul Henry Ramirez, Jennifer Reeves, Rufino Tamayo & Theodoros Stamos

“I paint big to be intimate” Mark Rothko

Viewing abstract paintings and photographs isn't often thought of as an intimate experience. Frequently, non-representational art may seem visually overwhelming—dense, confusing and obtuse. The aim of the present exhibition is to present work in a manner that allows for reflection, contemplation, and intimacy between the viewer and the art so that each person may bring their own experiences, their own aesthetic sense, their own personalities into a dialogue with those of the artists.

When viewing representational art, the visual language of objects is universally understood, the viewer immediately apprehends the object and the full panoply of literal, figurative, emotional associations to that object, thus rendering the object resistant to distortions of perspective, color, and verisimilitude. A fruit bowl reads as a fruit bowl, a painting of a tree reads as a tree, and a portrait will be understood as a representation of a person. The representation of an object is decidedly not the same as the object itself. “Ceci n'est pas une pipe”, the well-known work by René Magritte, serves to underscore this point. Even in near-abstracted art, e.g., cubism, the discernable visual clues direct and guide the viewer to see the referent object, thus informing their interaction with the shared, universal associations we have with those objects. Though personal engagement with any work of art will still be unique to each viewer, representative art requires less effort from the viewer to see what the painting, print or photograph is of.

However, when looking at non-representational art, the comfort of recognizing at a glance what one is viewing or one perceives to be viewing, is taken away. There are no visual cues, no didactic language, no flash of recognition. These works may be appreciated from afar, sensed as a gestalt, but without close examination, the emotional connection between artist and viewer is lost. Abstraction thus requires an entirely new relationship between artist, artwork, and viewer in a manner that can be simultaneously challenging and liberating: there is no right or wrong interpretation of the work, and the viewer's active participation is necessary in order to truly see and understand it. It is in this sense of personal perceptual effort that intimacy informs abstraction. Without a representational frame of reference to the subject of the work, it is the viewer's emotional and intellectual reaction to the composition, to the colors (or lack thereof), to the contrast, the thickness, the layering, the gestural application of paint, the lines, the blotches, and purposeful or accidental application of figure and ground that defines the meaning of that work to that viewer at that intimate moment of connection and reflection. No two people may view the work the same way or share the same reaction, and the same viewer is likely to have different reactions to the same piece viewed at different times. Thus is the interaction with abstract art becomes intimate—it cannot be repeated or duplicated and is critically dependent on the experiences of the viewer at the time of the viewing.

The impetus for the present exhibition is simple: To look at art for art's sake; to look at process and color and medium and glimpse the artist's hand; to enjoy the work itself as one would experience a cathedral—quiet, contemplative, meditative—unearthing and discovering for oneself the small intimate details from large canvases that are bathed in broad brushstrokes of color, gestural lines, and thick layers of paint. To share the joy of that intimate experience is what the present exhibition is about. The viewing of this type of work should inspire the viewer to really look and reflect on the abstract works here creating your own experience of reflection and appreciation, your own sense of intimacy.

Chelsea L. Cooksey is currently the Registrar at Dorsky Gallery Curatorial Programs. An art historian specializing in modern and contemporary art, she received her M.A. in Modern and Contemporary Art from Purchase College in 2009 and B.A. in Art History from the University of Colorado, Denver in 2002. Previously, Cooksey worked on the catalog raisonnée of Arshile Gorky as Research Assistant to the Director of the Arshile Gorky Foundation, was Assistant to the Program Coordinator of the Art Students League of New York, and was an Assistant for Oral History Interviews for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



Stephen Ellis *Untitled*, 1993