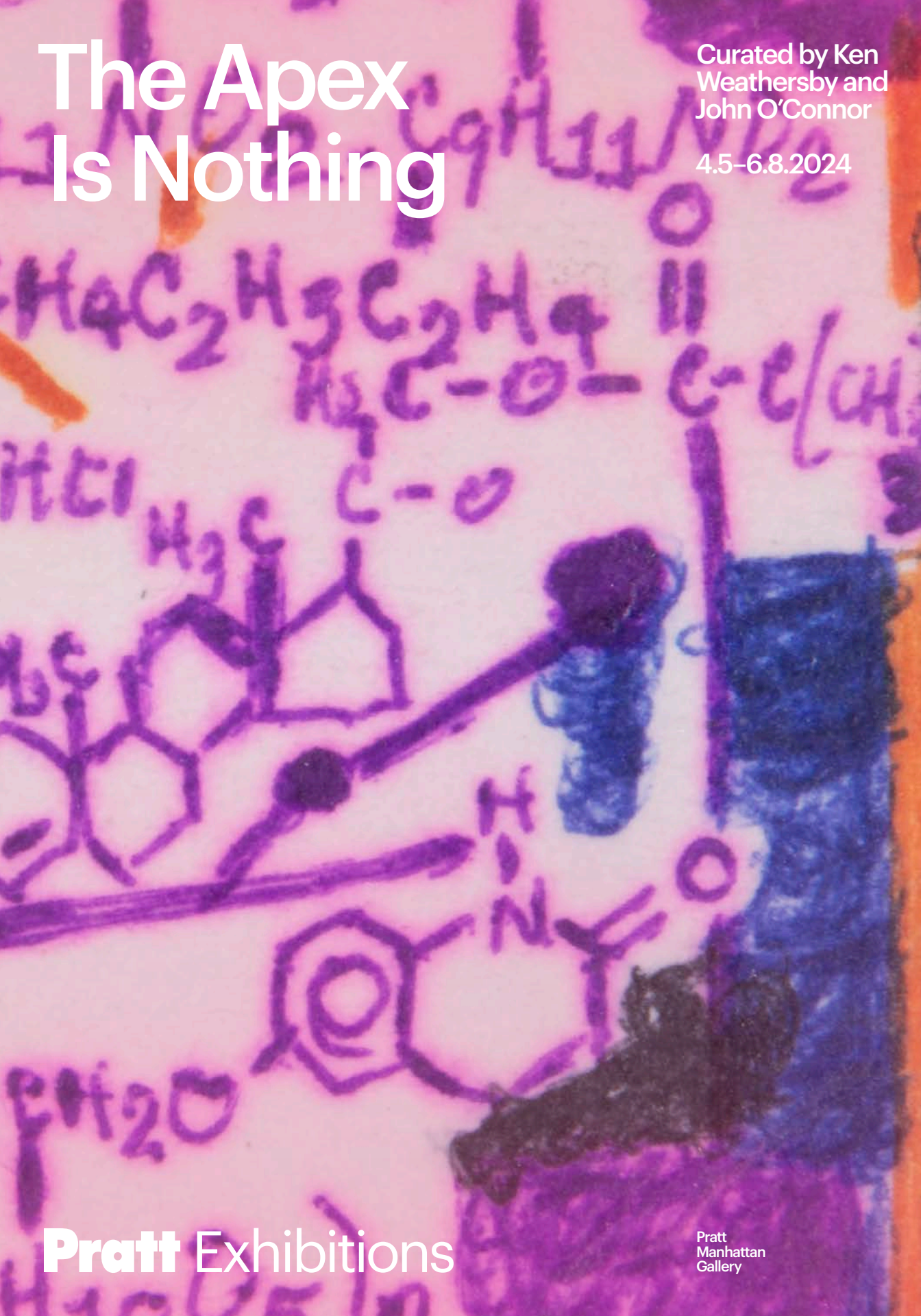


# The Apex Is Nothing

Curated by Ken  
Weathersby and  
John O'Connor

4.5-6.8.2024



**Pratt** Exhibitions

Pratt  
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Gallery

Cover:  
Melvin Way  
SULAYMAN #2, c. 2018 (detail)  
Ballpoint pen, marker on paper, Scotch tape  
2½ × 3¼ inches  
Courtesy of Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York

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**Pratt** Exhibitions

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# The Apex Is Nothing

## Ken Weathersby

Alfred Jensen created works of art whose conception was subject to extra-aesthetic imperatives. A center of energy in his paintings and drawings rests between abstract form and an array of idea structures. This intensely visual production isn't representational in any conventional way, yet seems forcefully shaped by areas of inquiry outside strictly visual concerns of painting or drawing—areas like philosophical traditions of thought from many cultures and times, numbering systems, and scientific ideas. *The Apex Is Nothing* exhibits Jensen's painting with works by a range of artists whose abstract images are likewise catalyzed by the incursion or absorption of factors beyond the picture plane.

For the other artists in this show, such factors also include statistical data, mathematical explorations, language and text, and mapped social or political matrices. Their art can embody an abstraction that is formed, or even excitingly deformed, and pushed into unexpected shapes by collision with the extra-aesthetic. Art invested in ideas in this way can seem to present an invitation to solve a riddle; to work out odd symmetries; to finally grasp superimposed patterns of meaning. Yet, this process of thoughtful looking often leads not to an answer, but to a space. Not to a something, but rather to a more valuable nothing.

### The Maze

The space I am speaking of is a mental space, given graphically on the surface of the work. A good metaphor for this space might be a puzzle maze, which suggests two ways of viewing: experiencing the maze as if imagined from within, moving through its pathways, maybe lost; and, alternately, stepping back to see the plan view, seeking order and pattern, looking for structure. This counter-changing duality between unrationalized sensory experience and abstract contemplation presents as a constant cycle in Alfred Jensen's work, a movement between presumably logical systems of organization and the dazzling sensory phenomena of color and palpable texture that his way of painting embodies.

Jensen's painting *The Pythagorean Theorem* (1964) was a point of inspiration for the exhibition. This monumental piece was completed during a period when Jensen was intensively considering mathematics and ancient architecture, particularly looking to ancient Greece. The Greek mathematician and philosopher Pythagoras, whose fundamental theorem the title of the painting evokes, conceived of nature and the world with an interwoven harmony of all phenomena, a connectedness of disparate forms and forces through number and proportion.

Jensen and each of the other artists whose works are gathered here bring together material from different categories, from different registers, and across time. The works form palimpsests of matter and culture. The physical stuff involved remains mostly that of painting (paint or ink on canvas, paper, or an alternate substrate), but can refer to other modes.

### Matter and Decoration

Jensen's chunky impasto and binary, checkerboard structures can evoke textiles. Though he left his childhood home in Guatemala at a young age, the influence of material culture there, including patterns and colors of textiles, is something many have discerned in his work. In Jensen's compositions, while his intent always seems specific and focused on a particular exploration within his wide-ranging and esoteric interests, the facture—the vibrant pitch of his touch—has a provocative sensory register of its own, with rich, thick paint “woven” through alternating patterns.

In Jensen's painting *The Apex Is Nothing*, the pattern of thickly-applied paint in unmixed colors is woven through with symbols. Inscribed along the diagonals are Mayan numbers. The odd and even numbers are then divided between the upper and lower halves of the painting, a placement that Jensen drew from a Chinese notion of heavenly and earthly attributes. This bringing together of concepts from different sources is consistent with the visual structure of the piece, an interlacing of varied strands.



Alfred Jensen  
*The Apex Is Nothing*, 1960  
Oil on canvas  
27 × 20 inches  
© 2024 Estate of Alfred Jensen /  
Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York  
Photography by Ellen Page Wilson

Some years ago, artist and critic Matthew Collings and I spoke about Jensen. While Collings fully acknowledged the conceptual programs Jensen employed to structure his vision, he also described the “decorative quality” of Jensen’s work as “very high indeed,” along with its “object quality, surface quality, and whole sheer delight quality.” And it’s true that together with esoteric thought, Jensen’s work, unlike that of most of the New York School abstract expressionists working at the same time, connects beautifully and meaningfully with traditions of weaving and decoration.

In Ellen Lesperance’s works included in this exhibition, a connection to the making of cloth is explicit, political, and historically specific. Her paintings respond to feminist activism, incorporating knitted garments with real histories as garments worn as elements of protest. Her work grounds itself in attention toward social and political action, and also with a definite posture in relation to painting as a medium, by citing and centering hand-made garments as inspiration.

### **Object / Code**

Mel Bochner—who has a long history of investigating notation, definition, communication, and quantification—also has a longstanding interest

in Jensen. (Moreover, in his early essay “The Serial Attitude,” published in *Artforum* in 1967, he considers Jensen in relation to Pythagoras.) Bochner’s recent paintings that employ idiomatic language are also relevant to many of the works in the current exhibition.

Bochner’s two recent works in *The Apex Is Nothing* (exhibited here for the first time) are “thesaurus paintings,” which manifest a series of familiar phrases, compounding and amplifying their meanings. The words are executed with a regularized font and spacing, but with an intensity of scale, surface, and color, with thick impasto oil paint on velvet.

Many of the assembled artists in *The Apex Is Nothing* directly include text or notations from other modes, and a throughline in the exhibition is artworks that foreground both intense “object” quality and linguistic or mathematical systems and codes. For Bruce Pearson, poetic shards of written language become physical, swelling into almost sculptural form through a blobby metastasis of paint, whereas the exquisite, infinitely-repeated deposits of color in the painted equations of Xylor Jane inhabit the other end of this spectrum: a place of precisely measured, super-refined ecstasy.

Chris Martin has frequently expressed admiration for Jensen's work, and in *9+9+9+10*, Martin creates the nexus of a central form with an accumulated herd of numbers jostling like billiard balls, surrounded by another, ascending series of digits, all manifested with a painterliness that seems to nod to Jensen's tactile surfaces.

In Mike Cloud's abstract work *Removed Individual*, the geometric units of its construction taken together form a sign—a double Star of David. The expressively-painted angular shapes that compose the work contain patterns of other information: labyrinths shaped as body parts, tire tracks, a color chart, and words naming items from a grocery list. The whole avoids closure as it leans against the wall with its structural layers, including wooden stretcher bars exposed.

Becky Brown's paintings included in the exhibition deal with accessible language, visually-patterned or entangled, as well as with repetition and an apparent self-reflexivity; these objects question their own generative processes, wittily challenging the viewer to respond to what may or may not be confusion.

In Leslie Roberts' compositions, language from lists, notes, and daily tasks is translated into grids of marks and colors, presenting both mundane information and its corollary, gemlike arrangements of color.

Steffani Jemison's work in *The Apex Is Nothing* is also involved with the transmission of text from a pre-existing source. Jemison worked with marks from the notebooks of artist James Hampton, a so-called outsider artist and the creator of the phenomenal installation work *The Throne of the Third Heaven* (currently in the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum). Hampton's notations were written in a personal language, and by incorporating these marks, Jemison addresses the notion of private communications; what is visible, what is accessible or closed to some, or what is culturally specific. As Hampton was a Black artist working outside acknowledged structures of power, Jemison addresses transparency and opacity, partly through the physical choice of transparent or opaque materials.

Melvin Way's small drawings show a wealth of thought and complex notation. These works provoke questions about how best to understand the relationships suggested by Way's highly-elaborated marks and evidence of calculation. They retain their mystery while emanating a striking visual intensity.

In *Ludwig van Beethoven – Opus 119, Nr. 2*, Jorinde Voigt creates a visual work as a translation of and expansion upon a specific musical composition. In so doing, she realizes a concrete explicit expression of synesthesia: complex sound transposed and manifested for the eyes.

### The Plan View

One of Alfred Jensen's areas of interest was architecture, and he made paintings and drawings based on proportional layouts of ancient buildings from many cultures. The flat, measured graphic of an architectural plan or a dressmaker's pattern condenses and carries information to describe or anticipate things in the world, but also contains an object quality of its own. A layering of information and material by drawing or painting in relation to this graphic object can establish a dialogue between the plan aspect and the object's presence.

George Widener's work in the exhibition, *Magic Squares*, is a grid of framed squarish rectangular sheets; each is painted with flowing horizontals, marked with names of various months, and dominated by a large, stenciled number. The piece presents an array of what may seem to be randomly dispersed numerals, yet adding the numbers together of any row of the grid—left to right, top to bottom, or along the major diagonals—reveals a magical symmetry (as well as a connection back through time to Albrecht Dürer's 1514 engraving *Melencolia I*).

In Charles Gaines' three-part lithograph *Color Regression #1 #2 #3*, the artist develops three grids containing a series of distinct marks, with three areas occupied by color coordinates in each of the successive grids. The notation of tiny marks of different hues in small squares is orderly and rational within the expansive, carefully numbered fields. The marked areas form shapes and mostly don't overlap, but in one final instance do, forming an area of color mixture. The effect of this careful and ordered arrangement is, ironically, a lyrical flow that feels like natural movement.

In his large drawing *A Recurrence Plot*, John O'Connor realizes a kind of fully-overlapping Venn diagram by superimposing data related to social class onto a graphic representation of the physical layers that make up the Earth. Units of representation within the resulting mandala shape are expressed with careful, full-color renderings of relevant corporate logos and text, and with abstract-seeming forms generated by these collisions of information. Concentric geological

layering is combined with social dimensions and suggests complex tensions.

### The Path of the Needle

The works by artists included in *The Apex Is Nothing* rotate through mental and physical space, and do not conclude in predictable solutions. Just to register all the structures and relationships within the works implies an open-ended and ongoing project. The orbit from visual to tactile to mental and back again can yield a realization of immersion. The minds of the artists are rendered by the touch of their hands. A complexity is formed. Each aspect is the form that allows the other to exist.

“And while the paper made way, with a slight crackling sound, for the path of the needle, I would now and then surrender to the temptation to dote on the knot-work on the underside, which, with every stitch that brought me closer to the goal on the front, became more tangled.”  
—Walter Benjamin, “The Sewing Box”<sup>2</sup>

When one sews, the thread that builds the image on the front of the piece follows the path of the needle over and over, passing through to what is underneath and what gives it structure. A thing is generated from a hidden tangle that paradoxically gives it form. To unravel an understanding of how things are, these works travel back and forth between the tactile picture surface and structures on the other side of appearances.

**Ken Weathersby** has exhibited his work nationally and internationally, with notable solo shows at Minus Space, NY; Pierogi Gallery, NY; One River Gallery, Englewood, NJ; NIAD Art Center Gallery, Richmond, CA; Some Walls, Oakland; and the John Cotton Dana Gallery, Rutgers University, Newark. His work has been included in group exhibitions at the National Academy of Art Museum, New York; Pazo Fine Arts, Washington, D.C.; Honey Ramka, NY; ODETTA Gallery, NY; 57w57Arts, NY; Parallel Art Space, NY; Mixed Greens, NY; Aljira Art Center, Newark; the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation Gallery, Morristown, NJ; Barbara Walters Gallery at Sarah Lawrence College, Bronxville; the Visual Art Center of NJ, Summit, NJ; Seven, Miami; Toomey Tourell, San Francisco; and I.S. Projects, Leiden, Netherlands, among others.

Weathersby has received numerous awards and residencies, including most recently the Individual Artist Painting Fellowship by the Mid-Atlantic Arts Council/NJSCA (2016). His work has been reviewed in *The Washington Post*, *Hyperallergic*, the *Huffington Post*, *Brooklyn Magazine*, the *New American Paintings* blog, *Two Coats of Paint*, *Painter's Bread*, and elsewhere. Weathersby holds an MFA in Painting from Cranbrook Academy of Art. He was born in Mississippi and has lived in the New York City area since 1990.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Facebook message to the author, June 13, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Sewing Box,” in *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 114–15.

*I wish to thank Michele Alpern for suggestions and thoughts in writing this essay.*

# Mel Bochner

Mel Bochner was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1940. He came of age during the second half of the 1960s, a moment of radical change in society at large as well as in art. He is recognized as one of the leading figures in the development of Conceptual art in New York in the 1960s and 1970s. During those decades, painting slowly lost its preeminent position in modern art, and language moved from talking about art to becoming part of art itself. Bochner has consistently probed the conventions of both painting and of language. Through his practice, he interrogates the way we construct and understand art and language and the way they relate to one another to draw attention to the unspoken codes that underpin our engagement with the world.

Bochner received his BFA from Carnegie Mellon University in 1962 and moved to New York City in 1964. Emerging at a time when painting was increasingly discussed as outmoded, Bochner became part of a new generation of artists—among them Eva Hesse, Donald Judd, and Robert Smithson—who, like Bochner, were looking at ways of breaking with Abstract Expressionism and traditional compositional devices. His pioneering introduction of the use of language in visual art led art historian Benjamin Buchloh to describe his 1966 *Working Drawings* as “probably the first truly conceptual exhibition.”

Mel Bochner  
*Thank You, 2023*  
Oil on velvet, in two parts  
91 × 82 $\frac{1}{4}$  inches  
Courtesy of the artist and  
Peter Freeman, Inc. New York/Paris





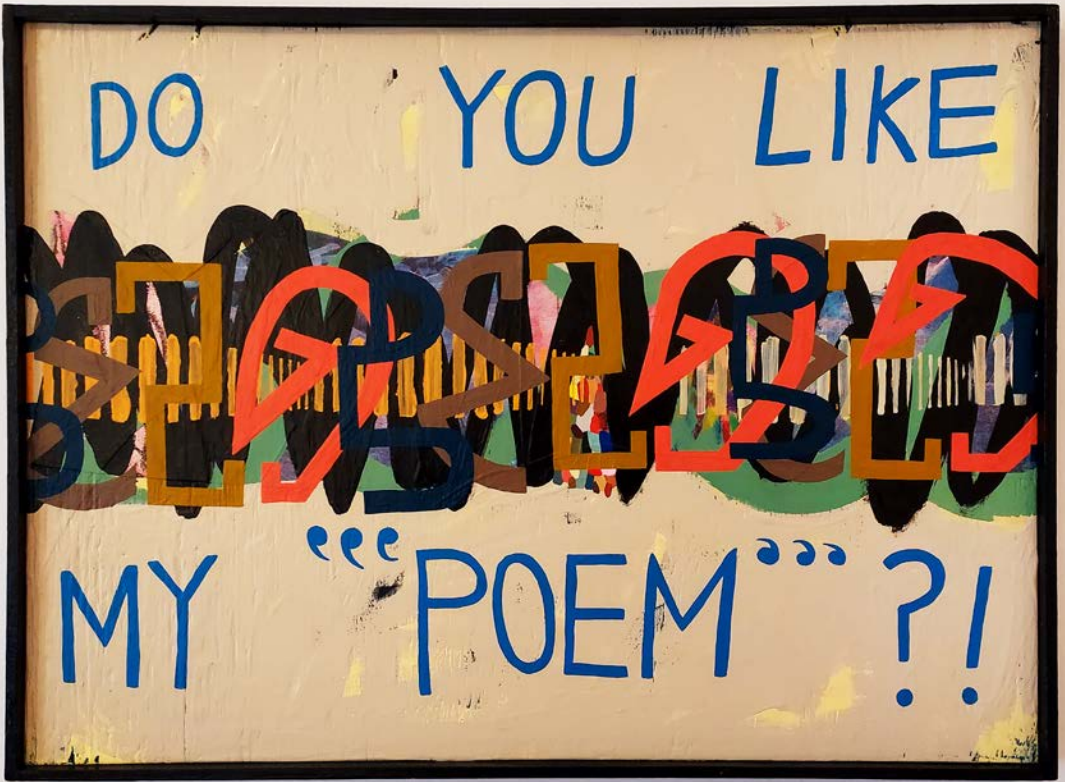
# Becky Brown

Becky Brown works between painting, drawing, sculpture, and installation using found images, objects, and texts. From sources including conversations, news, literature and advertising, she interrogates the potentials and limitations of language and the collision of the digital and the poetic. She explores pattern and repetition in the urban landscape across regions and time periods, focusing on how shapes and designs recur in signage, building facades, and crosswalk markings. Now that daily life happens on screen, her work celebrates material presence and the handmade mark as productive alternatives, with the power to restore attention and joy.

Brown's work has been exhibited nationally and internationally at venues including The Drawing Center, NY; Queens Museum, NY; Good Naked Gallery, NY; A.I.R. Gallery, NY; Hallwalls, Buffalo; Fort Gondo, St. Louis; and Religare Arts, Delhi. She has been an artist-in-residence at MacDowell, Yaddo, Saltonstall, and the Edward Albee Foundation, among others. She received a "Bronx Recognizes Its Own" Award from the Bronx Council on the Arts, and her art criticism has been published in *Art in America* and *The Brooklyn Rail*. She currently teaches at SUNY University, Buffalo and received her MFA from Hunter College and her BA from Brown University.

Becky Brown  
*My Poem*, 2014  
Mixed media on wood  
18 × 24 inches  
Courtesy of Good Naked Gallery

Becky Brown  
*Writing Holding*, 2017  
Acrylic on paper  
11 × 15 inches  
Collection of Ken Weathersby  
& Michele Alpern



# Mike Cloud

Mike Cloud is a Chicago-based artist whose work examines the conditions of painting in its contemporary life among countless reproductions, symbols, and descriptions. After studying at the University of Illinois at Chicago, Cloud earned his MFA from Yale in 2003. His work has been shown at venues including MoMA P.S.1, Marianne Boesky Gallery, White Columns, Max Protetch, and Apexart, and has been included in group exhibitions including *Frequency* at the Studio Museum in Harlem and *Honor Fraser Gallery*. In addition to numerous reviews, his work was part of *Painting Abstraction* by Bob Nickas, Phaidon Press (2009). He has been awarded the inaugural Chiaro Award from the Headlands Center for the Arts, CA; a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship; residencies at the Meulensteen Art Centre, the Netherlands, and the Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program, NY; and is currently a 2024 Jules Guerin Rome Prize Fellow in visual arts at the American Academy in Rome. Cloud is currently an Assistant Professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He is represented by Thomas Erben Gallery, New York.

Mike Cloud  
*Removed Individual*, 2013  
Oil on canvas  
120 × 240 inches  
Collection of Eric Diefenbach  
and James Keith Brown /  
Courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery



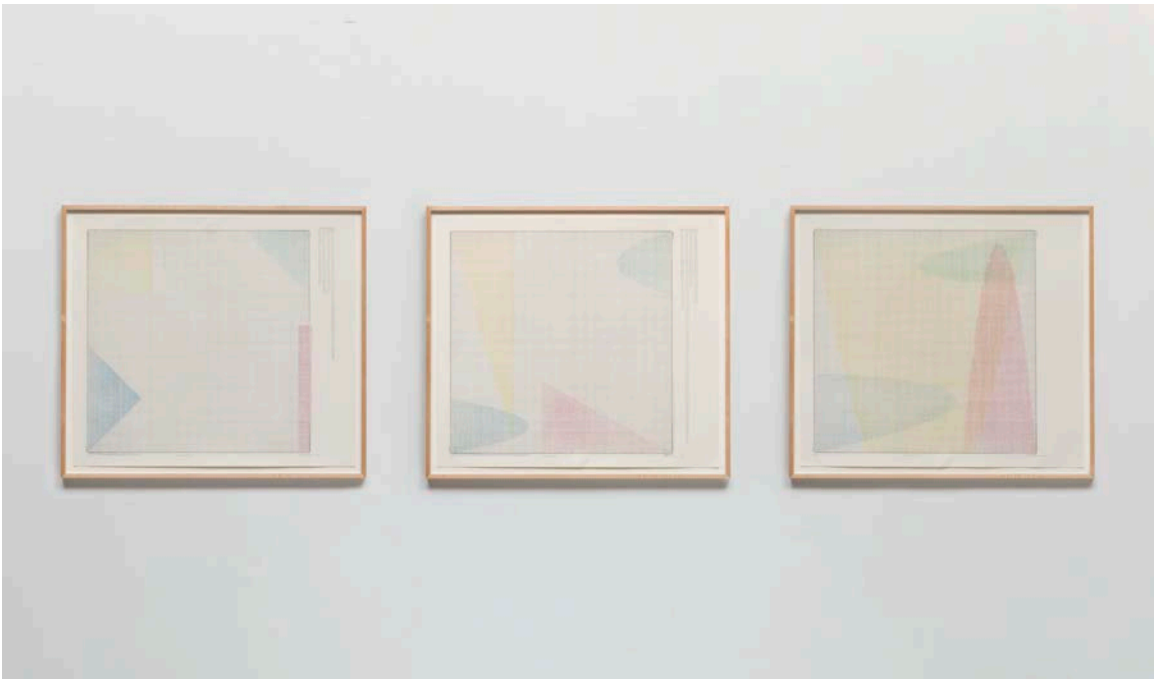
# Charles Gaines

Charles Gaines was born in 1944 in Charleston, South Carolina, and currently lives and works in Los Angeles. Gaines began his career as a painter, earning his MFA from the School of Art and Design at the Rochester Institute of Technology in 1967. A pivotal figure in the field of conceptual art, Gaines' body of work engages formulas and systems that interrogate relationships between the objective and the subjective realms. Using a generative approach to create a series of works in a variety of mediums, he has built a bridge between the early conceptual artists of the 1960s and 1970s and subsequent generations of artists pushing the limits of conceptualism today. In the 1970s, Gaines' art shifted dramatically in response to what he would later call 'the awakening.' Gaines' epiphany materialized in a series called *Regression* (1973–1974), in which he explored the use of mathematical and numeric systems to create soft, numbered marks in ink on a grid, with each drawing built upon the calculations of the last. This methodical approach would carry the artist into the subsequent decades of his artistic journey.

Gaines' work is included in prominent public collections such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The Studio Museum, Harlem, New York; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; and Tate, London. His work was also presented at the 1975 Whitney Biennial and the Venice Biennale in 2007 and 2015.

In addition to his artistic practice, Gaines has published several essays on contemporary art, including "The Theater of Refusal: Black Art and Mainstream Criticism" (University of California: Irvine, 1993) and "The New Cosmopolitanism" (California State University: Fullerton, 2008). In 2019, Gaines received the 60th Edward MacDowell Medal. He was inducted into the National Academy of Design's 2020 class of National Academicians and the American Academy of Arts and Letters in May 2022. In 2023, he received an honorary doctorate from his alma mater, the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York.

Charles Gaines  
*Color Regression #1, #2, #3, 1978–80*  
Lithograph on paper, 3 sheets  
28 × 31¼ inches each  
© Charles Gaines. Courtesy of the  
artist and Hauser & Wirth  
Photography by Fredrik Nilsen

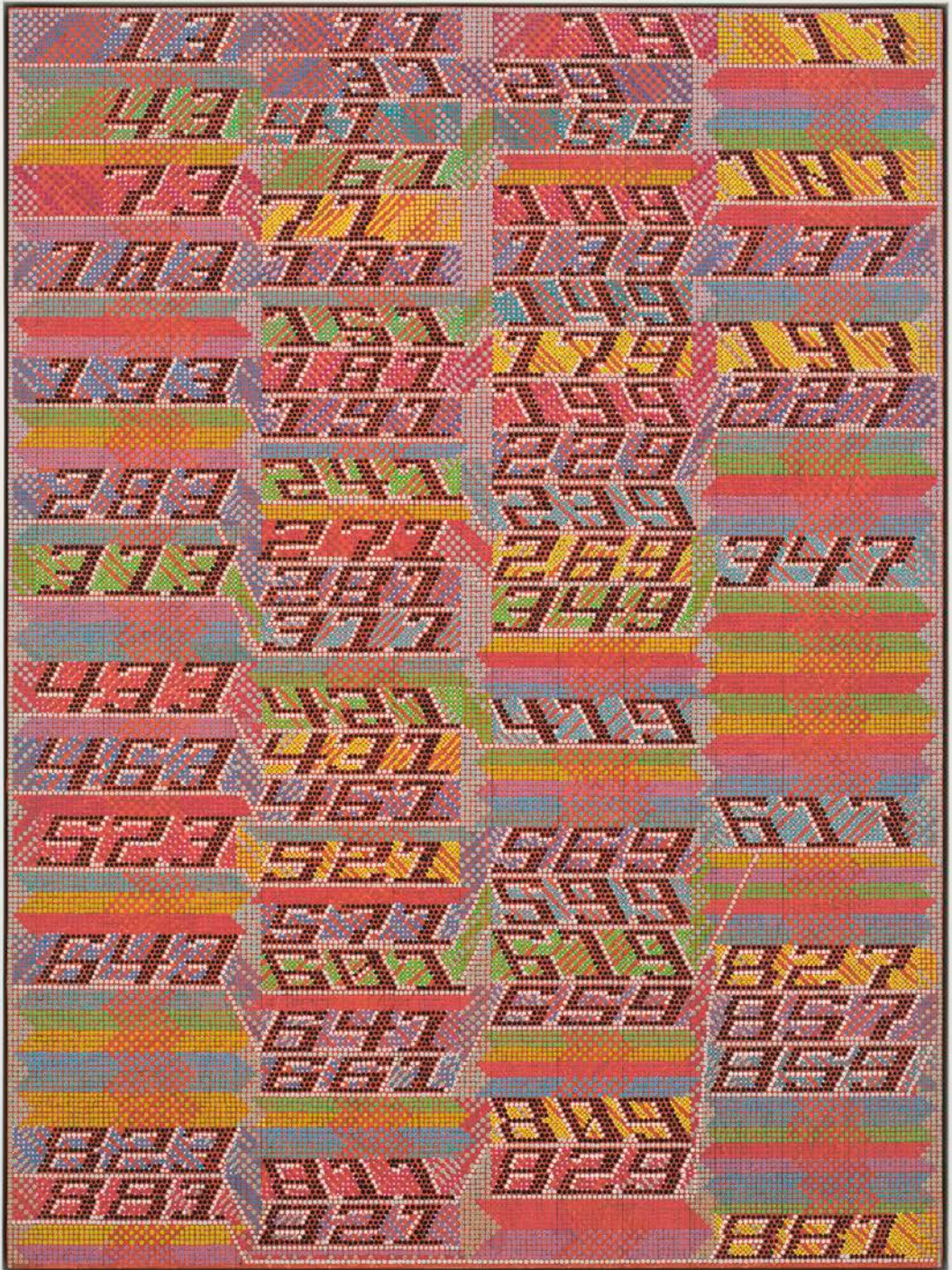


# Xylor Jane

Xylor Jane paints systems-based constellations, applying thousands of tiny dots that she arranges within grids that cumulatively form extraordinary color gradations. She explores vast textural and chromatic ranges, orchestrating intensely intricate paintings that reference numerical, time-based, and other patterned systems. Jane attended the now-closed San Francisco Art Institute in the early 1990s, and received her BFA in 1993. Her work has been exhibited in solo exhibitions at the University Museum of Contemporary Art, Amherst, MA; Santa Monica Museum of Art, Santa Monica, CA; CANADA, NY; Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin; Parrasch Heijnen, Los Angeles; Campoli Presti, Paris; Almine Rech, Paris; and Four, Dublin, among others. Jane lives and works in Greenfield, Massachusetts.

Xylor Jane  
*Tiger Twins*, 2022  
Oil and graphite on wood panel  
31 × 23 inches  
Courtesy of the artist and  
CANADA, New York





# Steffani Jemison

Steffani Jemison attends to the seam between conceptual precepts and embodied knowledge. Her multidisciplinary approach spans time-based, sculptural, and discursive mediums, informed by deep research into movement practices, literature, ethnomusicology, and the history of cinema. A 2020 recipient of a Creative Capital Award and a Guggenheim Fellowship, among other honors, her recent work examines the liberatory potential of opacity and quiet. Calligraphic drawings on clear film or tempered glass suggest an unreadable language, amplifying what she calls the “tensions between what can be read, what can be intuited, and what refuses to give up its secrets.” Mining the Black vernacular tradition of encrypting what cannot be said, Jemison looks to the archive for alternative genealogies of mark-making that sidestep the modernist narrative. The artist is perhaps best known for her lush video portrayals of highly-skilled performers, whose spellbinding physical feats pose the questions at the heart of Jemison’s own practice. “How do we move?” she asks. “How are we moved by each other? And how do we have the courage to pour ourselves into another without fear of depletion?”

Jemison lives and works in New York. Solo exhibitions, screenings, and performances include Greene Naftali, NY (2024, 2021); JOAN, Los Angeles (2022); Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam (2022, 2020); Galeria Madragoa, Lisbon (2021); Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati (2021); Kai Matsumiya, NY (2019); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2019); Lincoln Center, NY (2018); Jeu de Paume, Paris (2017); CAPC Bordeaux (2017); MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts (2017); Nottingham Contemporary (2017); RISD Museum,

Providence, Rhode Island (2015); and The Museum of Modern Art, NY (2015). Jemison is Associate Professor of Art & Design at Rutgers University; her first novel, *A Rock, A River, A Street*, was published by Primary Information in 2022.

Jemison’s work is in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago; Baltimore Museum of Art; Brooklyn Museum, NY; Buffalo AKG Art Museum, NY; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; The Museum of Modern Art, NY; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NY; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; The Studio Museum in Harlem, NY; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, NY, among others.

Steffani Jemison

*Not Titled*, 2019

Acrylic sawhorse, acrylic, clear polyester film

25 × 30 × 15 inches

Courtesy of the artist and

Greene Naftali, New York



# Alfred Jensen

Alfred Jensen was born in 1903 in Guatemala City, Guatemala. He moved to Denmark as a child after the death of his mother, and began at a young age working on a passenger ship, drawing pictures of the passengers and crew. Jensen later worked on a farm in San Diego, and eventually studied painting at the San Diego Fine Arts School and in Munich under Hans Hofmann.

After moving to the United States in 1934, Jensen's patron Saidie Alder May encouraged him to pursue his interest in color theory and pattern. His intricately organized diagrams reflect his distinctive conceptual approach, begun in the late 1950s when he started to refine his wide-ranging studies of systems and philosophies—from theories of color and light, mathematics, and the Mayan calendar, to scientific formulations—into multi-colored checkerboards. He used mathematical systems to construct two-dimensional grid paintings and demonstrate color theories, but the work itself is metaphorical, referencing pre-Columbian and Asian cultures, textiles, and divination.

By the time Jensen died in 1984, he had gained notoriety as an abstract painter, though he refused to commit himself to a singular style. He collaborated with many notorious painters, including Mark Rothko, Jean Dubuffet, Joan Miró, and Allen Kaprow. His work is held in major public collections including the Museum of Modern Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Smithsonian Institution and Whitney Museum of American Art, among others.

Alfred Jensen  
*The Pythagorean Theorem*, 1964  
Oil on canvas  
5' 2" × 16' 8" inches overall /  
5' 2" × 4' 2" inches, four panels, each  
© 2024 Estate of Alfred Jensen /  
Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York  
Photography by Bill Jacobson



# Ellen Lesperance

Ellen Lesperance employs the visual language of knitting patterns in order to pay homage to female activism. Inspired by actions of protest that have shaped the twentieth century such as the Greenham Common Peace Camp, the artist sources archival images of protesters' hand-knitted garments. She first translates these images into American Symbolcraft—a type of shorthand detailing stitches required to make garments—before turning them into meticulous gouache paintings on paper. Citing inspiration from Bauhaus-era female weavers, the Pattern and Decoration movement, and feminist art of the 1970s and 1980s centered around the female body, Lesperance reframes image-making outside of male-dominated Western painting traditions while honoring the creative labor of women standing up against social and political ills and environmental destruction.

Ellen Lesperance  
*And I Will Remember Your Face*, 2020  
Gouache and graphite on tea-stained paper  
41¼ × 29½ inches  
Courtesy of the artist and Derek Eller Gallery



# Chris Martin

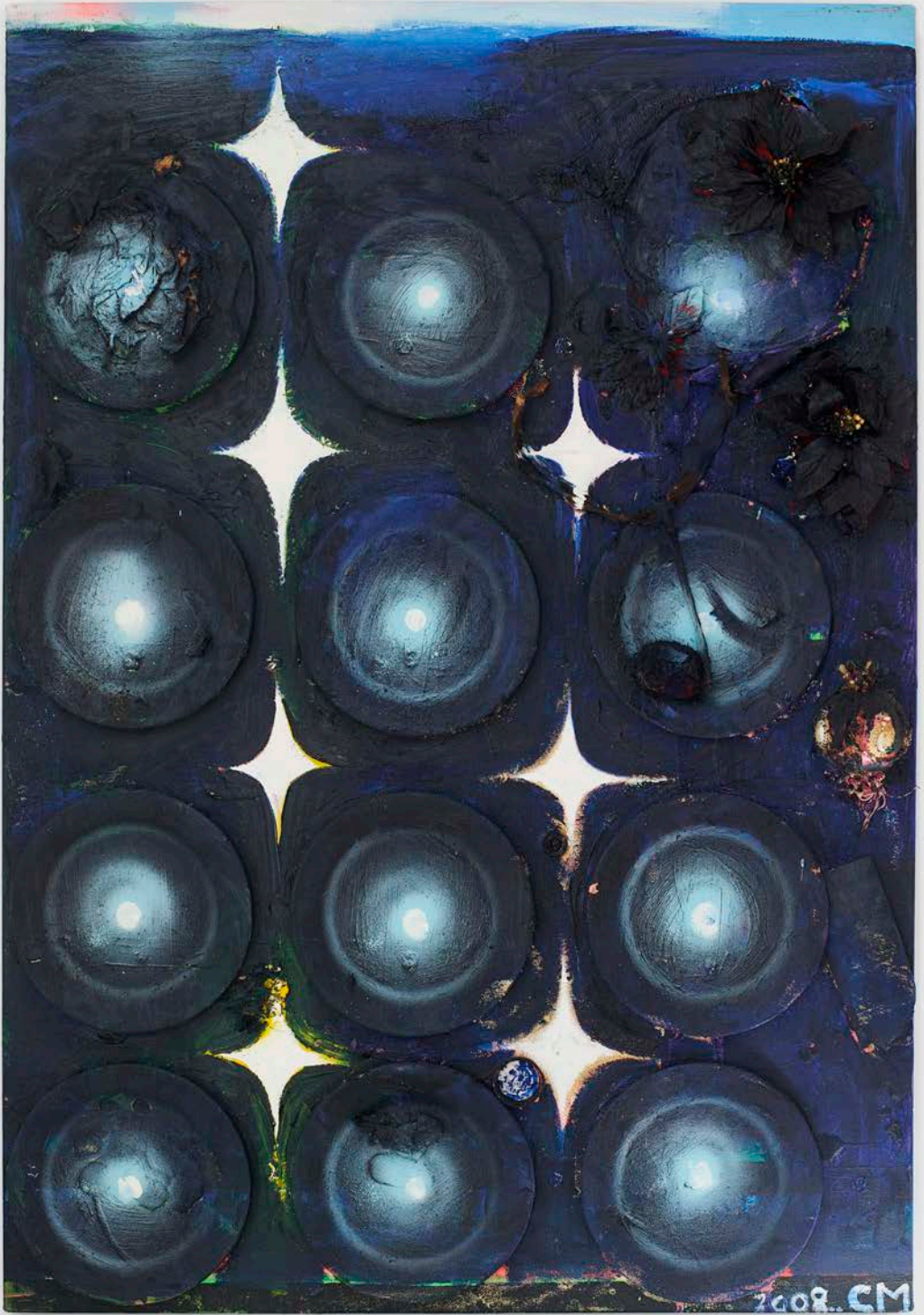
Chris Martin is a contemporary American abstract painter. His wide range of material and imagery is drawn from Buddhist mandalas, the landscapes of the Catskills, and the legacy of Abstract Expressionism. Martin's works attempt to deal with the psychological internalizations of spirituality and memory, using formalism in a way similar to both Alfred Jensen and Thomas Nozkowski. Martin's paintings that serve as living documents of the eternal present: He privileges stylistic diversity and immediacy over predetermined aesthetic ideas, generating an art that can be as primal as it is knowing, as vibrantly joyful as it is meditative and hermetic. He has experimented with non-art materials, non-traditional installation, and extreme scale. For this reason, Martin's career is characterized by an evolution of thematic cycles rather than strictly linear development. The overt influences—musical, spiritual, and art historical—that appear throughout his work are acknowledgments of his desire to return to a common well, or universally accessible source of inspiration. Martin is a revered and influential figure in the artistic community in Brooklyn, New York, where he has been based since the 1980s.

Chris Martin has been the subject of solo exhibitions at venues worldwide, including Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (2015); Rectangle, Brussels (2015); Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Germany (2011); and Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (2011). His paintings are included in the permanent collections of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Museum of Contemporary Art Denver; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; and San Francisco Museum of

Modern Art, among other museums. *Paintings*, a career-spanning monograph on Martin's work, was published by Skira in 2017. Martin lives and works in Brooklyn and the Catskills, New York.

Chris Martin  
Untitled, 2007–08  
Oil and collage on canvas  
43 × 39 inches  
© Chris Martin, image courtesy of the artist and  
Anton Kern Gallery, New York





# John O'Connor

John O'Connor makes large-scale, meticulous drawings that bridge text and language with abstraction and pattern. O'Connor's works attempt to visualize the unobservable relationships between systems and phenomena that undergird human behavior. His works are packed with information culled from a diverse array of topics, including conspiracy theories, emergent behavior, generation of consciousness, political language, mathematics, jokes, the lottery, and soap operas, among others. O'Connor transforms information from these subjects into the patterns, forms, and shapes that he draws, which balance conceptual specificity with the rigor of abstract painting. O'Connor records every step of his circuitous process on his paper—from his initial notes and calculations to the final drawing. In this way, O'Connor's drawings collapse the space between the generation of an idea, its gradual materialization, and final graphic realization.

O'Connor was born in Westfield, MA and attended Pratt Institute. He received a 2023 Guggenheim Fellowship and has participated in residencies such as MacDowell and Skowhegan. He has exhibited extensively in galleries in the US and abroad. O'Connor's work is in public collections such as MoMA, the Whitney, the Hood Museum, and the Weatherspoon Museum. He co-chairs Visual Arts at Sarah Lawrence College and is a member of the experimental art and technology collective NonCoreProjector.

John O'Connor  
*A Recurrence Plot*, 2019  
Acrylic, colored pencil and graphite on paper  
68 × 56 inches  
Collection of Amanda Parness



# Bruce Pearson

Bruce Pearson makes distinctive and hypnotic works that push the limits of painting. Constructed on Styrofoam panels, his paintings are fields of sensuous color and intricately creviced surfaces, with visceral impact and optical effects. His seamlessly constructed, intricately layered images are unique investigations in which text is the basis of image and image reverberates with meaning.

Pearson has been exhibiting professionally for over 30 years, including several solo exhibitions at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts and museum exhibitions at the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University and the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, KS. His work was included in *Open House: Working in Brooklyn*, Brooklyn Museum of Art; *Visual Politics: Art and the World*, Miami Art Museum; *Greater New York: New Art in New York Now*, MoMA P.S.1; and *Project 63: Karin Davie, Udomsak Kirsanamis, Bruce Pearson and Fred Tomaselli*, Museum of Modern Art.

Pearson's work is included in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He has lectured and critiqued at many institutions, including the School of Visual Arts, Parsons School of Design, and Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. He has received Joan Mitchell and Pollock Kransner grants. He currently lives and works in New York.

Bruce Pearson  
*And Who Hasn't Dreamed of Growing Up  
to Become a Princess*, 2013  
Acrylic on styrofoam  
72 × 90 inches  
Courtesy of the artist



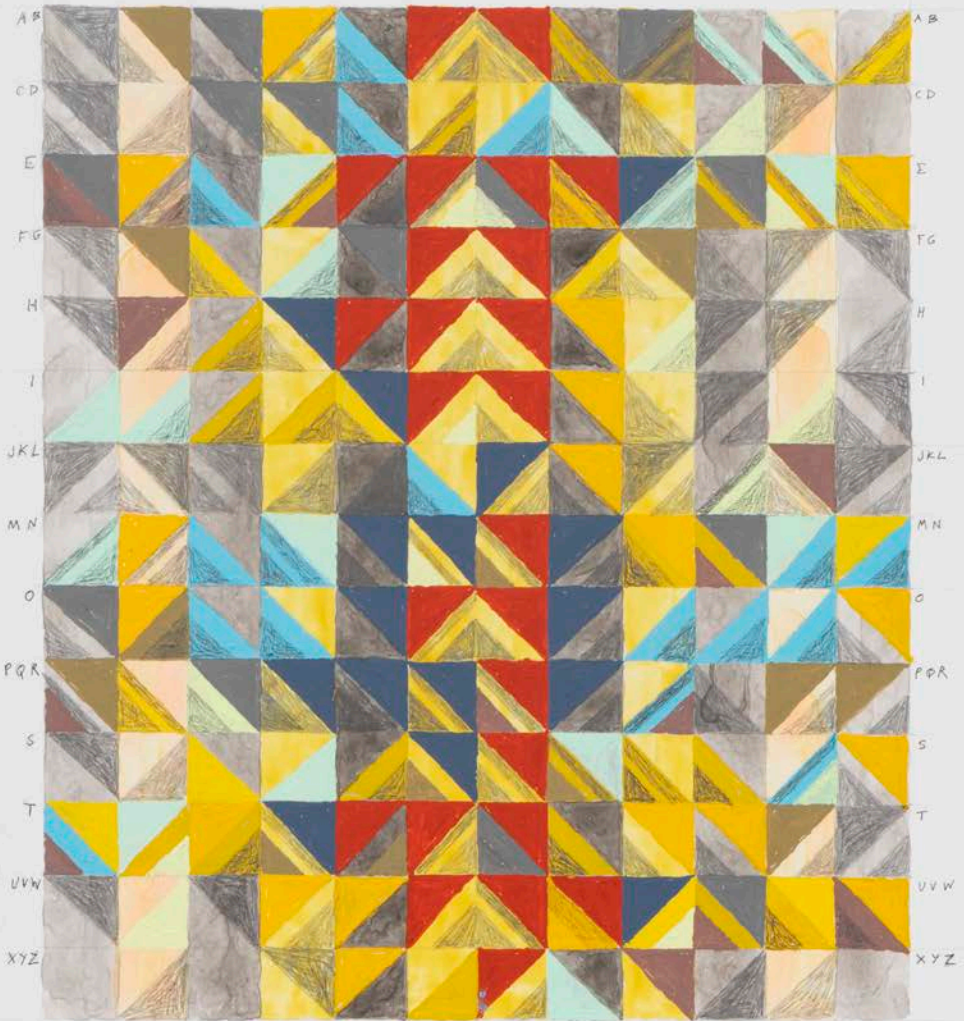
# Leslie Roberts

Leslie Roberts' paintings contain handwritten lists diagrammed into paint. From the relentless flow of information surrounding us, she compiles language to use as DNA for color and form. The words in her paintings are collections of everyday language from street signs, emails, packaging, text messages, news reports, and other ambient sources. The mismatched lexicons are artifacts of daily existence that often make sense in non-linear and even ridiculous ways. Roberts prints columns of letters and codes them into corresponding columns and rows of painted geometry. The ordered process of mapping language leads to visual relationships she couldn't otherwise invent. These slate-like panels are illuminated lexicons of 21st-century life.

Roberts has shown her work at venues that include Minus Space, Marlborough Gallery, McKenzie Fine Art, Pierogi, PPOW, Kathryn Markel Fine Art, Tiger Strikes Asteroid NY, the Brooklyn Museum, the Weatherspoon Art Museum, and the Wellin Museum. Her work has been discussed in *Artforum*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, and other publications. She has completed residencies including Yaddo, Ucross, Ragdale, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Monson Arts, Vermont Studio Center, and Marble House. She holds a BA from Yale and an MFA from Queens College. Roberts is Professor Emerita at Pratt Institute, where she taught Foundation Light Color and Design. She lives and works in Brooklyn.

Leslie Roberts  
*TO EIGHTH AVENUE*, 2021  
Acrylic gouache, pencil, ink on panel  
16 × 12 inches  
Courtesy of the artist

TO EIGHTH AVE



TRAINING	VEHICLES	TO EIGHTH AVE	VIA FOURTEENTH ST	THREE	UN PLAZA
CHASE	HEALTH SPA	NO STOPPING	NEW YORK	KEEP	GOING
WAY	OUT	THE CITY'S	BEST MUSEUMS	FINE	CUISINE
HELT WANTED / ROAD WORK		DO NOT LEAN	ON DOORS	NO PARKING	FEET TO LEFT
MAKE EXTRA CASH / PAY LESS		HER WAY TO	VOTE THIS JUNE	NO HONKING	STAY IN LANE
HALF PRICE / BIKE LANE		BEDFORD	AVENUE	INBOUND	HELP
		INVERTING	MADE EASY		
		FIRST	AVENUE		
		SELECT	BUS SERVICE		
		TAP GO	TRANSFER		
		PULL CORD TO	SIGNAL STOP		

# Jorinde Voigt

Jorinde Voigt works principally within the medium of drawing. Her pieces have been likened to musical scores, scientific diagrams, and notational thought models. Using a precisely coded system of mark-making, the artist gives pictorial form to an array of natural and psychological phenomena. In recent series, Voigt has applied her unique visual method in the deconstruction of works of literature and philosophical texts, highlighting specific words and passages. Voigt asserts that language alone fails to adequately describe the complexities of what she perceives around her, and it is through her art that she finds a means to visually express her experience of the world.

Voigt was born in Frankfurt, Germany. She has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions, including the Menil Collection, Houston; Horst-Janssen-Museum, Oldenburg; St. Matthäus-Kirche, Berlin; Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin; Kunstraum Innsbruck, Austria; Kunsthalle Krems, Austria; MACRO Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rome; Langen Foundation, Neuss; Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto; Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal; and Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, among others. Her work has recently been included in group exhibitions at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Sharjah Biennial 13, UAE and 14th Lyon Biennale, France; Manifesta 11, Zurich; Morgan Library & Museum, New York; Moscow Museum of Modern Art; and the 54th International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale, among others.

Voigt's work is included in prominent public collections worldwide, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Art Institute of Chicago; The Morgan Library & Museum, New York; Centre

Pompidou, Paris; The British Museum, London; Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin; Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich; Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg; Kunsthaus Zürich; and UBS Art Collection, New York, among others. Voigt lives and works in Berlin. She is currently Professor for Conceptual Drawing and Painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, Germany.

Jorinde Voigt

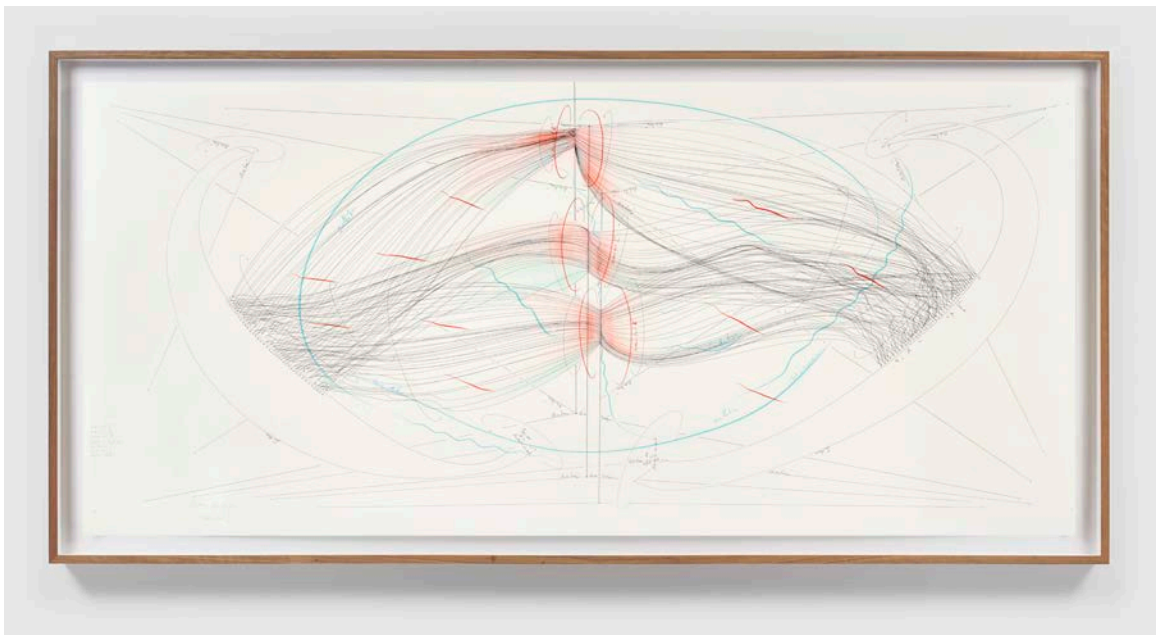
*Ludwig van Beethoven – Opus 119, Nr. 2, 2020*

Ink, gold leaf, pastel, oil pastel, and graphite on paper

31½ × 70⅞ inches

Courtesy David Nolan Gallery





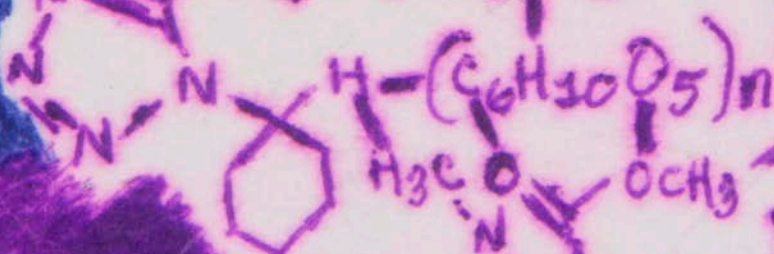
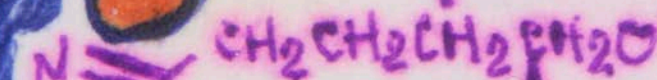
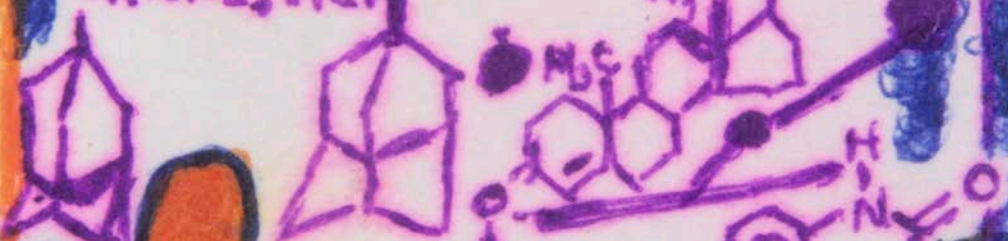
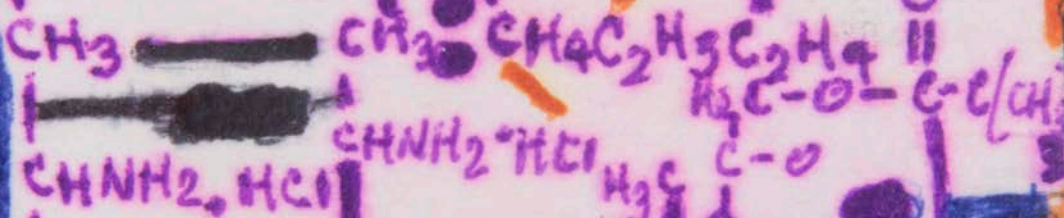
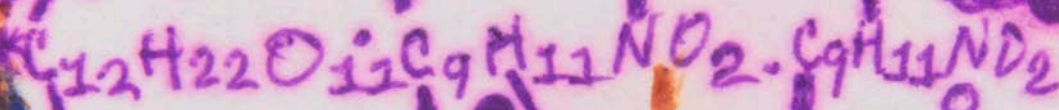
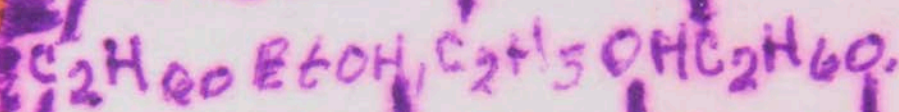
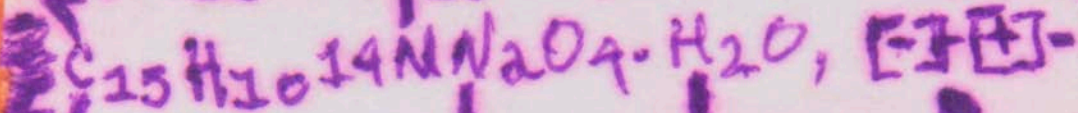
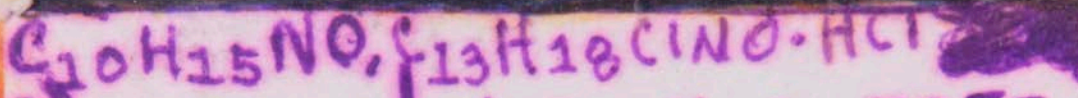
# Melvin Way

Melvin “Milky” Way was an Outsider Artist whose work occupies the uncharted border between art and science. Born in South Carolina in 1954, Way came to New York City in the 1970s to attend a technical school, earning a certificate to operate a power press. He played bass in local bands, and recorded a solo album with Encounter Records, which folded before the album could be released. Soon after, Way was diagnosed with schizophrenia, and became homeless.

By 1989, Way was residing in the shelter run by Hospital Audiences International, a nonprofit organization offering art workshops to people with disabilities. Lower East Side artist Andrew Castrucci, a volunteer workshop leader at the time, encouraged Way to make art, and acted as his advocate during subsequent years. Way soon began to produce small, exquisite ballpoint-pen and ink drawings on found paper. Despite the very straightforward nature of his chosen genre, Way’s drawings are strikingly complex. They are characterized by rich hybrids of scrawled text, mathematical equations, astronomical shorthand, chemical formulae, and alchemical punning. Each work is marked by the artist’s signature, thrillingly dense sensibility. Way engages both the eye and the mind, drawing viewers into exquisite mysteries that may never be solved.

Way’s works are included in the collections of the American Folk Art Museum, the Centre Pompidou, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, among others. He passed away in February of 2024.

Melvin Way  
*SULAYMAN #2*, c. 2018  
Ballpoint pen, marker on paper, Scotch tape  
2½ × 3¼ inches  
Courtesy of Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York



# George Widener

George Widener's artwork is as intellectually challenging as it is aesthetically compelling. A high-functioning savant who has channeled his extraordinary gifts of numerical computation into artmaking, Widener struggled for years before his talent was recognized. Widener was born in Kentucky in 1962 and was not diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome until he was an adult. After a stint of service in the US Air Force, Widener eventually attended the University of Tennessee. He currently lives and works in Waynesville, NC, near Asheville.

Widener's brain has been proven to function as a super-calculator, a gift that allows him to process mathematical information in a radically different way than most people do. By directing his impulse to calculate complex sequences of numbers through stunning, often large-scale drawings, Widener makes visible not only his savant skillset, but also his unique creative talent for reimagining it aesthetically. Far from mere illustrations of mathematical processes, his drawings often play out elaborate numerical puzzles and games, complex puns, palindromes, and informed prophecies.

Widener's favored vehicle for processing mathematical, historical, and personal information is the calendar. He uses calendars to consider both linear and random historical patterns, giving as much weight to logic as to chance and synchronicity. Often staining patched-together napkins or scrolls with tea to affect the look of parchment, Widener creates preciously fragile compositions that seem torn from the pages of medieval manuscripts, each page layered with accident, palimpsests, and esoteric knowledge. His

concern with the future has grown into creating elaborate games for the amusement of machines, whom he believes will gain the ability to think independently by 2050. Despite his relative youth, Widener has earned international recognition as one of the more significant self-taught artists the world has seen.

George Widener  
*Magic Squares*, 2016  
Mixed media on paper  
50 x 40 inches  
Courtesy of Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York



# Additional artworks exhibited

**Mel Bochner**

*Money*, 2022

Oil on velvet, in three parts

90½ × 47 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Peter Freeman, Inc. New York/Paris

**Xylor Jane**

Untitled, 2023

Oil, ink, and graphite on panel

21 × 23 inches

Courtesy of the artist and CANADA, New York

**Xylor Jane**

*Untitled (25 Nesting Prime Palindromes)*, 2022

Oil and ink on wood panel

39 × 41 inches

Courtesy of the artist and CANADA, New York

**Steffani Jemison**

*Same Time*, 2017

Acrylic on clear polyester film

3 parts: 107½ × 20 inches each

Courtesy the artist and Greene Naftali, New York

**Ellen Lesperance**

*The Land of Feminye, Fair Isle*, 2022

Gouache and graphite on tea-stained paper; sweater of undyed

Hebridean wool and wool dyed with madder root, wild chervil,

nettle, and bramble leaf hand-knit by the artist

39½ × 30 inches (painting)

Courtesy of the artist and Derek Eller Gallery

**Chris Martin**

*9+9+9=10*, 1986–90

Oil on canvas

16 × 14 inches

© Chris Martin, image courtesy the artist and Anton Kern

Gallery, New York

**Leslie Roberts**

*WHAT'S THAT*, 2021

Acrylic gouache, pencil, ink on panel

14 × 11 inches

Courtesy of the artist

**Leslie Roberts**

*SEND TO*, 2022

Acrylic gouache, pencil, ink on panel

16 × 12 inches

Courtesy of the artist

**Melvin Way**

*Sechlorum*, 2018

Ballpoint pen, marker on paper, Scotch tape

8¾ × 4¾ inches

Courtesy of Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York

**Melvin Way**

*Neurocaine*, 2019

Ballpoint pen, marker on paper, Scotch tape

2 × 8 inches

Courtesy of Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York

**Melvin Way**

*MAXIMO*, 2005

Ballpoint pen, marker on paper

4 × 5¼ inches

Courtesy of Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York

# Acknowledgments

This exhibition and its successful implementation would not have been possible without the dedication of the Department of Exhibitions staff: Ted Holland, Assistant Director; Shoshi Rosen, Gallery Coordinator; Travis Molkenbur, Head Preparator; and Peter Schenck and Scott Whipkey, Installation Technicians, along with our dedicated student assistants.

I especially would like to thank the artists, galleries, and lenders who graciously made work available.

Special recognition goes to our co-curators John O'Connor and Ken Weathersby for bringing together a talented group of artists, whose abstract work is guided by systems rather than the familiar formal concerns.

Sincerely,  
Nick Battis  
Director of Exhibitions

## **Design and production:**

### **Pratt Communications and Marketing**

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Mel Bochner  
Becky Brown  
Mike Cloud  
Charles Gaines  
Xylor Jane  
Steffani Jemison  
Alfred Jensen  
Ellen Lesperance  
Chris Martin  
John O'Connor  
Bruce Pearson  
Leslie Roberts  
Jorinde Voigt  
Melvin Way  
George Widener

