

# LENNON, WEINBERG, INC.

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514 West 25<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY 10001 Tel. 212 941 0012 Fax. 212 929 3265  
info@lennonweinberg.com www.lennonweinberg.com



Polly Apfelbaum  
Daniel Carello  
Billy Copley  
Shirley Jaffe  
Jenifer Kobylarz  
Harriet Korman  
Stephen Mueller  
Beth Reisman  
Peter Soriano  
Andrew Spence  
Stephen Westfall

Opening reception: Thursday, July 12, 6-8 pm  
Exhibition continues through September 15, 2007  
Summer Hours: Tuesday-Friday 10-6

Shape is a word that refers to many things: the identity of a specific form, something seen in outline, an assumed appearance, an organized form of expression, an orderly arrangement, condition or state of repair. The idiomatic phrase “take shape” means “to assume a distinctive form.” Each artist in this exhibition uses shape as a significant element in the conception and execution of their work. In their hands, shapes can be entirely abstract or descriptive of a concrete state. Or both.

Polly Apfelbaum, recognized for her signature ovals and blossom forms, has made a new series of work in which she organizes a multitude of colored stripes into wide bands. Daniel Carello locks figure and ground together in his deceptively simple placements of circle into square. Billy Copley embeds many different types of shapes into layered, buoyant compositions with lots of pop flavor. Shirley Jaffe’s paintings map a complex space in which a variety of articulated shapes establish intersecting and receding planes. Jenifer Kobylarz uses curving arcs and crisp color contrasts to create repeating rhythms and echoes. Harriet Korman invents shape by creating looping, intersecting boundaries between areas of strong pure colors.

Rounded, patterned organic shapes and ovals arranged in a bilateral symmetry inhabit Stephen Mueller’s atmospheric drifts of tart colors. Beth Reisman’s figures are composed of a crystalline structure of smaller shapes, derived in some part from photographic images. Peter Soriano is the sole sculptor among these painters and his frontal wall-oriented works address form, color and figure-ground relationships in ways that reverberate with the paintings in the exhibition. Andrew Spence is known for distilling shapes from the ordinary things around us, organizing them into paintings that read like signs and symbols. Stephen Westfall uses shape as an essential element of his improvisatory systems of grid, line, field and color, rich with reference to observation and perception.

For additional information, contact Amy Yee at 212 941 0012, amy@lennonweinberg.com.

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## Taking Shape

Naves, Mario. "Painters Shape Up for Summer." *The New York Observer*, July 30, 2007.

### Painters Shape Up for Summer

*For once! An off-season group show that actually makes sense*

Group exhibitions during the dog days of summer aren't inherently tired, but they do tend to straggle along, droopy-eared and sluggish, after the gallery season's end. The interest and enthusiasm of art mavens, whether aesthetes or investors, drop precipitously as the temperature rises. After a glut of big shows, big names and big money, less-taxing pleasures are sought. Museums play to the season—witness the Whitney's inconsequential *Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era*. Galleries dust off their inventory for display. Who's going to shlep through Chelsea in this kind of weather?

In a few ways, *Taking Shape*, an exhibition of 11 artists at Lennon, Weinberg, Inc., meets typical summer group show expectations. Some gallery regulars—in this case, Stephen Westfall, Peter Soriano and Harriet Korman—are roped in. Other artists get wall space for whatever reason—possible representation, perhaps, or a goodwill gesture to a friend. An encompassing theme is draped over the proceedings; here it's "the identity of a specific form, something seen in outline, an assumed appearance, an organized form of expression, an orderly arrangement, condition or state of repair." Having established this suitably vague and promiscuously inclusive rationale, the gallery has something to show in the off-season.

Except that *Taking Shape* is a real exhibition; it's anything but arbitrary. "Shape" isn't an idle conceit—it's meant literally. Each artist explores concrete forms that state their presence unequivocally, taking different paths to wrest individuality from this shared pictorial concern. If the organizing principle isn't clearly articulated in the press release, it's played out on the gallery walls, where it counts. There we are confronted with bold, clean colors and flat, frontal spaces. The featured painters (and the lone sculptor) make art that is crisp and punchy.

The works are abstract—though, as usual, "abstract" is an equivocal proposition. Stephen Mueller's paintings (unfairly and too hastily dismissed by this critic several years back) are the least representational. His luxuriantly colored and patterned emblems, not-so-distant cousins of mandalas, float and bob within atmospheric spaces. This hushed and endless cosmos is best seen in large formats: *Protogonos* (2007), with its unidentifiable extraterrestrial form and ineffably tranquil mood, exposes a quartet of

"domestic-scale" pictures as professional trivialities. Mystery is preferable to merchandise. Ample surface area isn't everything to Mr. Mueller's art, but it makes a big difference.

Many of the artists derive inspiration from high modernist painting and, however obliquely, observed phenomenon. Andrew Spence exploits purity of form for impure ends: His *Squid* (2005) winnows its subject into a heraldic sign; a dry humor is embedded in its worked surfaces. Polly Apfelbaum's monumental woodblock monoprint, *Rainbow Park 3* (2006), is true to its title—a geometric riff on impressionism, sort of. Ms. Korman's flexing biomorph, with its pinched and sloping forms, is likable enough, but doesn't beguile like the complex structures seen in her last solo exhibition.

Mr. Westfall's *Winslow* (2005), an ordered array of inverted triangles, casually associates the Zen-inspired geometry of the California painter John McLaughlin with the flapping multicolored banners flown at a store's grand opening. Jenifer Kobylarz's looping, pointed forms and Shirley Jaffe's hodgepodge of eccentric shapes look, respectively, to nature and the city. Their joyous and sharp pictures sport fresh rhythms and hues.

Not everything is equally infectious. Daniel Carello's "dials"—they are what they advertise—are as concise as Mr. Spence's images, but they lack the latter's indispensably tactile surfaces. Mr. Soriano is up to something elusive, and his sculpture suffers for it; his *Tito* (1993-94), a vertical wall piece featuring a bright yellow orifice, suggests a space alien's bathroom fixture. Billy Copley's *Mugwump* (2007) is the odd painting out: With its scabbled surfaces and ungainly cartoons, it crashes the party with an unappealing thump.

Beth Reisman, on the other hand, is a find. Her *Losing My Religion* (2006) and *Isle* (2007) evince an artist still in formation—and well worth watching. In the paintings, masses of

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#### Concrete forms that state their presence unequivocally.

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small, topographical shapes coalesce into lumpy, anonymous personages. Drifting upon shadows or, perhaps, flying carpets, they



That's her in the corner: Beth Reisman's *Losing My Religion*, 2006.

navigate across dense, uninflected fields of color—weird and intense variations on blue and pink. Surrealistic without yielding to trite sentiment, Ms. Reisman channels Clyfford Still's jagged forms, as well as a skewed Pop sensibility: The dry absurdism of *Yellow Submarine* is evident. Her oddball art will get better the odder it (or she) gets, and at this juncture, there's no reason to worry that it won't.

*Taking Shape* comes at an opportune time. The exhibition provides an inadvertent—or at least partial—response to *What is Painting?*, MoMA's muddled attempt to define the art form and explore its place in contemporary culture. There are no big statements at Lennon, Weinberg, thank the Lord, only artists working within the constraints of their medium and finding within them great flexibility of purpose and potential. Refusing to throw in the towel, they dig deep, with quiet determination. Making art is a challenging but intrinsically optimistic pursuit—a truth *Taking Shape* emphasizes unassumingly but eloquently.

## Taking Shape

Holliday, Frank. "Abstraction Reconsidered." Gay City News, July 26 – August 1, 2007.

# Abstraction Reconsidered

Walking a fine line, artists look back for renewed exploration

BY FRANK HOLLIDAY

**T**wo shows open now in Chelsea have similar concerns—abstraction, mainly in painting but also in a few drawings and sculptural pieces.

Abstraction, a dirty word for some time in the art world, emerges again about every 10 years and is reconsidered for about five minutes. Greenbergian Formalism, once the avant-garde of the New York School of painting, became anathema, and that perspective that became a springboard for the conceptual artist.

When baby boomers first came to New York to study art, Color Field, Hard-edge, and Post-painterly Abstraction were at the forefront and many were trained by their leading practitioners, learning formalistic strategies directly from the horses' mouths. Many learned the push pull theory directly from Hans Hoffman and color theory from Josef Albers and Color Field painting was born.

At the same time Pop Art, Minimalism, and performance art were fighting for dominance. Some things never change — the competition of figurative versus Pop versus abstraction versus photography versus any hybrid that implicates earlier lines or boundaries becomes an opportunity for exclusion. It often seems to boil down to tension between formal art issues and social concerns. And everything continually splinters, morphs, and reassigns significance, slowly moving art history and evolution along, as retrograde as it may appear.

Many young artists look back to movements that have died on the vine for their renewed exploration. Within these two shows — "Taking Shape" at Lennon Weinberg Gallery through September 15 and "Late Liberties" at John Connelly Presents through August 24 — a continuum of generations join together and an important branch of abstract painting ideas grows stronger.

In "Taking Shape," 11 artists are brought together because of their common bond of using pluristic shape as their figure-ground relationship. This is a strong show in which most of the works included have a masterful ease to them. In the work of Stephen Mueller, Billy Copley, and Stephen Westfall, many of the shapes are silhouetted references to things we may recognize, their forms simplified and idealized into flat shapes and patterns. In Beth Reisman's work, the palettes are bright and hue-conscious with the use of very pure color; the science of color is used to create vibrations. It's where form and color intersect that plastic tension results.

Paintings by Shirley Jaffe and Harriet Korman refer to movements as diverse as American Modernism, Cubism, and Hard-edge painting, with glances toward Picasso, Malevich, and Mondrian. Even Ellsworth Kelly can be seen.

It's a fine line that all these artists choose to walk. If one steers too near formal devices they risk emptiness and if one uses a formula so popular with art today — taking something formal and adding content — it becomes too obvious and trite. But if a balance is found on the edge between, exciting new spatial relationships and visual problems can spring forth.

In "Taking Liberties," 12 artists explore a wider range of painting ideas. Flatness of color and formal rules are explored in Kim Fisher's, Carrie Moyer's, and Michael Zahn's work, and looser methods of paint handling are embraced in the work of Daniel Hesidence, Elizabeth Neel, Dana Frankfort, and Augusto Arbizio. Fisher and Wendy White use combi-

nations of paint application, sculptural elements, and shaped canvas to arrive at their formulas, while pattern or digital generations show up in work by Tauba Auerbach, Raha Raissnia, Alex Kwartler, and Jeff Elrod.

Earlier artist like Frank Stella, Peter Halley, Philip Taaffe, Kenneth Noland, Valerie Jaudon, and Peter Schuff are freely quoted. I always wondered when Neo-Geo would come back, but it makes sense that it would be a 20-year cycle. Many of these painters probably established their early art impressions during that period. These paintings have

Grads school ruins today's revolutionaries. Academics are so concerned with validating art as a science or a history lesson or a political tactic that very few great things are made, no mistakes are allowed, and there is no swimming in the unknown for extended periods of time in order to find something new.

Good is the enemy of great.

Painting is not very suited to today's pace. We live on quick fixes and instant consumerism. Painting takes a long time to harness before convention can be fearlessly thrown out and deeper, profoundly abandoned subjects can emerge.

The Lennon Weinberg show

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**Painting is not very suited to today's pace. We live on quick fixes and instant consumerism.**

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those roots, now forming the basis for elaboration.

The problem with some of the works in both shows is they seem to be corporate objects. They are smart, snappy, and decorative and look really good. But they only just create a façade, never breaking through fearlessly, risking it all in order to venture into new pictorial territory. There is a lot of playing it safe. Painted well with nice color and clean edges, they seem so consumer-friendly. Pottery Barnish. That bugs me. It looks a lot like "art."

Maybe paying back huge student loans and/or decorating rich people's homes lead to playing it safe. Or maybe there is nothing to risk anymore; we just need to entertain the status quo. Everything has an airtight explanation, a reason that is academically correct.

seems to embrace this problem; many of the artists have been painting for a long time. It feels oddly freer and yet solid, almost more radical, a position one would think the Connelly show would own.

So why does all this seem so conservative to me?

Maybe because it is. It looks good, smart, colorful, tasteful, explained, marketed, just like a glossy magazine ad. Maybe that's all art is now — corporate-friendly, consumer fashion, something to match the mid-century modernist furniture in the co-op. With everything so expensive today, I guess the object has become very important again.

Art is the signifier of hip, so perhaps money finally did win.

It sure looks like it did and I hope at least some of these artists are getting their fair share.



In Stephen Mueller's, "Untitled," 2007, above, 12 x 12 in., acrylic on canvas, and Billy Copley's "Mugwump," 2007, 62 x 58 in., acrylic and rice paper collage on canvas, recognizable things are simplified in form, idealized into flat shapes and patterns.

