



Sandra Gottlieb, *A Cloud Study, Sunset No. 11, 2016*, archival, digital C-print, limited edition., 30" x 40"

Free Form Five Preview of Group Exhibition at Elga Wimmer PCC in New York City, Oct. 7–Nov. 18, 2017

by Christopher Hart Chambers

Abstract art is at heart an exploration: an adventure into the unknown, what we don't already know. It's a self-admission that there is more than meets the senses, and yet more to be revealed. All that is seen, smelled, and heard, are abstractions which we label with empirically derived nuance: This form is a tree. That smell connotes a rose. This sound is from an automobile; a Ferrari, a Volvo – things that we have learned. What happens when we drop what we understand? Gaze with wonder once more as an infant, when all is new; when what we search for is not necessarily reduced to literally assigned "meaning," but, something else, an other? Imagine cloud-gazing when the cloud needn't resemble a dragon, for example, but a mystery. THE mystery.

In the abstract expressionist ideal a painting, or any work of art (art for art's sake) is an object, not representing anything other than itself. The traditionalist *modus operandi*, in the Western sense, of perspective – of the picture plane, need not apply: A window into what? In fact, Islamic and

Judaic law forbids representational art as being the province of the Lord. Is not instrumental music abstract, connoting emotions and memories sans direct mimicry? Abstract sculpture is easier to grasp because we relate to it viscerally. We instinctively want a picture to be "of something."

Sandra Gottlieb's photographs focus literally on clouds. Roiling, billowing, dramatic masses consume the picture plane from latitude to longitude, border to border, like exhalations of the gods in high contrast. We are free to interpret these pictures, bringing along our own histories and imaginations or appreciate these magnificent manifestations of nature from any intellectual or sensory standpoint whatsoever. We may concentrate on the artist's compositions, think scientifically or ecologically – we can seek out visions reflecting the Jungian notion of the collective subconscious.

The other four artists selected for inclusion in this exhibition, *Free Form Five*, curated by D. Dominick Lombardi, utilize paint on canvas.

Sharon Kagan's twisting pixilated serpentine forms, like magical worms, comingle biological with digital bytes thereby commenting on the developing history of image making. We recognize her image as a primary "thing." Perhaps it is magnified, knitted, color saturated stitching, but

the image is merely a leading device. It doesn't matter so much what it is. The physical component alludes to a more intriguing reality than its surface appearance. There are sparkles of hidden meaning, and the very fact of their unclear innuendo invokes curiosity, magic, and phenomenological drama. We might invent entire narratives of a "bigger picture" from the little bits and pieces that have been so intimately examined and captured. Here again, something "real" has been made abstract and offers up additional properties above and below its more obvious topography.

Rebeca Calderón Pittman works with an "all over" Helen Frankenthaler influenced surface composition overlaid with runes and cryptic, Neolithic cave scrawling, like faux-sectarian hieroglyphics. There are numerous references for such strategies in post-war painting, however her works are insistently individualistic. One would require a handwriting expert cum Indiana Jones in order to decode her intent. The mystery of intentions, that intentionally sought after mystery; the pursuit of exotica and esotericism is the hallmark of Pittman's work and



Susan Sommer, *City Squares, 2016*, oil on linen, 66" x 52"

indeed exemplifies the curator's aim of exploring the personal, the random, and historical referents in current abstractionism. Pittman's narrative in drawing and painting, her quirks and notations, are actuated with a technique that resembles in and out of focus graffiti and stucco, the informational "text" playing lost and found with veracity.

Susan Sommer's broad colorful brush strokes invoke Franz Marc's earlier efforts, while Piet Mondrian's formalist reductivism complements yet challenges the slashing fluidity without invoking biomorphic symbolism. Her work demarcates a clear example of synthetic versus organic styles of abstract painting. Her titles, like, *Light in Autumn*, or, *City Squares*, indicate sources of inspiration and lead the viewer to interpret the image. She

relates the peripheral experience of a moment and place rather than mimicking planar form and color, such as in one series of works that take the Monarch butterfly as a source of inspiration. They flit and flicker through implied environs, intimating moods and atmosphere without spelling her subject out illustratively, allowing the viewer to discover her muse but never forcing the issue.

Bobbie Moline-Kramer's canvases are gestural abstract fields with faces and eyes peering through. She chooses a limited palette which reinforces an obscure haze festooned with primal marks, seemingly creating a general obfuscation of prosaic life while quotidian reality everlastingly invades. It is like emotions are clouds while pragmatic issues continually force their way through, invading the artist's

sentence. In essence, the mundane interfaces with esoteric aspirations while real life keeps pestering higher ideologies. Specifically, recognizable themes actually emerge through a mystically riddled haze to somewhat dizzying effect, embezzling a moment of twinkling clarity from amid our muddled dreams.

The five artists comprising *Free Form Five* seek to discover and relate higher truth than realistic, factual mimesis. That is itself a tautological concept, because reality is as much an ever changing muse as truth is an unattainably subjective paradigm – it shifts in time and space like gravity. The well known expression, "We bring our own baggage (to a situation)," is apt for a journey into the unknowable, where thoughts are nonverbal and the journey is the destination.



Left: Sharon Kagan, *The Untangling Rebirth*, 2017, 36" x 106," mixed media



Above: Rebeca Calderón Pittman, *The Great Majestic*, 2016, acrylic and ink on board, 24" x 40"

Bobbie Moline-Kramer, *Are You Sure*, 2017, 6" x 6"