

South Texas upstarts take their form beyond Loopland

# ROAD TO ABSTRACTION

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**R**ipping its title from an Oldsmobile slogan, "Not Your Father's South Texas" affirms the exhibition's purpose with the eloquence of a Flowmaster on Southwest Military: where art and automobiles are concerned, devotees, however much they might appreciate vintage, live for this year's model.

True to its cheeky name, the

**REVIEW**

UTSA survey of local, abstract painting is stocked with brush, young upstarts and a few fresh, but seasoned veterans. The strength of their work highlights the larger and expanding pool of artists who practice and exhibit abstract works in San Antonio and the schools and galleries that encourage them. If the trend represents a new critical mass for the genre locally, it also parallels a current art world enthusiasm. The new *lingua franca* of contemporary art, this reinvention of non-representational painting emphasizes exuberant color, refined form, and technical finesse.

Curated by UTSA Professor Frances Colpitt and graduate student Jennifer Davy, "Not Your Father's South Texas" isn't your father's abstraction, either. Gone are the Ab. Ex. historicists and hushed Minimalist austerity of previous decades. Certain artists, however — Mondrian, Kandinsky, Malevich, and Miró, for example — maintain their relevance for this generation of San Antonians. Whether in art or cars, innovation builds upon previous strengths. Like those who've come before, these artists prove again that successful abstraction need not reach beyond the surface of the painting. That is the unforgiving place where abstraction builds its case.

Estevan Arredondo and Kimberly Squaglia use reflective materials to make surface the distinguishing factor in their work. With a pearly-blue concoction of oil and dry pigment, Arredondo paints swirls on sheets of Mylar. Translucent as soap bubbles, these glistening compositions



Thomas Walsh's *Lick*, 2000, oil on panel, 73 x 20.5 inches

**"NOT YOUR FATHER'S SOUTH TEXAS"**  
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grow increasingly complicated as seemingly indistinct marks build dense layers of infinite variation. Likewise, Squaglia's use of clear resin layers between painted elements catches light in her oil-on-panel paintings. This technique creates a limp, unfixable depth that encases her lacy, overlapping architecture of painted flower patterns, orbs, and colorful flecks.

Mark Schlesinger and Trish Lewandowsky butt form against form to generate dynamic visual couplings. Schlesinger's opposing rectangles bleed amazing Technicolor drips in several works. In others, rectangles bind themselves together with raised bars. These meticulous acrylic-on-canvas paintings pit bright pastels against darker, more menacing colors to evoke a sense of constriction or dissolution. On neatly sanded, wooden panels, Lewandowsky's acrylic-painted forms are more constructive. Taut and lean, her oar-like shapes stretch toward each other from opposite ends to form brightly colored geometries.

Nate Cassie, Robert Tiemann, and Todd Brandt incorporate grids and other ordered systems with a stunning variety of materials. Cassie's enamel paintings weave colorful lines into vast, potholder-style lattices. Tiemann starts with the flat, pre-organized pattern of factory-made pegboard and through paint and wooden pins, transforms the field entirely. Brandt's execution is the least conventional of the three: his latex paint is contained not on canvas but in small plastic film containers that hold disposable coffee creamer cups. Attached to a wooden panel, these paint-cup "dots" of color construct tight zigzag patterns that course diagonally across the work and generate a shifting optical effect from a distance.

Margaret Craig "paints" with royal icing, sculpting bands of the vanilla-scented confection into dense, pictorial slabs. These square works are dominated by free-form passages of blue, green, and white, punctuated with yellow-rimmed sinkholes that pierce the picture. Mounted on spray foam, Craig's nubby works are an extraordinary synthesis of painting and sculptural elements. Thomas Walsh also concocts intricate, asymmetrical compositions of nonspecific shapes, but his exquisite oil paintings leave nothing to chance. The artist's "paint-by-number" colors are corralled with a precise vocabulary of graceful curves and jagged forms that gather speed as the eye travels up and down the tall, slender works.

Augusto Di Stefano's paintings are quintessentially abstract. They create a pictorial space stripped of any unnecessary referents beyond a monochromatic field and the few brush strokes that gather somewhere in its pure expanse. *Working Title*, a nine-by-six-foot oil on canvas, is a fine example. Taking a cue from Barnett Newman, Di Stefano's crude daubs of red and white paint near the bottom are made exact and eloquent by the lustrous field of muted green that surrounds them. If abstraction comprises all the infinitely imaginable relationships between form and space, then Di Stefano's *Working Title* is a singularly perfect description of one such relationship. For the moment you stand before it, this painting makes all others seem superfluous. That's the most any work of art can aspire to — a quality shared by many of the works in this exhibition. ●