

THE RALPH ARNOLD GALLERY  
AT LOYOLA UNIVERSITY



**In the United States there is more space  
where nobody is than where anybody is.**

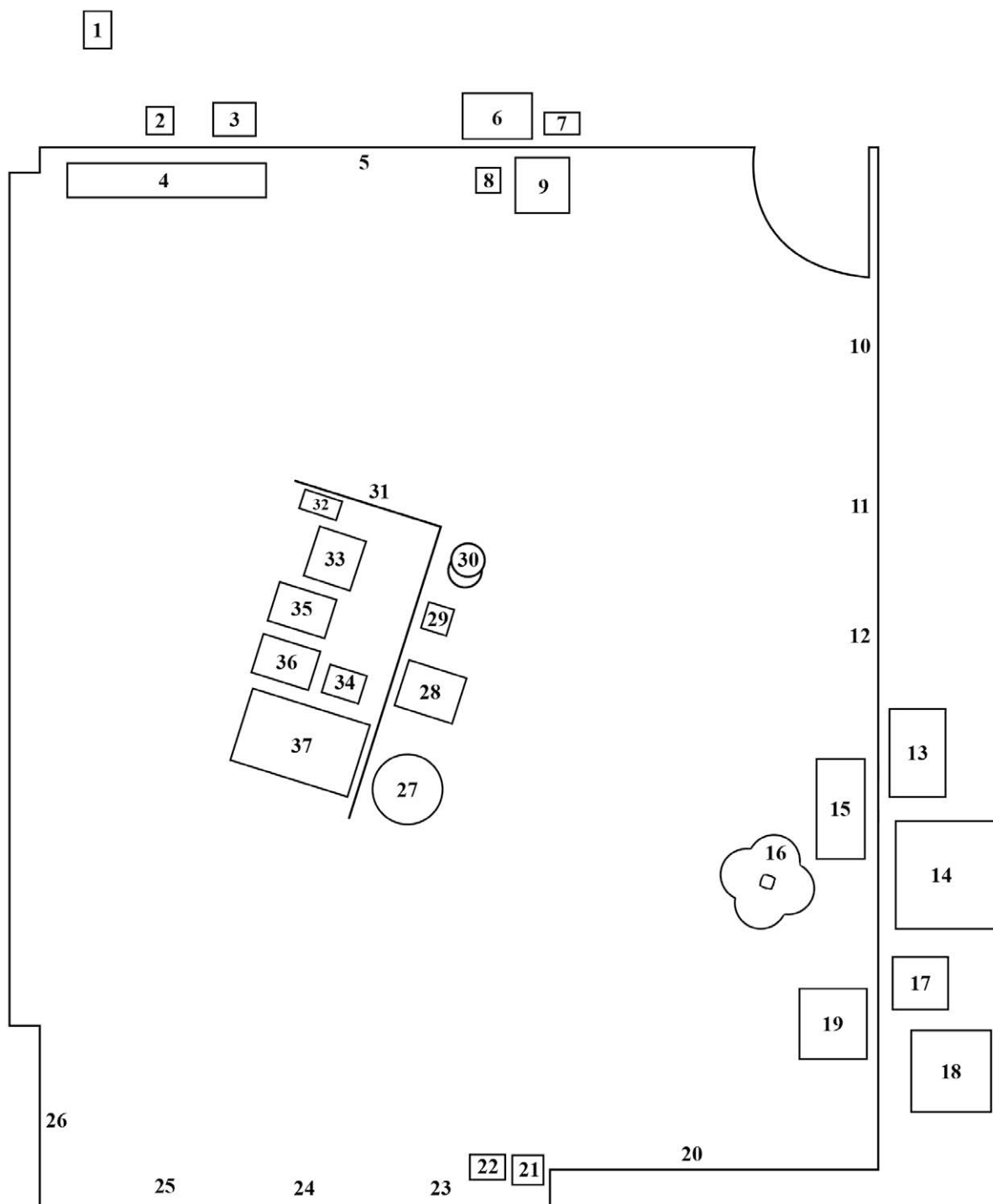
**KIM KRAUSE | MORGAN | SABINA OTT**

CURATED BY MATT MORRIS  
4 NOVEMBER 2022 – 25 JANUARY 2023



LOYOLA  
UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

RALPH  
ARNOLD  
GALLERY



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1. Sabina Ott. *7 Deadly Sins: Lust*  
[1 of 2 panels], 1982  
Oil and acrylic on canvas, 19.5" x 13.5"  
Collection Columbia College Chicago
2. Morgan. *Inextricable Continuum*, 2004  
Graphite, acrylic paint on panel, 11.75" x 11.75"  
Courtesy of the artist
3. Morgan. *Diverse Reasoning*, 1985  
Graphite on Paper, 15" x 18"  
Courtesy of the artist
4. Kim Krause. *Kepler's Paradox*, 1990  
Graphite on vellum, 12" x 48"  
Proposal for United Student Aid Funds,  
Indianapolis, Indiana  
(Project realized 1992)  
Courtesy of the artist
5. Sabina Ott. *Sub Rosa #8*, 1992  
Oil and encaustic on mahogany panel, 72" x 60"  
Collection Columbia College Chicago
6. Sabina Ott. *Sub Rosa #20*, 1994  
Oil and encaustic on panel, 24" x 36"  
Collection Columbia College Chicago
7. Sabina Ott. *...love hearing in a center...*, 1996  
Mixed media on paper, 12" x 17"  
From "The World is Round" by Gertrude Stein  
Collection Columbia College Chicago
8. Morgan. *Embodied Rhythm*, 1997  
Watercolor and acrylic on panel, 12" x 12"  
Courtesy of the artist
9. Morgan. *Unassociated Sources*, 2001  
Acrylic/Canvas over panel, 24" x 24"  
Courtesy of the artist
10. Morgan. *Dark Canyon*, 1995  
Acrylic/Canvas over panel, 24.5" x 24"  
Courtesy of the artist
11. Kim Krause. *Marmara*, 2001  
Oil on canvas, 60" x 60"  
Courtesy of the artist
12. Morgan. *Peculiar Developments*, 1999  
Acrylic/Canvas over Panel, 24" x 24"  
Courtesy of the artist
13. Sabina Ott. *A sight is always a sight  
of something*, 2001  
Encaustic on panel, 20" x 24"  
Collection Columbia College Chicago
14. Sabina Ott. *All Flowers Tell Me*, 2000  
Oil, encaustic and enamel on panel, 36" x 36"  
Collection of Michelle Wasson and Joel Farran
15. Sabina Ott. *The sun*, 2001  
Digital inkjet print, Artist's Proof,  
signed and dated, 24" x 36"  
Collection Columbia College Chicago
16. Sabina Ott. *all flowers tell me*, 1999  
MDF board, wax, plaster, oil and  
acrylic paint, carpet, 32" x 32"  
Collection Columbia College Chicago
17. Morgan. *Callous Disposition*, 2010  
Mixed-media drawing &  
collage elements, 3M Scotchcal Film  
mounted on polypropylene surface,  
16.5" x 16.5" (Framed)  
Courtesy of the artist
18. Morgan. *Everyday Practice*, 2017  
Acrylic ink, graphite, pen & colored pencil  
on Duralar/Paper, 24.75" x 24.75" (Framed)  
Courtesy of the artist

19. Kim Krause. *Eleusinian Mysteries S.F. #4*, 2012  
Acrylic on panel, 21" x 21"  
Courtesy of the artist
20. Kim Krause. *Calliope*, 2006  
Oil on canvas, 66" x 60"  
Courtesy of the artist
21. Kim Krause. *nepenthe Studies Series 3 #3*, 2010  
Mixed media on multimedia Artboard, 15.375" x 13.5" (Framed)  
Courtesy of the artist
22. Kim Krause. *nepenthe Studies Series 1 #2*, 2010,  
Mixed media on paper, 8.5" x 7.5" (Framed)  
Courtesy of the artist
23. Kim Krause. *grace + nepenthe #11*, 2010  
Oil and spray paint on canvas, 40" x 36"  
Courtesy of the artist
24. Morgan. *Object Lesson*, 2015  
Acrylic, colored pencil and collage on prepared paper, 46.25" x 46.25" (framed)  
Courtesy of the artist
25. Sabina Ott. *beautiful beautiful beautiful beautiful*, 2011  
polystyrene, inkjet print on paper mounted on sintra, spray enamel, flashe, mirror and spider plant, 49" x 48" x 14"  
Collection of Lise Haller Baggesen Ross and Jonathan Ross
26. Kim Krause. *Candide #10*, 2022  
Oil and spray paint on panel, 43.5" x 30"  
Courtesy of the artist
27. Sabina Ott. *Table of Contents: Spectacle (Part 1 of 2)*, 1989  
Oil on wood, 36" diameter  
Collection Columbia College Chicago
28. Kim Krause. *The Cooper Spirals #1*, 2003  
Acrylic on paper, 26.5" x 22.5" (Framed)  
Courtesy of the artist
29. Morgan. *Saturated Mix*, 2001  
Graphite, acrylic paint on paper, 13.5" x 13.5" (Framed)  
Collection Columbia College Chicago
30. Sabina Ott. *a touching white shining*, 2014  
Styrofoam, plaster, mirror, burlap, spray and oil paint, 20" diameter  
Collection of Jeff Robinson and Erin Hayden
31. Sabina Ott. *Mater Rosa #10*, 1991  
Encaustic on mahogany panel, 48" x 36"  
Collection Columbia College Chicago
32. Sabina Ott. *frequently the woods are pink #1*, 2005  
Mixed media on paper, 15" x 22"  
Collection Columbia College Chicago
33. Morgan. *Beyond Translation*, 2009  
Graphite, acrylic paint on prepared panel, 30.5" x 30"  
Courtesy of the artist
34. Morgan. *Autonomous Zones*, 2020  
Graphite, watercolor and acrylic paint on paper, 20.25" x 16" (Framed)  
Courtesy of the artist
35. Kim Krause. *Pangloss #16*, 2022  
Acrylic and spray paint on multimedia Artboard, 16.5" x 11" (Framed)  
Courtesy of the artist
36. Kim Krause. *Pangloss #9*, 2022  
Acrylic and spray paint on multimedia Artboard, 16.5" x 11" (Framed)  
Courtesy of the artist
37. Kim Krause. *Rough Magic Series 2 #16*, 2021  
Oil and spray paint on panel, 47.5" x 33"  
Courtesy of the artist



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# VANTAGES

by Matt Morris

“....Breaking human limits

To get home and the dew

And oil on the roads

Like that light — quick

violet

And rainbowed as magic

At dawn the shadows

Of our human forms

Move over the land like

yellow

Hands across the sexual body

Sometimes just caressing

The mud, sometimes gripping

As if there should be more

To be had than idealized....” [1]

Manganese

Iron oxide

Garnet

I had this idea that I'd paint it light blue, to match the sky. I got all dressed up in a dress to do it, which was kind of weird because I didn't like to wear dresses and I didn't know how to paint. I got this really sticky enamel paint that was in the garage, and I tried to paint this thing blue and it was way beyond my capacity. I got sticky blue paint all over the grass and all over my dress and everything was ruined and the thing was only half-done. And I loved it. And I felt unbelievably powerful at that hour. And then I got in a lot of trouble and it was terrible. There was so much defiant pleasure and decisiveness in trying to paint something the same color as the sky and making a huge mess and loving the mess. And just feeling like the dirty sticky thing was like war paint or something. I think that one hour made me into a painter. [2]

The abstract painter acts upon a site that does not lend itself to the expression of an individual style or approach. Rather, painting abstraction serves to mark out a vantage and achieve a potential of critical distance while actively participating within the construction, practice, and maintenance of a shared language. Whether the language/s of painting or of abstraction rise to the level of the commons or the collective may be debated (and should be, especially along lines of class and their interstices, with special attention to problems of access), but to make an abstract painting is to resume an activity that precedes your own attempts and continues to perform an implausible movement toward and away from the world at hand. In most applications, to abstract is to withdraw from specificity—often distilling, generalizing, deconstructing, deranging, sampling, conjuring metonyms. But cave walls, Byzantine icons, and struggling pictorialism from the eighteenth century onward all conspire to show that abstraction works into and through precisely the particulars that may fall out of easily apprehended view. The motion sickness produced from abstraction's pluralism signals to the more gaping dangers implied by the uneasy, potentially contradictory questions that give it shape as a methodology.

When I consider the multivalent potential of abstract tactics in paint and adjacent media, I'm particularly struck by the challenges presented to artists like Kim Krause, Morgan, and Sabina Ott working in this way during the times that they have. This exhibition is a means of inquiring into the activities of abstraction and painting as these three artists have contended with them over the past forty or so years. In looking at art practices that began in the latter half of the 1970s and early 1980s, I will establish some historical context vis-a-vis each of their material and conceptual approaches to painting. In characterizing the vantage of the abstract painter—especially during the period these three artists have worked—its relative remoteness is evidenced. That is, the structural, systemic events of the times appear to be at remarkable distance away from the formal problems and sumptuously material solutions that populate these oeuvres. But perhaps, as with the experimental yet nonetheless incisively critical work of

ex-pat Gertrude Stein, after whose writing this project is titled, that remove is integral to seeing a bigger picture, so to speak.

And yet, as generative an approach as this may be, the record of the past century shows how the language of abstraction courts active or latent controversy. With the advent of the monochrome, a bold attempt at rendering art at its most populist instead registered as painting at its most rarified, at its greatest intellectual inaccessibility. In the subsequent decades, world wars were fought and ‘abstract’ linked the individual with the universal in a strange algebra that produced Abstract Expressionism and its subsequent permutations wherein the gesture records the body (and somehow also the psyche) of the artist in a way that is shared and appreciable with the painting’s viewer. This is more or less the art world that preceded Krause, Morgan, and Ott’s generation.

To wit, influential art critics like Clement Greenberg, commercial gallery programs like Peggy Guggenheim’s Art of This Century, and a robust sense of cultural nationalism following on the success of New Deal art programs saw the United States emerging from World War II with traction for the rhetoric of a newly recentered art world for which downtown New York was a beating heart. Our Krause, Morgan, Ott trifecta were part of a second-ish generation of artists who entered programs that granted Masters in Fine Arts degrees: the 1940s saw the perhaps fanciful expansion of art and academia’s crossroads, and by the 1970s and early 1980s, they were mostly being trained by artists who had been trained in this higher higher ed. In the mid-1970s, the United States saw art supply store chains like Dick Blick and Michaels Arts, Crafts, and More were proliferating brick and mortar imaginariums chock full of technological advancements like acrylic paint—invented decades earlier but reaching big, broad consumer demographics with the spread of retail chains.

A more sweeping historical backdrop situates these artful stirrings into a game of geopolitical chutes and ladders, propelling the culture into a crisis at the threshold between the Modern and the Post-Modern. The United States was dragging its heels out of the long, costly embarrassment of the Vietnam War, a heavy blow to the nation’s global reputation as the last word in power relations. Nixon and his resignation set the stage for an emerging ‘New Right,’ and the world unwittingly angled toward the coming decade of deregulation, austerity, increased military spending, widening wealth gaps, and other scorched earth policies of Reagan, Thatcher, and their ilk.

Amidst these instabilities, the world witnessed a rise in social justice movements. By the start of the 1980s, race, gender, sexuality, and ecological issues were the focuses of established special interest groups intent on (ideally compatible) liberation and equity. At the best of times, there could be witnessed a coalition politics that found shared concerns across taxonomies, subcultures, and regulated identities. Nonetheless, the emergence of unique political subject positions on the Left—what the second wave of feminism was calling a ‘standpoint’ at the time—and the valorization of the isolated, self-sufficient individual of the neo-liberal Right imploded the longstanding and privileged myth of a universal yet thoroughly bourgeois position from which art may be experienced. The totalized progress narrative of Modernism fragmented. The Post-Modern came to serve—quite awkwardly in retrospect—as a catch-all attempt to hold myriad differentiated concerns carried on the backs of particular lived experiences ballistically resistant to an organizing principle per se and critical of any historical carryover hierarchies.

It’s no wonder that these upsets brought with them a mistrust of conventional or traditional approaches to artmaking in favor of avant garde experimentation in performance, video, emergent installation

strategies, and sculptural offcuts from industrialized, advanced capitalist centers of manufacturing. To have decided to work as a painter and one preoccupied with a project of abstraction no less could very well have been dismissed as an exercise in the most baroque contours of futility.

When painting exploded back into the market after a feverishly brief hiatus, it brought with it a use of figuration and representation that was consistent with the so-called emergent identity politics of the day. While sculpture and installation largely eschewed source imagery, it could really only be called abstract to the extent that the materials used were often not altered into some form recognizable as other than the raw material itself. Too big to fail neo-expressionistic tendencies in the forms of Schnabels and Baselitzes kept step in this era with the rise of technologically reinforced global superpowers.

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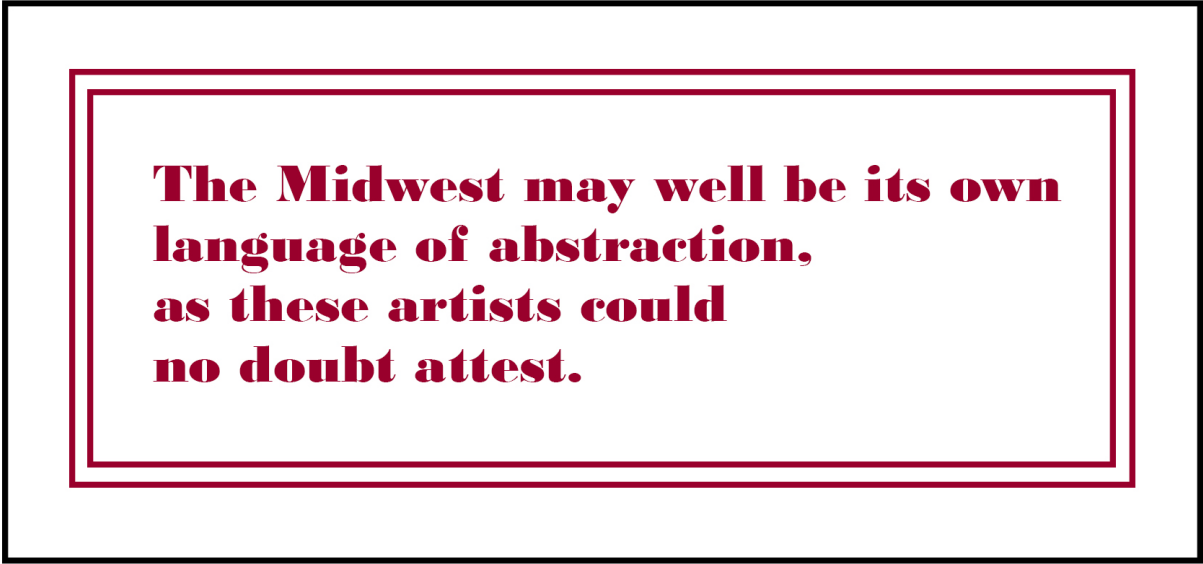
Only in 1986 did Hal Foster underscore a kind of burgeoning abstraction on the rise at the time, attributed variously as “generic,” “ironic,” “novel,” “irresponsibility,” “campy,” “kitsch,” “gratuitousness,” “*styles*,” “simulacra,” “false,” “*reaction*,” “parasitic,” “outmoded,” “outlandish,” “outré,” “indifferent pastiche,” and “passive pessimism.” [3] That’s quite a crucible mapped across a disowned combination of medium and method. The duplicitous, undermining character applied to abstract painting from that time is consistent with a permeating affect reflective of the period when wild oscillations between possibility and foreclosure marked out the border spaces for the postmodern project at the end of the century.

Concurrent with the postmodern turn in the last decades of the twentieth century was the rise of the conceptualization of—if not a true practical demonstration of—a horizontally-oriented model of globalization. Through the incorporation of the Internet into every aspect of daily life in developed nations, not to mention the spread of multinational corporate conglomerates and the rising jurisdictional influence of NGOs, visions circulated through the 1980s and 1990s of an increasingly decentralized network of power relations such that longstanding cultural epicenters might be redistributed—evenly, rhizomatically even—across available geographies. Braided into this futurism was the possibility of a destabilized coastal elite, with arts and entertainment capitals NYC and LA succeeded by an anywhere, everywhere, all at once optimism in step with email, instant banking, 24-hour news cycles, and other harbingers of a totalized and totally distributed cultural epoch. The art world’s evolution into calendars of commercial art fairs and curatorial biennials meant that the potential of a newfound spaciousness was subservient to patterns of lightning quick temporality: farflung *destinations* have come to be

incorporated into the cultural landscape, but only as temporary reprieves for the denizens of longstanding visual arts-haunted gothams.

In light of this, what values may be assigned to the escapees—those artists and cultural workers who have resisted dominant narratives that would favor only a scarce few sites for creative production? Among other shared features in the careers of the three artists under consideration, each have trackable movements inward from the coasts where they could bear witness firsthand to a persistent regionalism at odds with or otherwise entangled with the zeitgeist. Kim Krause’s graduate studies at the prestigious upstate-New York Bard College, Morgan’s early years in Philadelphia and a period spent just inland in North Carolina, and Sabina Ott’s ties to New York and years working in various cities in California: all three came to be installed in leadership roles within art schools around the American Midwest.

The Midwest may well be its own language of abstraction, as these artists could no doubt attest. Ostensibly settled along trade routes, river systems, and the resources of the Great Lakes, the lifespans of mid-sized cities dotting this territory are fascinating studies in contingency—the ways they adhere to, veer from, reinvent, cross-inform, and complicate notions of the urban that circulate from US Eastern and Western shores. Not called Rust Belt for nothing—and notably dubbed so as our painters here examined were beginning their studio careers—this is a region that has seen the biggest jobs entrusted to it historically replaced by new efficiencies and brokered arrangements of global trade. Entire industries collapsed and with them the reliability of an everyman Fordist logic that not only showed how this part bolted to the next part and then was firmly welded and ground into the part that followed, but offered similar reassurance for a predictable, Midwest-intoned Age of Man that anticipated modest American dreams achieved through steady employment, fair wages, valued labor, and the infrastructure of a supportive community of families.



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Dashed dreams deferred practically at the scale of a whole region, the Krause, Morgan, and Ott entries into Midwest-based art careers would certainly have been met with a queasy sense of possibility at odds with an underlying fatalism concerned with the futures of their new homes. Each in its own endearingly odd way, our mid-size burghs have worked to draw new industries, business, and jobs into their communities with special blends of mimesis, mistranslation, and surprising portmanteau within what

might be thought of as a specially Midwestern language of abstraction in urban planning. A city might try and get a light rail or a downtown trolley system like the ones spotted in larger metropolises; NYC's High Line might serve as a reference for creating their own Midwestern urban walking path—elevated or not. Sampling from boho arts and culture spotted in places like Austin and Portland, combined with 'shining city' makeovers to lure tech startups from the Bay Area by using aesthetics they recognize, and reinforced with incentives that will bring Hollywood movie making into the streets of, say, Chicago or Cleveland: the resultant mashups aren't only monsters of envy nor desperate exercises in importing and retaining residents and jobs. It's the fragments that get lost around the edges of an idea, the bits of clunk, gusto, and idealism that leave cosmopolitan impersonations by Midwestern towns misshapen in the most exciting ways possible that distinguish not only an active vantage from which to look upon the larger world, but also the slack left in those attempts that provide a curious alterity built in.

And so, whether or not coastal cultural epicenters take note, one can assume that—as in the urban planning, civil engineering, and futurist bricolage of the contemporary Midwestern city—there is also a particular vantage for the resident painter, one that isn't simply imitative of artists celebrated along the coasts, but in an uneasy dialogue with an array of technologies, identities, and time/space anomalies that produce not only a valid approach to making paintings and making a life in which those paintings are made, but one in crucial need of accounting in order to reckon a nation's cultural point of view more completely.

What began in all three artists' practices as a kind of architecturally minded division of compositional space has shifted over time and through tests into more fantastical, paradoxical, and virtual matrixes of matter and space to emphasize the building blocks themselves rather than any one structural solution that could be illustrated in their work. And while these painters have certainly loaded visual codes into the efforts at language to describe space and its possible inhabitants, it would appear that evolution in their respective projects was directed as much if not more by advancements in which might be called the means of production which accounts for how their art was made, what it was made out of, and underlying implications in the broader material and social realities to which the stuff of their work correspond.

There are certain attentive, reactive ways that the works included in this project correspond to the times in which they were made, more through technological advancements than particular milieu or stylistics of the period. Innovations in painting mediums—gels, thinners, permanent inks, fluid acrylics, and pastes, among other things—locate the painterly gesture in a dialogue with the tools and means available in that moment. This seems to be a lesson learned from the prior decade's Post-Minimalism, when many artists initially trained in painting became rampant in their experimentation with all kinds of materials newly innovated in a manufacturing economy on the rise. And it is that scope at which a material analysis of these paintings becomes so rich and meaningful: not simply that this or that painter was inquisitive about the latest offering from Golden Acrylics, but that tracing a timeline in which developments in synthetic pigments, water-based mediums, spray paint, digital technologies, and a wide array of surface supports are located historically makes all too evident the ways that the materials of this niche field in the arts advance in parallel to, say, the research and development of civil engineering, space races, war games, expanded uses for fossil fuels, or else a decided departure away from those dependencies. A structurally minded examination of the material lives of these artworks will incite discourses around such far reaching issues as geopolitical trade, crude oil futures, planned obsolescence, and as of yet unresolved but interrelated questions about ecological sustainability and artwork conservation.



In excess of the themes and prompts our trio have explored throughout their careers, it is critical to also approach their paintings as material records of the times and places in which they came to be, deeply informed by a technological landscape that may be easily taken for granted except at some years' remove.

Morgan is a technician whose intricacies belie the flood of affect that rushes through his prolific compulsion to lay out complication across surface planes. If he employs analytic techniques to the stages of producing a drawing or a painting, they are almost always psychoanalytic in nature, having worked there way up from Morgan's most private recesses. These activities are felt and then recorded variously into bodies of work that keep step with the artist's latest curiosities into the latent potential of this or that medium. A period in the 1990s is characterized by gorgeously fat accumulations of acrylic paints and gels, nearly always completed as shimmering monochromatic fields or loosely gestural arrays of pattern. Something is preserved from this excess in the following years during which drawing directed Morgan's interests more than the typical conventions of painting. A synthesis of that early material richness and years of drawing-like tactics makes itself visible in more recent densely annotated fields of looping and gyrating ghosts. His resultant works are fairytale quests comprising mazes and impossible adventures of discovery—both for Morgan himself and his viewers. A self and the possibility of an other, with a briar patch of circuits and stenciled systems expanding between them.

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For all the time period and general regionality that these artists have worked in common, of special curiosity are the ways that socially maintained markers of identity have interacted with their withdrawals into the languages of abstraction and painting. Gender, race, orientation, and a litany of other ways we are all distinguished within our society cannot be divorced from the artistic activities that take place within a given society that produces and enforces these distinctions. This is the case even if the work is not 'evidently' 'about' 'identity.'

Perhaps for our purposes there is a means of approaching the complicated dynamics of identity by way of an identity each of these artists came to claim for themselves—that of educator. Perhaps in considering their explorations and discoveries in abstract painting in direct relation to teaching, one of the other great commitments of each of their lives, we might render legible something about self definition in conflict with the regulations of an identified individual—subject, citizen, social actor.

To that end, while Sabina was a dear friend and Morgan has become a new object of my affection, and they both worked earnestly for years as art educators, it was Kim Krause with whom I studied most closely as an undergraduate art student in Cincinnati in the early 2000s. I recall realizing that the classroom was already a studio before it became enlisted into the project of learning, populated with a class of mostly young artists making their initial steps towards a studio practice of their own. There is an element of place-making in Krause's paintings which, however abstract are nonetheless often rendered into crisply defined figure/ground relationships. Anticipatory of the uncanny valley of visual forms produced by Pixar, CGI, VR, and metaversal inevitabilities, since early in the development of his studio practice, Krause's paintings have displayed a kind of reconciliation of fragments one could also find in Cezanne, Alex Olson, or Inka Essenhigh: for Kim's paintings, even the paradoxical has been bestowed with a sense of mass, weight, and physical presence within some sort of kaleidoscopic pocket dimension.

Stepping back in from studio toward classroom, I remember Kim distinguishing between the source material for an artwork and its resultant capacities for meaning. All of his major projects have been tethered to some cultural artifact: classical myth and literature, Medieval tapestries, an operetta. From these references he gathers some form of propulsion into the swooping movements and seriously playful forms that populate his paintings. These are not works of historical scholarship, rather they trace our cultural pasts into wild unknown futures.

I remember asking Kim close to the time when I graduated what he wanted us to get out of art school. He replied simply that he wanted to equip us with the tools we needed to reinvent ourselves and our work whenever the times came when we needed to. I believe he demonstrated the usefulness of doubt, the necessity for poetics, and a particularly Midwestern work ethic. As with his own layered, accumulated ways of making a painting, he encouraged us to invite rather than avoid a protracted process of making something and the personal journey it would afford.

To further the relationship that is then established between abstraction as an artistic preoccupation and learning as a lifelong one, far beyond the scope of academia but certainly not excluding academia either, one can ask what might be surmised from the uses of this shared vernacular as it has been tailored to each of our artist's individual purposes for decades of production. What might be learned, what might be known, from the looking—a primary, phenomenological encounter with compositional risks, unlikely color combination, lively geometric permutations, and the poetic titles these artists have attached to their paintings? Amidst other pursuits, what can be learned or known about the painter from her painting?

I do not show my own work in the classes I teach. Or, that is, I occasionally bring a group of particularly mature students to my studio, but otherwise, I feel my objective in the art school classroom is to facilitate learning along curricular goals, that is, an ethics and capacity for critical analysis that will serve aspiring artists in the development of a sustainable, lifelong engagement with their own studio work. That process—as anyone who has ever taught or studied may attest to—is humbling, circuitous, and flavored with a type of frustration that might be called character building. As much unlearning occurs as learning; usually more. Doubt is a friendly in these efforts.

Much of the same could be said of the disarming vulnerability endemic to observing the effects of artistic praxis, but the obstacle course is less an arrangement of flamboyant ideological impressions and more the tender task of coming to know someone through what they have done, have made, how they

have acted upon their material surroundings to aesthetic and affective consequence. Perhaps the perceived indirectness of abstraction is all the more of an indicator of the elusive knowledge of or about the artist therein contained. Even when Ott is permuting her way through tricky passages of Gertrude Stein or Krause is invoking esoteric figures in classical mythology, it is their predilection for these literary references that may be traced back to these artists and their exquisite minds. Their desire is showing. Likewise, as Morgan's practice develops into intricately layered systems, an interplay of presence and absence characterizes the compounded burial sites and erotic exposure between which the paintings convulse, vibrate. In all three cases, a flushed romantic forensics begins at their gesture, and from those swipes, scribbles, splays, spatters, stencils, and strokes a viewer might reverse engineer the body and also the libido from which the artwork in question has issued. There is no verification, no authorization, and really no regulation of this psychic material. All of us as artists risk becoming deeply knowable through the moves we make.

Abstraction as a project anticipates multiple patterns of breakages overlaid, an inherent capacity for pieces to come apart like an erector set in reverse. There is, then, a material irony in abstract painting that as the surface accumulates and builds thickness in layers, its departure from its starting place grows more pronounced, its correspondence to an organized rote image-world further destabilized. Accretion into fracture. Up to a point this is a deconstructive episteme with intent: an insightful skepticism, a way of looking that is always autopsy. Perhaps the most provocative stages of this abstracting is death: an archive of art objects permanently separated from her author.

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Sabina Ott passed away in the summer of 2018 after several years battling cancer. In mapping the trajectories of a practice, how it evolves, doubles down, interrogates itself into growth, there is this threshold of loss rendered as an inevitability. More surreal than those of us who survive loved ones is the lifespan of the artworks that outlive who made them. In many cases, there is irretrievable knowledge of ideal installation instructions, means of conservation, latent content, and the truest insider's perspective of how all the work interacts with itself. This modest outing dances sideways along the stalwart efforts ongoing to archive and catalogue Sabina's surviving works; her remembered presence in this exhibition is made possible by a number of private collectors and Columbia College Chicago who received over three hundred works by Ott into its collection at the time of her passing. I note these conditions in order

to make the claim that content, meaning, and the profound implications of context outlive us. The retrospectively minded conversations I've been afforded with Morgan and Kim only make the impossibility of such a meeting of minds with Sabina all the more stark. For instance, several works on view were first shown in immersive installation environments, with only selected fragments preserved by the artist after those ephemeral exhibitions ended. In some cases, the work is in a different condition than it was when last shown.

While questions of conservancy and stewardship might orbit, in the context of this inquiry, wonderment follows on how an encaustic painting made in direct dialogue with the advent of digital technologies can be seen and understood now when a patina of age and circulation marks the edges and surfaces of the work. In Ott's feisty formalism, rude collisions were never to be avoided. In fact, she took note of how awkwardly the digital came to be integrated into a world organized by analog precursors, and drew inspiration from the glitchy, broken syntaxes that resulted. They called to mind experimental poetry from the beginning of the century as well as a devil may care spirit of assemblage and bricolage techniques that processed through art projects that came to define the feminist movement. Adherence to conventions of craft or even a kind of isolated purity of medium were just other power dynamics demanding obedience, and from her earliest works included in this exhibition, it's clear that Sabina Ott was always more excited by transgression, cross contamination, volatile fluctuations between transparency and opacity, and an accompanying politics of joy and rage.

So then no matter the physical properties of the works that now walk alone without their maker, however they behave can be read as a latent politics of engagement within the realm of the social. Fragile, delicate, tough, scrappy, or some other degree of resilience all serve as indicators of the resilience of these greater, sweeping conceptual positions to which Ott's works speak. If we reencounter these works in a condition of some disruption, so too are we navigating an uncertain time when the very usefulness of abstraction as a tool is caught in a struggle to be inverted.

In an age of the Trump presidency, capitol insurrection, crypto-currencies, and the indisputable slippage from nation states as the unit of global power toward a privatized business sector that envelopes the planet and even erects itself in an orientation toward the colonization of so-called outer space, abstraction has been doing something else over the past six or so years. This has been an insouciant, pernicious movement not away from the Real or the sourced image, but away from the true and the efficacious. In many contexts, abstraction has registered as an unnecessary risk. As the rigid monolith of the far religious Right has dissipated into a (just as powerful if not more) fluid, amorphous rhetorical battle full of internal conflicts, breaks in chains of command, and a QAnon-inflected paranoia, distortion has been the proximal strategy to a vestigial Modernism's abstract/ed forms. As public discourse has decried 'fake news,' 'gaslighting,' and 'subterfuge' across party lines and in the service of burgeoning justice movements, there's been a mostly undisputed premium directed at the most authenticated authenticity, the most earnest and self-evident sincerity, and the purest measurement of veracity—this at the expense of transgressions of normativities, the crafting of elaborate counter-narratives, and an indispensable kind of return of the repressed into the real that may only be facilitated by abstracting apertures and an accompanying capacity for dialectical extrapolations. Without easy distinctions between true and false (nor simple mappings of the relative positions for which such a binary remains operative), abstraction clarifies rather than distorts, offering polyphonic perspectives on a given object of inquiry through a tendency to process one syllable at a time.

Abstract painting is in a period of recovery after a number of libelous years in which the illusionistic qualities of representation and figuration have been celebrated as a dignifying, life affirming force to the exclusion of most or all other visual strategies. Artists are likewise treating ourselves for the trauma of being deprived of (or at least directed away from) our most capricious, fiercely liberatory tools with which to address the worlds through which we are made to navigate. I have reapproached these three artists' practices with a sense of gravity and urgency: by their model, I hope to trace a schema for staying close and bearing witness to troubling times while refusing to either speak in the language of the oppressor/s or reconstitute the substantive features of abuses of power through continued representation within an oppositional argument. Abstraction as it's been used by Sabina, Kim, and Morgan is refusal as an aggressive tactic. In their paintings, they open up portals. As many of their bodies of work are entangled with literary precedents, they may be seen as the illuminators of manuscripts, who to the surprise of all do not simply illustrate what has already been said, but propose new positions in parallel to the narrative and pacing of their source materials. The gathering of these works acts against the unfair attribution that those who cannot, teach, and even worse do so in the flyover states between coasts. Along with a reanimation of the abstract languages in which these painters prophecy, this research and exhibition advances a categorical, positivistic description of both the regional and the pedagogical as frameworks for lives lived making art. And with each stroke, each canvas, and each oeuvre remembered, we might venture into even broader, more open territories.

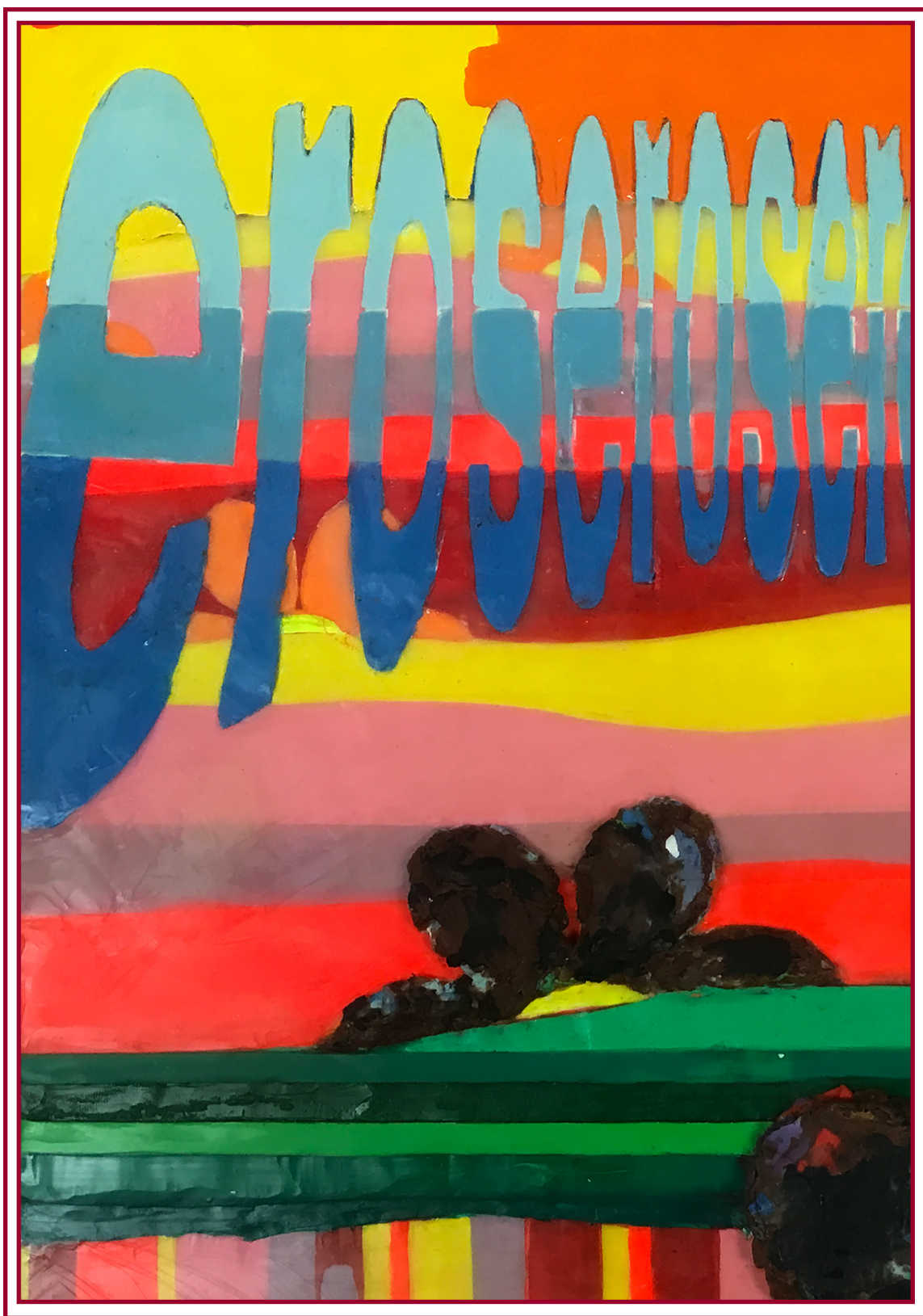
## Endnotes

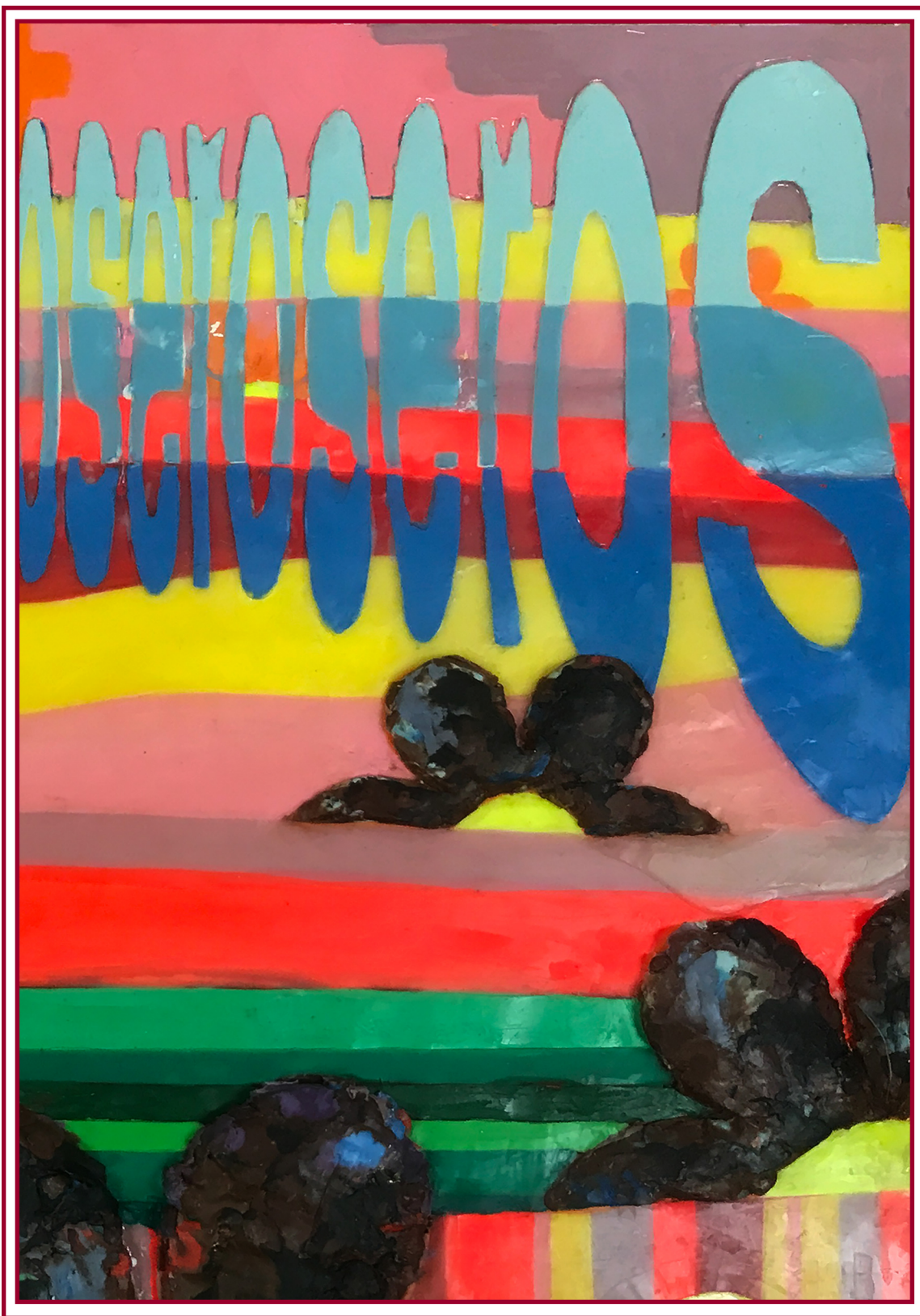
[1] Arnold J. Kemp. "for m.w." *Canyon–Daisy–Eden*. Saratoga Springs: the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, in association with Gagosian, 2021.

[2] Amy Sillman. *Between Artists: Amy Sillman in conversation with Gregg Bordowitz*. Page 35.

[3] Hal Foster. "Signs Taken for Wonders // 1986." *PAINTING*. Editor Terry Myers. Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art, 2011. Print, pp. 47–51.









# **Thought is a process underway**

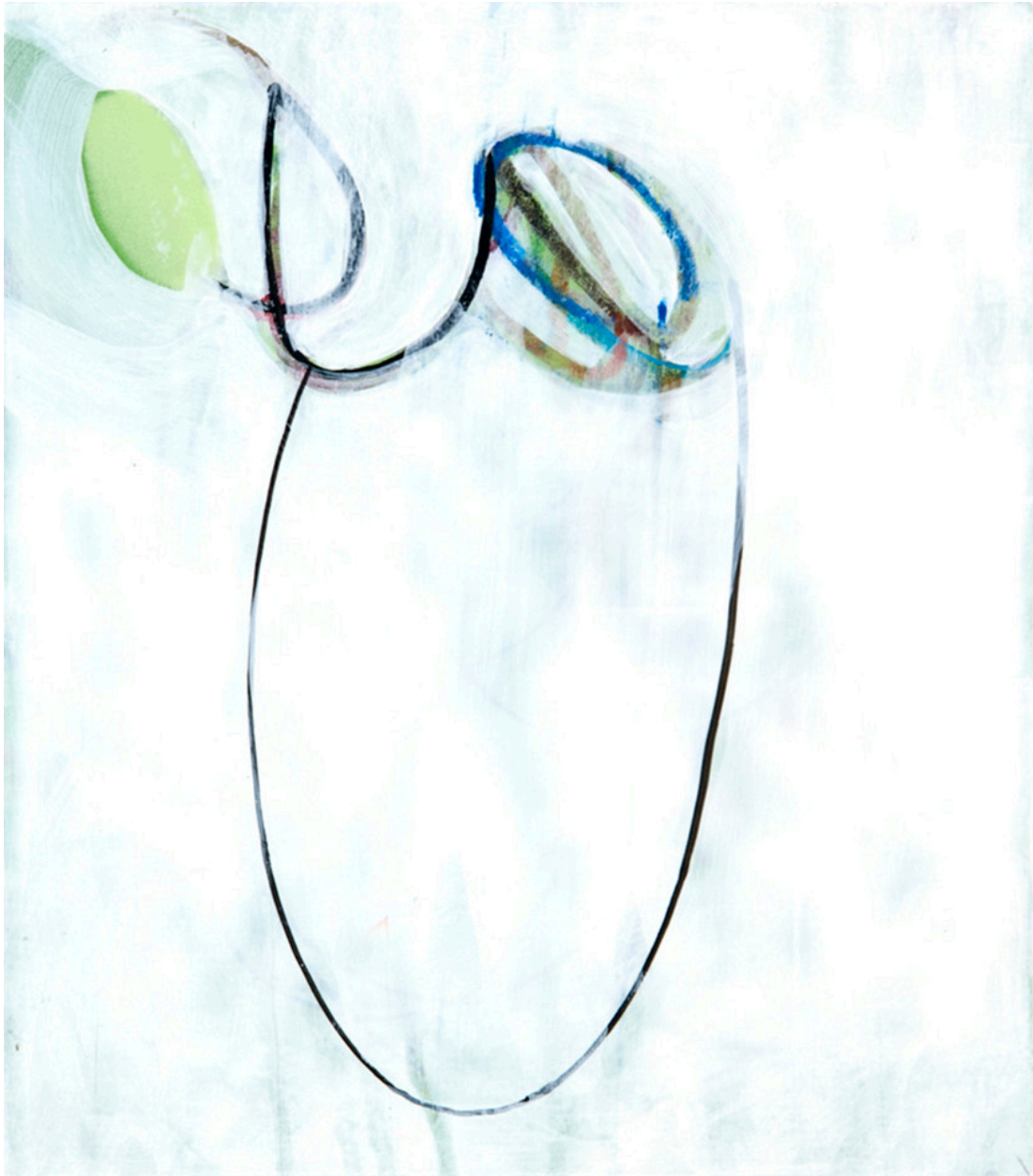
**The interpretation of an abstract painting is something that often mystifies the viewer however looking at a painting that has forms that are unfamiliar the painting in fact leads the viewer somewhere and takes the viewer with it, more precisely, they are being driven by the questions that the painting or drawing have raised. The form shapes colors and linear patterns pushes the viewer forward in thought. In this sense thought serves as an open pathway to zones of the imagination.**

**Morgan, 2022**





Kim Krause. *nepenthe Studies Series 3 #3*, 2010  
Mixed media on multimedia Artboard, 15.375" x 13.5"



Kim Krause. *nepenthe Studies Series 1 #2*, 2010,  
Mixed media on paper, 8.5" x 7.5"



Kim Krause. *Pangloss #16*, 2022  
Acrylic and spray paint on multimedia Artboard, 16.5" x 11"





Kim Krause. *Pangloss #9*, 2022  
Acrylic and spray paint on multimedia Artboard, 16.5" x 11"



Installation view of works on paper by Morgan included in  
“The Beginning of Everything: An Exhibition of Drawings”  
January 21 - March 28, 2020  
Katherine E. Nash Gallery  
University of Minnesota  
Minneapolis, MN

## **Curator's Acknowledgements**

**I am so thankful to the Ralph Arnold Gallery and Loyola University for hosting this exhibition and research. In particular, gallery directors Betsy Odom and Rafael Vera have been inimitable hosts, supporting the ambition, growth, and risks that are part of an undertaking of this scale.**

**Following on Sabina Ott's passing in 2018, working on an exhibition that includes work spanning her career has required the cooperation and shared vision of numerous institutions and individuals: my deep thanks to Columbia College Chicago, Duncan MacKenzie, Heidi Marshall, Michelle Wasson and Joel Farran, Lise Haller Baggesen and Jonathan Ross, Jeff Robinson and Erin Hayden—you have all assisted in re-assembling a striking memory of an artist we all loved.**

**So much gratitude to Eric Ruschman and the Ruschman Gallery, Jennifer Armetta and Engage Projects, Amira Hegazy, André Marin, Michelle Grabner, and the gallery staff and student workers for all the diverse ways they've shown up and helped to make this project a reality. Thank you for working with my questions, my excitement, and my desire to build richer context around these three artists and the times and places in which they've worked.**

**My tender fondness, thanks, and remembrance is devoted to Sabina Ott, a friend who taught me so much about community, chosen family, and trajectories for growth as an artist committed for life.**

**And most of all, I want to express an outsized gratitude for Kim Krause and Morgan, two living role models who trusted me and the premise of this exhibition. Thank you for opening up your archives, for time traveling with me, and for being a part of this jubilant, judicious installation of painting.**

**Love,  
matt.**

