



## The Seventh Time Around

*Jeffrey Cortland Jones and Paige Williams team up again*

**MATT MORRIS** // MAR 18, 2009

There are few exhibition spaces in Cincinnati as dependable and consistent in quality as Aisle Gallery. Its current exhibition, *Almost Certain*, features two series of abstract paintings by Jeffrey Cortland Jones and Paige Williams. Remarkably, this is the *seventh* time these two painters have shown together.

Even before they met, Jones and Williams were running in the same circles; both are part of close-knit communities of local artists with shared aesthetic concerns. Yet they don't get together and catch up very often.

"We run these parallel lives," Jones says, meeting with Williams at Aisle recently to discuss their work.

Both artists credit their practices to their art educations in the area, their parenting of their small children and their experiences as art professors (Williams teaches painting at the Art Academy of Cincinnati, while Jones teaches classes at University of Dayton).

Apart from clear admiration of each other's painting projects, there are shared approaches toward art that make their work complementary when shown together.

"We may be saying different things, but we're using the same language," Williams says. "We don't think about painting in terms of rules. I've tried to help make a community out of what I want my work to do. Jeff is so able to let the ego go when it comes to the work."

From previous local exhibitions, Williams' paintings have the reputation of being colorful with designed minimalist leanings. So the biggest surprise in this body of paintings on paper is the near-total absence of color. The grids and blocks that have populated her paintings for some time are painted in even, flat layers of black, gray and silver and framed with mattes that are the palest ice blue.

"The grids reference a lot of domestic things, like windows, doors, quilts, nets and ladders — things that are found in 'the home,' " she says. She compares the process of removing color to the changes that occur while raising a child.

"I read *Operating Instructions* by Anne Lamott right after Max (her son) was born," she says. "It was about having a kid, but even more so I think it relates to the artwork. She said that as kids grow up, the things you've loved about them in earlier stages don't disappear, they just become incorporated into them. I think the same way about the things you work through in your work. It's not like you get rid of it, it just gets incorporated as you move on."

It is that kind of insight that makes Jones comment to Williams, in admiration: "Your work is so honest."

For his part, Jones presents one series of paintings on plywood-like OSB panel and another series of small, transparent vellum works marked with black paint and installed ethereally across the entrance wall to the gallery space. These were sections of Jones' studio wall, cut out like a Gordon Matta-Clark piece and then worked over with layers of resin and acrylic painting.

“After my last big show, I looked at my studio wall and thought that it was the most beautiful, honest painting I had ever made,” he says. “It was simply the accumulation of making paintings. So I ripped the wall down, took it to the woodshop, and cut it down into squares.”

Hearing this prompts Williams to say of Jones, by way of returning a compliment, “He’s way braver than I am. He’s gutsier than I am.”

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**ALMOST CERTAIN continues at Aisle Gallery (424 Findlay St., Over-the-Rhine, 513-241-3403) through March 27. Gallery hours are 1-4 p.m. Monday-Friday.**

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