



GALLERIES | CATE MCQUAID

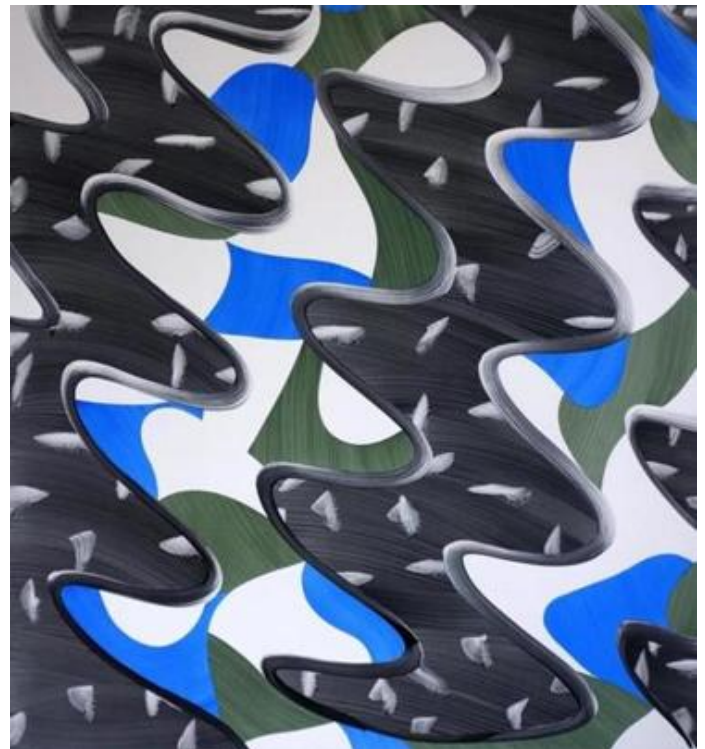
Approaching abstraction systematically

By **Cate McQuaid** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MARCH 30, 2017

Abstraction can be off-putting. The curators of “Abstract Systems” propose a way in: See the art as a system.

The show, at Lasell College’s Wedeman Gallery, includes paper constructions arising from maps, a painting that mimics memory’s protean quality, canvases about comedy, and works describing climate change. To evoke these subjects, layer, strategies, or beats are required. The art develops from them.

Organizers Lisa Reindorf and Andrea Fogle Plotkin have gathered a terrific roster of artists, including painters Barbara Grad and Jennifer Moses and rogue draughtsman Debra Weisberg, whose three-dimensional “drawings,” made with paper, salt, and nail polish, look like gritty crystal formations. Many of the works are frustratingly small; artists such as these have the chops to command a wall.



“Drift,” Stephanie McMahon, oil on panel.

And some do. In “Drift,” painter Stephanie McMahon explores the relationship between past and present. Wildly undulating gray verticals dance against a white ground animated by wind-blown blue and green banners. McMahon sets the allure of the gray’s brushed-on texture against the snappy, sterile, unmarked white. The eye falls into the gray, like velvet or fog (or the past), then ricochets off the white. Add to that the breathless dance of lines, and you’ve got a playground.

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In his digitally altered photographs, Wally Gilbert slices up and weaves city scenes, cranking color values off the charts. Ember red burns against royal purple, and lemon yellow pops against red and violet, in “Torn Building Tower — Triptych.” Zing! The three narrow vertical panels echo forms of the buildings they depict, which tumble, fold, and open into dazzling, game-board grids.

All this wall-hung art operates within painting’s system, which includes composition, tone, gesture, and the figure/ground dynamic. It’s true: If you don’t know that rubric, it can shut you out. For an alternate approach, read the artists’ statements — on hand in a book, and not, unfortunately, mounted near the art they refer to. Still, they prove there’s more than one way to look at abstract art.

ABSTRACT SYSTEMS