

# SEARS·PEYTON·GALLERY

## NEW YORK·LOS ANGELES

**Fran O'Neill**

### CV

b. Wangaratta, Victoria, Australia

Lives and works in Brooklyn, New York

#### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2019 TW Fine Art, Brisbane, Australia

*Changing Tides*, Hathaway Contemporary, Atlanta, GA

*Change Rooms in Your Mind for a Day*, West End Art Space, Melbourne, Australia

*Divergence*, Sears Peyton Gallery, New York, NY

2017 *Next Move*, TW Fine Art, Brisbane, Australia

*Exuberance*, BMG ART, Adelaide, Australia

*The Stage @ The Emporium*, via RENEW Newcastle, Australia

*Moving Through*, Hathaway Contemporary, Atlanta, GA

*Abstraction*, Sublime Gallery @ DeLo, Jacksonville, FL

*Sensing Place*, David & Schweitzer, Brooklyn, NY

2016 *Magical Thinking*, CUAC, Salt Lake City, UT

*Fran O'Neill*, Miller Gallery, Cincinnati, OH

2015 *Annex Space*, Greenwich Art Society, CT

*Steel Plant*, Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY

*Painting Her Way Home*, Life on Mars Gallery, Brooklyn, NY

2014 *Art Around the Park*, Morristown, NJ

2013 Sussex Coast College, Hastings, England, UK

2012 New York Studio School, NY, NY

2011 Perimeter Gallery, Belfast, Maine

Scared Chow Gallery, NY, NY

2009 John Davis Gallery, Hudson, NY

2007 Perimeter Gallery, Belfast, ME

#### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2021 *Spring Selections*, Sears-Peyton Gallery, New York, NY

2019 *Poetic Symbol*, West End Art Space, Melbourne, Australia

*Color Moves*, Green Door Gallery, Brooklyn, NY

*Surface Spectrum*, Mash Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

*Divergence*, Sears-Peyton Gallery, New York, NY

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- 2018 *East Australian Current*, TW Fine Art, Brisbane, Australia  
*Christmas Show*, BMG Art, Adelaide, Australia  
*High Summer*, Sears Peyton Gallery, New York, NY  
*Abstract Tendencies: Works by Contemporary Abstract Painters*, Hathaway Contemporary, Atlanta, GA  
*Call & Response; Reinterpreting MOCA Jacksonville's Permanent Collection*, MoCA Jacksonville, FL
- 2017 *Yellow Chair*, David & Schweitzer, Brooklyn, NY  
*Bands of Color; The Use of Line in Contemporary Art*, MoCA Jacksonville, FL  
*Fresh Produce*, Hathaway Contemporary, Atlanta, GA  
*The Other Side of Things: Women of Abstraction*, Garrison Art Center, Garrison, NY  
POP UP – Nic Graham Interiors, Sydney, Australia  
*Translucent*, McKenzie Fine Art, New York, NY  
Kempner Fine Art, New York, NY  
*Flat Files*, David & Schweitzer, Brooklyn, NY
- 2016 *Christmas Show*, BMG Art, Adelaide, Australia  
*Sensing Place*, Newburgh, NY  
*A Cup of Sugar*, Lorimoto, Bushwick, NY  
*Confronting the Canvas*, Museum of Contemporary Art MOCA, Jacksonville, FL  
*An Occasional Dream*, Life on Mars, Bushwick, NY  
*All Tomorrows Parties*, Hathaway David, Atlanta, GA  
*Drishti – A Concentrated Gaze*, 1280 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY  
*Sideshow on Mars*, Life on Mars, Bushwick, NY
- 2015 *Wanderer*, Pluspace, Coventry at Angelika Studios, High Wycombe, England  
*Checkered History: The Grid in Art & Life*, Outpost, Bushwick, NY  
*Paintings in Trees*, The People's Garden, Bushwick, NY  
*Eating Painting*, 308 at 156 Project Art Space, New York, NY  
*Thrice Legendary, or Forever Thens*, Centotto, Bushwick, NY  
*Pure Paint for NOW People*, Weber University, UT  
*Family Ties*, 500X Gallery, Dallas, TX  
*A Weekend at the Old Gem*, 695 Grand St, Brooklyn, NY  
*New Work City*, Momenta Art, curated by Julie Torres, Brooklyn, NY
- 2014 *21st Anniversary Exhibition*, Painting Center, NY  
*Aggregate: Six*, Long Island City, NY  
*Form and Fracture*, Paul W Zuccaire Gallery, Stony Brook University, NY  
*City as Subject*, Bethune Gallery, NY; Curated by Xico Greenwald  
*Second Family*, 2 Rivington, NY; Curated by Julie Torres

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*Family Style*, formerly Pocket Utopia, NY; Curated by Julie Torres

*Never Mind the Bollock's*; Summer Invitational – Life on Mars, Bushwick, NY

*Indexical Mark*, Life on Mars, Bushwick, NY

*Painting Invitational* – Paducah School of Art and Design, Paducah, KY

- 2013 *Scale*, Life on Mars Gallery, Bushwick, NY  
Grand Haven Art Walk – Grand Haven, MI  
Art Prize – Grand Rapids, MI  
*Flight from Nature*, National Arts Club, NY, NY  
*Aquarelle*, Dickson State University Gallery, ND
- 2012 *First Street Gallery*, MFA Summer Show, NY  
Gary Snyder Project Space; Brooklyn College MFA Exhibit – NY  
*Wet Paint*, Zhou B. Art Center, Chicago, IL
- 2011 *Cluster Bomb*, Bowery Poetry Club, NY  
*Double Spaced* – Brooklyn College  
Charles Lahati Gallery, Brooklyn, NY  
John Davis Gallery, Hudson, NY
- 2009 *Four heads*, Governor's Island, NY  
Perimeter Gallery, Belfast Maine
- 2007 *Painting in New York*, 46 Warren St, NY, NY  
Perimeter Gallery, Belfast, Maine  
John Davis Gallery, Hudson, NY
- 2006 Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY
- 2005 Liman Studio Gallery, Palm Beach, FL

### EDUCATION

- 2012 MFA – Brooklyn College
- 2001 Certificate – New York Studio School (NYSS)
- 1997 Post Grad – Monash University, Melbourne, Australia
- 1994 BFA – Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

### AWARDS

- 2013 Acker Award – San Francisco division
- 2010 Shaw Award, Brooklyn College
- 2007 Joan Mitchell Foundation Award
- 2000 Hohenberg Travel award, NYSS
- 2000 Rosalyn Edwards Scholarship, Pen & Brush Inc., New York

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### REVIEWS

Karen Wilkin, "At the Galleries," *Hudson Review*, X-Marks the Spot; NYSS Alumni Exhibition, Fall 2018.

Carrie McCarthy, "Fran O'Neill's Next Move," *Cultural Flanerie*, Aug, 2017.

David Cohen, "Fran O'Neill at David \$ Schweitzer," *Art Critical*, January 31, 2017.

Karen Wilkin, *Hudson Review*, Vol LXIX, NO.3 – Autumn 2016, pages 477–8.

Erin Thursby, "Color me Abstract: Confronting the Canvas at MOCA Jacksonville," *EU Jacksonville*, July 24, 2016.

Charlie Patton, "Abstract expressionists showcased in MOCA's 'Confronting the Canvas,'" *The Florida Times Union*, June 10, 2016.

Jaime Desimone, "Fran O'Neill Never Planned to be an Abstract Painter," *MOCA Jacksonville*, June 9, 2016.

"Confronting the Canvas: Women of Abstraction," *MOCA Jacksonville*, 2016.

Karen Wilkin, *Hudson Review*, Vol LXVIII, NO.1 – Spring 2015, pages 105–6.

James Panero, "Gallery Chronicle," *The New Criterion*, February 2015.

Jonathon Goodman, "In Hot Pursuit: Fran O'Neill at The New York Studio School," *Art Critical*, 28 September, 2012.

Mario Naves, "Fran O'Neill at the New York Studio School," *Too Much Art*; September 2012.

Nancy Jones, "A Sacred Legacy," *Art Slant*; May 31, 2010.

David Cohen, "Fran O'Neill at John Davis Gallery," *Art Critical*, April 10, 2009.

Karen Wilken, *Hudson Review*, Summer 2011

### BLOGS

<https://thenewschoolart.org/blog/featured-artist-may-2015-fran-oneill/>

<https://gallerytravels.blogspot.com.au/2014/09/fran-oneill-studio-visit.html>

<http://www.painters-table.com/blog/eating-painting>

[http://structureandimagery.blogspot.com.au/2014/03/the-indexical-mark-life-on-mars\\_23.html](http://structureandimagery.blogspot.com.au/2014/03/the-indexical-mark-life-on-mars_23.html)

<http://kioskderdemokratie.blogspot.de/2015/04/shimmer-fran-oneill-usa.html>

<http://tnsoart.com/featured-artist-may-2015-fran-oneill/>

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## NEW YORK·LOS ANGELES

**Fran O'Neill**

### **Artist Statement**

An Australian-American, O'Neill, was born in Wangaratta, Australia, and currently lives and works between Australia and Brooklyn, New York.

O'Neill attended Monash University, Melbourne, Australia, earning a BFA and Post Graduate Degree. Her post-graduate work continued at the New York Studio School's Certificate Program, and her MFA was completed at Brooklyn College in 2012. In 2007 she received a Joan Mitchell Foundation award. O'Neill's solo exhibitions include at David Schweitzer Contemporary, Bushwick, NY; Hathaway Contemporary, Atlanta, GA and Miller Gallery, Cincinnati, OH; BMG Gallery, Adelaide, Australia; TW Fine Art, Brisbane, Australia; Life on Mars Gallery, Brooklyn, NY, John Davis Gallery, NY; New York Studio School, NY; and Sussex College, Hastings, UK. In 2016 her work was exhibited at MOCA in Jacksonville, FL in a group exhibition titled Confronting the Canvas: Women of Abstraction.

O'Neill's work has been included in various group shows through out the USA and in Australia. She has recently taught at the New York Studio School, Arts Students League and Pratt Institute.

Her work resides in private collections in the USA, Australia and UK, and in the permanent collection of MOCA Jacksonville, FL.

## Fran O'Neill at David & Schweitzer

by David Cohen

*artcritical*

January 31st, 2017

Maybe it helps to know that Fran O'Neill has a deep past in figurative painting rooted in perception and drawing from life: that would make sense of the compositional acuity, vivacious economy and voluptuous sense of bodily connection in her beefy, boisterous forms. It might also explain why they sometimes recall Howard Hodgkin though they are far less polite in dispatch. Or why the brushstrokes remind us of Juan Uslé but with more generational purpose. But the highest compliment one can pay to these audacious paintings is that the artist's formal groundings aren't beaten into them. They are abstract, hard and fast.



## Color Me Abstract: Confronting the Canvas at MOCA Jacksonville

By Erin Thursby

*EU Jacksonville*

July 24, 2016

When interviewing some of the various artists for *Confronting the Canvas: Women of Abstraction*, there were two words that kept cropping up from the artists: physicality and color. Jill Nathanson says, “The two things together are central to the way the color moves through us. The paint has to move to engage you in that process.” And so, the artists have to move and use their bodies to achieve that. Fran O’Neill dons a raincoat and gloves to her elbows, using her arms as giant brushes. Jackie Saccoccio says that her process is something like a dance. She works on multiple canvases, using the drips of color from one to change another, perhaps a bit like a dancer changing partners, going from one to another as the spirit moves her and the paint allows. “There’s a performative aspect to my paintings,” says Saccoccio. That’s an aspect that people rarely understand, except in the few cases where a video is posted of her process, but it’s something, if you know about it, that can inform a viewing of her work.

For artist Fran O’Neill, her art is about subtraction, the act of wiping things away on the canvas with her arms as the brush. Looking at it, I felt as though I was viewing some next-level sophisticated, large-scale finger painting, with each abstraction touching on a series of different feelings and impressions almost unreachable. All of the artists in this show seem to have an innate understanding of layering and translucency, but hers is unique in the active process of taking away layers more often. The other artists in this show most actively layer one thing atop another—O’Neill’s tendency is to layer and strip away, perhaps layering again, which makes for some very intriguing canvases. She says that she works by going into her zone, starting with, she says, “Coffee and brain work.” The best work happens for her when she’s given up on a piece, because that’s when she starts taking the risks which pay off for her artistically. Those bits that are just on the edge of perception, color just peeking through behind a layer, are her “ghosts of memory,” a colorful shadow of what came before, which you can only see through her reduction of layers.

Even though this exhibition is an all female show, none of the artists we spoke to feel that’s the main reason you should see this showing. In a perfect world, for Jackie Saccoccio, an artist’s gender wouldn’t be foremost. She and her husband are both artists, they’ve both had their share of struggles and successes. “I don’t think that women should refer to themselves as women artists,” she says, “Just artists. That’s true equality. Mostly I like the painters that were in for the

show.” When she saw the list, she felt strongly that all the artists were, she says, “Pursuing very different paths, so it’s exciting to be in a show like this.”

Jackie Saccoccio’s work begins with notebooks filled with notes on different paints, forms, and colors. She doesn’t generally refer back to the inspiration of her pieces as she works, more often concentrating on the feelings and colors she has in memory. Her jumping off point mainly comes from the portraiture of 15–1600s, drawing from the works of greats such as Correggio. The inspiration for one piece came simply from the curve of an arm in a portrait by Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez, who is probably the most admired portrait artist of that era. Her abstract results seem far from the highly realistic and structured work that has inspired them. She produces large-scale canvases of drip-driven paint, works of structured improvisation, forming complex lattice-works over layers of abstraction, with contrast not only in color, but in texture and sheen, since she layers shiny mica infused paint over and under matte paint. Those contrasts are the reason why her works are best seen in person, as only a special printing could come close to conveying that. She mixes her own paints, which are inspired by 16th and 17th century paints, and that makes for a lot of drying time. The dance of painting she has with a particular canvas can last anywhere from six weeks to three months.

Jill Nathanson’s work is so subtle and so dependant on translucency that her work is something you have to see in person, as it could never be properly translated into a print, like those musicians whose work is best enjoyed live. The translucent polymers, acrylics, and handmade oils are poured and layered on to the canvas in fields of color. Besides the physical pouring of the work, Nathanson engages in a deeper aspect prior to engaging the canvas, starting with what she wants to achieve, thinking about color interaction and doing color experiments to see what will work. Most often, she says, people experience a sense of calm when looking at her work. For those who look deeper, she hopes to achieve a sense of “intense meditation” and hopes that those viewing her work not only find that sense of calm but will also feel “very alive at the same time.”

As the oldest artist in the show, Nathanson has been painting since the 1970s. She believes that this is a pivotal moment, and the most exciting time to be an artist that she’s experienced thus far. For her, *Confronting the Canvas* captures the essence of abstract art today. She feels that for a long time, people tried to make that next great work of art to become the next art star rather than being devoted to the art itself, a wearying state of affairs. But in this past decade, she says, it’s been the people who are just fascinated by the process, who really love art, who work alone in their studios trying to stretch the bounds of art that are now making their mark on the art world. Nathanson feels that the show “encapsulates the energy and experimental concepts.” Each artist in the exhibition, she says, is using the language of painting to get to a feeling of huge possibilities.



## Fran O'Neill Never Planned To Be An Abstract Painter

By Jaime Desimone

*MOCA Jacksonville*

June 9, 2016

The paintings of Australian-born Fran O'Neill rely upon a construction/deconstruction equation, where she uses her physical body to produce, alter, destroy, and recreate oversized gestures. Layer upon layer, O'Neill applies paint only to swipe, smear, and remove it with her body or another material. Her paintings are as much as an additive process as a subtractive one, where at times she reinvents imagery on the same canvas. In preparation for *Confronting the Canvas: Women of Abstraction*, O'Neill answered a few questions about her process and the ideas behind her work.

### **Describe your approach to painting.**

Having grown up in Australia and currently living in the city of New York, the mixing of past experiences of my life become and feed my painting. The ability to manipulate oil paint and watercolor is core to my practice; abstraction, color, movement of the paint, and shifting scale all come into play on the canvas/paper. I crave space, and how "space" can be open, compressed, complex, grand, intimate, and sometimes, all within the same image, intrigues me.

I look for moments in life that have a special or unexpected quality about them. Perhaps it is the way that light hits a surface, or the juxtaposition of shapes, textures or a tiny happening, a memory or a fragment of a dream or reality. There are times when I glimpse something, and I have no idea what I am looking at, or when the strangeness of real life seems dreamlike or indescribable for a split second, then materializes into focus. Sometimes it's that fleeting moment that catches my eye and plays in my imagination. I don't necessarily seek to recreate what I have seen but more the experience of how it felt and how I perceived it. I entwine those experiences with others, and as I begin to paint, and with that, the direct application of paint in the moment can add its own dynamic to the image-making process.

The act of creating becomes "all important" in my process, exploring the fluid movement of the paint as I apply it. How to recreate the tension or emotive quality without needing to name, locate, or describe a narrative or an exact experience/memory. Broad movements, simplified palettes versus intricate and sometimes cluttered space(s). Seeing the process take place on the canvas—drips, glimpses of under layers, forms take shape and/or break down on the surface, the rotation of the canvas, all coalesce to make a whole. My process is organic, intuitive, and improvisational.

I seek to always surprise myself, and with that, I am intent on researching beyond my “go-to mediums,” as I believe it is always necessary for an artist to continually reinvent one's imagery and not to be afraid of where that journey takes me. Striving for newness and to be open to change is a necessary part of my practice.

**How did you develop this unusual approach to abstraction?**

I never planned on being an abstract painter. It was a natural and curious progression that began with working from perception. I began as a figure painter and moved to landscape painting. After a conversation with a friend who knew that I have sewn some of my own clothes, wondered if I'd ever considered using "patterns in my work," and I began to use patterned material from various locations as backdrops, teamed with a Balinese doll. Slowly, the doll began to exit the work, and the patterning took precedent. The use of pattern from highly repetitious work began to be more sporadic, and I discovered that it was “mark-making and movement” of the paint that really excited me. This has kept me occupied for sometime now.

**What ideas do you explore in your work?**

Movement, scale, light, and color. I'm always seeking to surprise myself.

**Describe your color palette.**

My color palette changes with each painting. I've been known to buy a color that I find ugly or just can't imagine using. Sometimes I use it straight away, other times it sits on my studio table for months, until the moment calls for it. I am after creating light with color and any means necessary to achieve this. No color is out of the question.

**Describe your titles. What meaning do they convey?**

I deliberately title work in “lowercase,” as I consider the title to be secondary to the painting and more of a way of identifying one from another, not necessarily the “meaning” of the work. I seek simple one- or two-word phrases that don't give too much of a narrative, to allow viewers to have their own experience, not to be swayed by my thinking. Sometimes I use lines from song titles. I've been known to retitling work, until a word or phrase sticks to the image.

**What does “abstraction” mean to you?**

Now that's a big question. Today, for me it has to do with sensuality and sensibility, in terms of surface. To me there is abstraction in figuration and landscape. It could be the simplification an idea to obtain its essence? Or does that sound just like some “art talk” ...

**Who, if any, abstract painters have influenced your work?**

I've looked at the Abstract Expressionists and others including but not limited to Philip Guston, Joan Mitchell, Lee Bontecou, Helen Frankenthaler, Terry Winters, Elizabeth Murray, Joanne

Greenbaum, Amy Sillman, Bill Jensen, Margrit Lewzcuk, and recently Daniel Hesidence. Variations on why they've held my interest include mystery in the making or imagery, a sense of spirit and purpose, along with surprise in the making, and this has allowed me a glimpse into how I see their approach to their vision. This has given me the ability to seek my own voice via paint.

**How much do these influences or other inspirations guide your painting process?**

We live in such a visual fast-moving world. It is hard to say what doesn't influence my work. In terms of painting and/or painters, I try to see a variety of work, and hoping that on both a conscious and sub-conscious level I am soaking in all that is good, mashing it around and that it comes out in an interesting way on my surfaces.

**Do you see yourself as an action painter or one who is continuing the tradition of Abstraction Expressionism?**

I don't consider myself an action painter. Though I do recognize and see the link to Abstract Expressionism in my work.

**Does being a woman change artistic output?**

I don't think it does for me. I just work.

**At times, paintings are discussed as masculine; at others, feminine. Are your works gendered?**

I've had my work described as "masculine and muscular," terms that I believe are coined to my work due to the scale and contrast of the mark-making. The connotations associated with gender and any stereotypical ideas are ones that I am not interested in. Either term can be good or bad.

**What, if any, is the role of women painters in contemporary art?**

I think it is the same as any other gender. To be true to oneself and to seek and go after the journey.

**Why do we need this all-female show?**

Hmm. Women are still making strides. I do believe that only I can make my work, and this is the same with any other gender. I do think that society does instill ideas regarding gender and that this occurs on a continued and not so subtle way. I struggle with this question. And think back to that quote by Joan Mitchell who was asked to be in a female painting show, to which she declined and said "ask me to be in a painting show" (or something akin to this), and I'm there. There is the chance that someone will not necessarily give it the same credence that they would if it was a male who painted it. I like to think this perception is changing and will continue to change. Like the gun laws, or lack of. Always debatable depending on who is at the table. (An abstract answer?)

**Did the feminist movement impact your career?**

I've been aware of the feminist movement from undergrad. I use to say that it didn't really affect me as a painter or my career, however, the further I get into my career, that more grateful I am for those women who fought for the right to make work that they wanted and to show the significance of being female. Unfortunately, sexism is still alive. When I teach, I really encourage my female students to find other female artists, present and historical, to enable them to see that anything is possible.

**Where do you find inspiration?**

Anywhere and everywhere.

**What's your workspace like? When and where do you like to create your art?**

I have a studio in Long Island City with great natural light. When the weather is good, I ride my bike and aim to arrive to my studio early in the morning and work to late afternoon. Additionally, I have a very small room at my house that allows me to make work at home at anytime. Riding my bike gives me good thinking and looking time along the way.

**What's your next project?**

Always ongoing. To date, I would say that I don't have a start or finish of a project, though looking back, I can see moments when the work changed. And in that process, I step forwards and backwards constantly.

**How will exhibiting your work at MOCA Jacksonville affect your career?**

Exhibiting at MOCA Jacksonville is a tremendous step for my work and for my career. I see it as confirmation that I am on the right track. Exhibiting along side the other artists is a gift and a significant moment for me, and I am excited to see how the works might talk to each other. Ultimately, I hope the exhibition will allow the audience to see the impact and relevance of abstraction today.



## Confronting The Canvas: Women Of Abstraction

*MOCA Jacksonville*

June 4, 2016 – September 4, 2016

Abstract Expressionism has historically been defined by male artists who rose to fame in post-World War II America. While women were practicing unique modes of painting alongside their male counterparts, they were given little emphasis or attention within the canon of art history both then and now. *Confronting the Canvas: Women of Abstraction* does not attempt to rewrite history, but instead it identifies and gives prominence to emerging and mid-career women working in the field of gestural abstraction today.

Consisting of six contemporary painters and approximately thirty works, this exhibition explores the manner in which these women appropriate both the physical, dramatic processes and the expressive freedom of direct gesture at the core of action painting, redeploing the now-historic style to boldly advance the abstract painting of our time. *Confronting the Canvas* is not necessarily a revisionist perspective of the New York School but a report from the front line about the current state of abstraction by women painters living and working in New York today. *Confronting the Canvas* is one of the first museum exhibitions to focus solely on contemporary female painters.

### **Fran O'Neill**

The paintings of Australian-born Fran O'Neill rely upon a construction/deconstruction equation, where she uses her physical body to produce, alter, destroy, and recreate oversized gestures. Layer upon layer, O'Neill applies paint only to swipe, smear, and remove it with her body or another material. Her paintings are as much an additive process as a subtractive one, where at times she reinvents imagery on the same canvas. Most recently, her large-scale gestural paintings capture one movement within a square canvas.

# The Florida Times-Union

## Abstract Expressionists Showcased in MOCA's 'Confronting the Canvas'

By Charlie Patton

*The Florida Times Union*

June 10, 2016

In post-World War II New York, abstract expressionism, sometimes called the New York School, emerged, led by male artists like Jackson Pollock, who made the cover of Time magazine in 1956.

But "the male-centric definition of the movement" was a "myth," argues Jaime DeSimone, the Museum of Contemporary Art Jacksonville's assistant curator of exhibitions.

Pollock's wife, Lee Krasner, was a leading abstract expressionist, as were Helen Frankenthaler, Lee Bontecou, Grace Hartigan, Joan Mitchell and Anne Truitt, to name just a few.

Abstract expressionism is no longer the dominant American art movement as it was in the 1940s and 1950s. But there are still plenty of abstract expressionists and a lot of them are women.

"Interestingly, a survey of the state of contemporary abstraction that resulted in this exhibition revealed that the artists who appear explicitly engaged in a conversation with this historically male antecedent are primarily female," DeSimone writes in an essay for the catalog of "Confronting the Canvas: Women of Abstraction," a new exhibit at MOCA Jacksonville, which DeSimone curated.

The exhibit "explores the manner in which six contemporary painters appropriate both the physical, dramatic processes and the expressive freedom of direct gesture at the core of action painting, redeploying the now-historic style to boldly advance the abstract painting of our time," DeSimone writes in the catalog.

The six artists, all New York-based women, are Keltie Ferris, Maya Hayuk, Jill Nathanson, Fran O'Neill, Jackie Saccoccio and Anke Weyer. Saccoccio is the inaugural recipient of MOCA Jacksonville's Brooke and Hap Stein Emerging Artist Prize, awarded in March. As part of the prize, MOCA Jacksonville has purchased one of her large abstracts, "Time (Smelt)," for its permanent collection.

All of the six artists are well-known and highly regarded in the art world.

Martha Schwendener wrote last September in the New York Times: "This has been a summer of women warriors: Serena Williams, Angela Merkel, Charlize Theron's character in 'Max Max: Fury

Road,' and Shaye Haver and Kristen Griest, the first women to earn the United States Army's elite Ranger designation. Now, in the final days of summer, painting's warrior women are advancing, and Keltie Ferris is among them."

DeSimone said the women use varying approaches to create their art.

Saccoccio creates "improvisational portraits" which consist of countless layers of oil, mica and varnish. Fran O'Neill uses as many as 50 layers of paint in her work. Hayuk allows her paint to drip down the canvas. Nathanson uses an involved process involving polymers to create her color field paintings. Ferris uses a spray gun in her work. Weyer is the most traditional abstract expressionist in the exhibit.

In the catalog, DeSimone addresses the question of why she wanted to do an exhibit with only female artists.

"Recent discussions in the field question the agendas and value of all-women exhibitions, even though there are many influential precedents," she writes.

In 1945 socialite Peggy Guggenheim organized "The Women," an exhibit that included work by female artists like Janet Sobel, Lee Krasner and Louise Bourgeois, among others.

"Guggenheim provided an opportunity," DeSimone writes " ... 'Confronting the Canvas' strives to do the same for Ferris, Hayuk, Nathanson, O'Neill, Saccoccio and Weyer.

# The New Criterion

## Gallery chronicle

By James Panero

*The New Criterion*

February 2015

On “Gary Petersen: Not Now, But Maybe Later” at Theodore:Art, “Philip Taaffe” at Luhring Augustine, “Through the Valley: New Paintings by Devin Powers” at Lesley Heller Workspace, “Fran O’Neill: Painting Her Way Home” at Life on Mars, “Sideshow Nation III: Circle the Wagons” at Sideshow Gallery, and “Paperazzi IV” at Janet Kurnatowski Gallery.

At the opening for the painter Fran O’Neill at Life on Mars, another gallery, like Theodore:Art, along the always-rewarding main drag of Bushwick’s 56 Bogart building, I found myself puzzling over an important question with the artist Dee Shapiro and anyone else who would listen in.

How does she do it? What I meant was, how does Fran O’Neill achieve what I consider to be her signature sweep of color across canvases over six feet square? A sponge? Some kind of squeegee? We had our theories, but none of them seemed quite right, and indeed they weren’t. The textures of her line, especially where they skip a beat, are somehow too natural, too “shimmery” (to take a title from her best work), for any of those tools.

The answer came when the artist arrived and I asked her myself. She pointed to the underside of her arm. After a few moments of mental processing, the gracefulness of O’Neill’s paint handling made much more sense to me. For her big strokes, O’Neill uses nothing more than herself to push oils across canvas. It’s a uniquely physical process, one sized to the canvas and her own frame, and results in something I now see, in part, as a set of movements captured in one long exposure. This is not at all to suggest her work is merely the result of some actionist happening. Her paintings are nothing like Yves Klein’s raunchy “human paintbrush” performances, which would today certainly land him in the court of microaggressions.

A native of Wangaratta, Australia, O’Neill started off as a landscape painter. The turbulent thunderstorms of her former home are never far from her work, helping to explain the title of this exhibition and also her increasingly gestural paint handling, as she finds a way to tap her own physical atmospheric. Sometimes these movements can get messy. Perhaps that’s the idea behind *Meeting You*, a two-paneled work joined as one from 2014. Best are the works that sweep the mess away with one final flourish.

## In Hot Pursuit: Fran O'Neill at the Studio School

by Jonathan Goodman

*artcritical*

September 28th, 2012

*Fran O'Neill: Recent Work* at the New York Studio School

September 4 to October 13, 2012

Fran O'Neill's fine show at the Studio School demonstrates how the practice of gestural abstraction can remain very much alive in the hands of someone willing to explore and experiment. While Louise Fishman's accomplished, historically aware exhibition at Cheim & Read shows us a mature artist committed to the lexicon of the New York School, in O'Neill's paintings we see the pursuit of an originality that really pushes forward the vocabulary of abstract art. Her backwards glance toward the legacy of mid-20th century painting is transformed into a forward leap into the unknown—in the sense that the paintings do not appear to refer to actual things and that the artist is genuinely trying out a language of her own. Building a new vernacular in abstract art is a trying task, especially if the artist knows the history of the genre. In O'Neill there is both a sense of the past and an independence from that past.

It is difficult to work this way, in the sense that the great painterly moments of Abstract Expressionism occurred more than two generations ago. And yet the excitement of this show remains based on the movement of the hand. *rising* (2012) is an epic composition in which a series of long, horizontal orange stripes cover the top half of the painting, while beneath them, in the lower right quadrant, are a series of short, often angled gray lines that are a bit darker than the gray ground. The painting's title refers to the generally upward motion seen in the composition.

O'Neill's paintings communicate the pleasure of their own making. Her sense of drama is closely linked to the use of color, which offsets transparent use of compositional structure. In *earthly delight* (2012) for example, a six-foot-square work dominated by a saturated purple there is an angular clearing of yellow and green that runs from the center to the upper left.

*mischief* (2012), another six-foot-square oil in canvas, is forceful, even startling with a v-shaped structure moving down the middle of the image, cutting into bars of red, gray, and black on either side of the form. Outlined in gray and possessing a center of white, the v-shape plunges toward the bottom of the painting, which is black. In each of these paintings, color is used to strong

structural effect; planes of pigment build formal arrangements that are vital to the experience of the work.

Karen Wilkin's catalogue essay speaks of the artist's "memories of her Australian origins" and additionally says that O'Neill's paintings are "united by their rich, saturated color." Perhaps her foreign bearings bring about the unusual color schemes that are such a striking feature of these works. It makes sense that someone from outside New York can reinterpret its history of abstraction according to her own lights. *memory down* (2011), is a square painting done in dark blues and blacks, with the blues forming verticals and the blacks moving across them toward the base of the painting. Melancholic but very beautiful, the canvas shows how emotional O'Neill can be—surely a basis for these works' memorable presence.

## Fran O'Neil at John Davis Gallery

by David Cohen

*artcritical*

April 10th, 2009

Fran O'Neill, subject of her second solo show at the John Davis Gallery in Hudson, New York, was a recent recipient of a Joan Mitchell Foundation grant. Her latest series is a breakthrough: these sumptuous, all-over abstractions built of mind-bogglingly intricate details are oceanic in their fusion of decorative and labor intensity. Like the ocean, there is slow evolution and constant undulation. The little teeth-like tesserae in *Reel* are negative shapes, revealing the white ground of the canvas exposed from the painstakingly filled-in spaces between. The impact is somewhere between the aboriginal painting of O'Neill's native Australia and Gustav Klimt. Mitchell, one feels, would have approved.