



"XYZ: The Geometric Impulse in Abstract Art", left to right: Dennis Koch, Hadley Holliday, Krysten Cunningham, Brad Tucker, Jessica Halonen  
Photograph by Jennie Warren

## XYZ: The Geometric Impulse in Abstract Art

The Torrance Art Museum

Through November 3

by Emily Ng

*Geometry* is a branch of mathematics concerned with questions of shape, size, relative position of figures, and the properties of space.

Tucked away in the small city of Torrance, CA is the **Torrance Art Museum** which is currently host to *XYZ: The Geometric Impulse in Abstract Art*, a group exhibition organized by Jessica Halonen and Emily Joyce featuring artists from various locations. The title of the exhibition is a straightforward translation of the major theme of the show, provoking thoughts of just how much geometry tends to find itself within abstract art. Based on the fact that you can find mathematics at the core of any component of nature, you could argue that all abstract art has some basis of geometry.

These questions bring forth a larger meditation on the mathematical tendencies in visual decision-making. Everyone has experienced rearranging a room or hanging a picture frame without a measuring tape or a level—*feeling* that objects were simply out of place. Visual relationships between an object and space turn into subconscious cognitive calculations that translate into an emotional perception of equilibrium. In many ways, this is how the decision-making process works: the rational part of your brain works in collusion with the emotional part in-order to give you gut feelings and intuition. There is a certain inexplicable tendency towards clean lines and predictable shapes, some individuals drawn to that aesthetic more than others, which the exhibition does a fine job of indulging in.

**Abstract art** uses a visual language of form, color and line to create a composition which may exist with a degree of independence from visual references in the world; Artistic works that don't attempt to represent reality or concrete subjects.

An **abstract object** is an object which does not exist at any particular time or place, but rather exists as a type of thing.

Brad Tucker's playful abstractions of seemingly random objects: *Kidney, Canal, Peanut*, pares down visual

information to the bare minimum needed to communicate an idea. Shapes constructed in wood and fabric with rounded corners and a palette of varying shades of blue challenge traditional abstract painting. They have an innocence to them that is reminiscent of the simple interpretations of everyday objects that would be used to, for example, teach a child language. A square with a triangle on top represents a house. Two dots and an arched line represent happiness. These simple symbols are priceless tools of communication, from ancient hieroglyphics to the development of character-based writing systems. Emily Joyce's takes on the duality of the representational in addition to the physical in *Sun Burn (Burned) 2*, in which she creates a large graphic screenprint of a sunburst, then physically burns a hole in the center. The piece is gestural, performative, and humorously literal.

But an abstraction does not have to represent anything—it has the ability to exist in and of itself. Dennis Koch's untitled color pencil drawing vibrates with bold colors marked obsessively in a concentric symmetrical pattern. In *SBW #1* Linda Besemer creates moire patterns with acrylics, vivid bands of colors streaking in and out of them. Both of these pieces focus on the process of mark-making and, through repetition, its ability to create something visually engaging. In Jessica Mallios' case, a representation of something can be so ambiguous that it recedes back into the realm of abstraction. A video loop of what at first could almost be a still image, *Rhombus*, takes away your vantage points, leaving you ungrounded from what you are looking at visually and how you are looking at it temporally. The rhombus' skewed and eerie shape is reminiscent of James Turrell's *Skylight*, compressing space into two dimensionality, yet the movement in the video piece is undefined, suggesting a fallacy while grasping for that one moment of explanation that would allow you to register a concrete truth.

The exhibition's exploration of geometry in the abstract, however verdant and fresh, felt somewhat cursory. Abstract art has a long and distinct history, and focus on the evolution of it into the contemporary may have been more textured with the inclusion of less traditional approaches to the idea of abstraction, although the possible interpretations of such a multifaceted topic is quite endless, and the task to dissect it insurmountably arduous. Art history, graph paper, protractors, and X-Y-Z coordinates aside, this exhibition is a solid sampling of contemporary artists with shared sensibilities making interesting work. In this way, *XYZ* also provides commentary on the constantly shifting approaches to art-making and how this generation of artists will continue to break through preceding categories in order to define their own.

**Emily Ng** is an artist and Production Associate at *Fluent~Collaborative*.

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