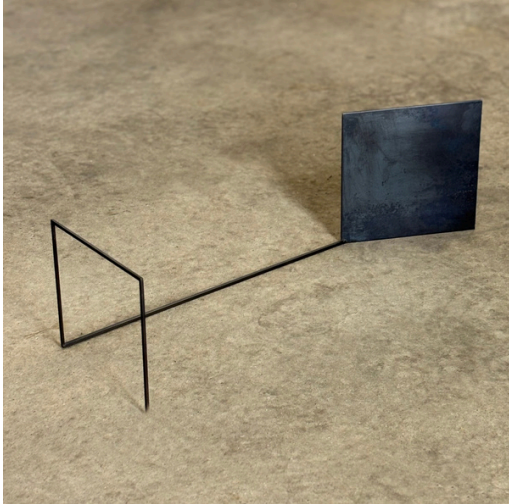


ABSTRACTION NOW - ARTIST'S STATEMENT



Catherine Burgess (RCA) – Sequence No. IV, 2024; steel.
Image courtesy of the artist.

I make abstract sculpture, usually in steel, but often I combine steel with other metals, stone, or simple found objects. I work directly and intuitively, not using drawings or preconceptions. My work is minimal, geometric, and usually consists of discrete elements that seem to contain an awareness of their own form and materiality, their own completeness, energy, and possible significance.

These elements relate to each other in such a way as to form a kind of visual narrative. Sometimes these narratives are simply about the essential characteristics of form itself. At other times, the elements and the spaces between them act as metaphors in narratives that, in many instances, are about physicality, existence, place, and time.

Acknowledging this additional content has set my work apart from the formalist abstraction that Edmonton is noted for. I let my abstract pieces be about more than just their form. However, I never attempt to impose meaning on these sculptures. I know that meaning emerges on its own, if I just let it, by keeping thinking out of what is, for me, an entirely visual creative process. (I realize that my subconscious is far better at communicating using non-verbal language than my conscious brain could ever be.)

I wait until the sculpture feels complete to address it with my thinking brain. Then I choose a title that hints at the nature of whatever content/meaning I have identified, while understanding that, given the universal nature of subconscious symbolism, other readings are equally valid.

Increasingly over the last few years, my interest has focused on making the immaterial appear more substantive. Sometimes the steel elements that I fabricate include linear, perspectival drawing that seems to penetrate the physical boundaries of the walls and floors they come in contact with. Or I attempt to “bend space” to make our awareness of it more palpable.

Experiencing such unfamiliar space/form adds an awareness of human limitation (that which is unknowable) to the conversations or narratives emanating from the placed elements.

Catherine Burgess, RCA

ABSTRACTION NOW - ARTIST'S STATEMENT



Scott Cumberland – Pink, It Was Love At First Sight, 2025; acrylic on canvas. Image courtesy of the artist.

My work is representative of my perception of time, thought, and energy. Our society views all three of these as moving forward – always progressing. In this classic view of time, we progress forward in a linear manner, collecting our experiences chronologically, appearing as though our experiences are compartmentalized and systematic. For most, however, these experiences are anything but linear. I find the “ribbon” a rich subject because it stands as a metaphor for how I view time, thought, energy, and memories. As life does, the ribbon bends in on itself, layers, doubles back, and creates circular patterns.

Like the metaphor, my process is anything but linear and chronological. I take pleasure in discovering a painting, fighting my way through an improvisational process, one that utilizes and relies on chance, risk and uncertainty.

Paint is poured and drawn through with unconventional tools to create ribbons of undulating colour. These ribbons seek to bring volume and deeper space into the flatness of painting in an attempt to question the paradigms of Formalist Abstraction. The questioning is not intended to be oppositional, rather quite the opposite; it is a way to explore materiality and flatness by highlighting contrast with the introduction of volumetric illusion.

Each painting begins without a definitive plan, but frequently draws inspiration and influence from current and past popular culture, with a particular recent focus on music. These influences serve as a way to begin and/or complete a work and are intended to provide another way for the viewer to engage with the work.

Ultimately, I intend for my paintings to be evocative rather than descriptive. The referential nature of the metaphor is intended to apply to the viewer's own personal experience rather than describe an external past experience of someone else.

Scott Cumberland

ABSTRACTION NOW - ARTIST'S STATEMENT



Peter Hide (RCA) – Sculpture & Architecture, 2014, mild steel. Image courtesy of the artist.

Abstract sculpture is a structure that is not useful, like a table or a chair. It doesn't have a subject matter, such as a landscape or a portrait. It is not literal. However, this doesn't mean it lacks content, that the work lacks delicacy, or power, or beauty.

It's more like music, which evokes feeling through the arrangement of notes, a feeling that can't necessarily be put into words. Instead of a subject the artist has to build, carve, cut, and grind an order, an organization, an entity. This gives the artist great freedom.

Creating an abstract work of art is like going on a journey. When you begin, you don't really know where you will end up. You don't set out to depict an idea. The work itself is your guide.

Excerpt from Greenberg's statement on Peter Hide, 1983:

" That he's original, anyone should be able to see. But I don't set too much store by originality, as important as it is. He's also independent, which isn't necessarily the same as original. He's won his own way to a conception of abstract sculpture that diverges from what was the ruling one in London when he entered upon the scene there. That ruling conception, in the wake of Caro and David Smith and Gonzales, was a linear one more or less: " drawing in the air", Gonzales had called it. Hide began to mark himself off by " modelling and carving in the air". He returned to volumes that were more closed, and to mass and weight, to reminiscences of the monolith if not quite the monolith itself...What makes Hide's art so exceptional is that his "return" was much more than a return; it was equally a departure, a venture into new possibilities. It opened up a different way for abstract sculpture. Yet even that wouldn't have been enough by itself. The art still has to be good, not just innovative. What's decisive in making Hide's art good, and I'd say more than just good, is his inspired force, his temperament, personality - or what you will."

Peter Hide, RCA

ABSTRACTION NOW - ARTIST'S STATEMENT



Darren Kooyman - Early Impressions (Deirdre #2), 2021; acrylic on paper. Image courtesy of the artist.

Our reactions to the world around us and the stimuli we encounter shape our individual identities. For artists, this dynamic interaction with their environment becomes a vital source of inspiration and expression. It is the artist's role to engage deeply with their surroundings-absorbing, remixing, and representing the essence of what they experience.

In my case, the creative process mostly unfolds in an improvisational manner, where the focus lies on exploring colour and surface texture rather than rigid planning. Every artwork draws from natural elements, reconsidering the human figure, personal memories or bridging between the urban landscape and expansive prairie scenes. These themes act as foundational references, guiding the initial stages of a painting while allowing freedom to evolve organically.

As a process painter, I place a profound emphasis on the act of creation itself. Emotional expression, experimentation, and being fully present in the moment take precedence over striving for a predetermined, perfect outcome. This approach highlights the journey of making art as equally meaningful as the finished piece.

From this perspective, abstraction represents the purest form of painting. It prioritizes the intrinsic qualities of colour and paint, minimizing the reliance on drawing or representational forms. Influences from Colour Field artists such as Jules Olitski and Helen Frankenthaler, alongside Abstract Expressionists like Willem de Kooning, and Richard Diebenkorn - who skillfully merged abstraction with figuration - inform this artistic vision.

Ultimately, this artistic philosophy celebrates the intimate relationship between environment, encounter, memory, and the expressive potential of paint, inviting viewers to experience art as a living dialogue rather than a static image.

Darren Kooyman

ABSTRACTION NOW - ARTIST'S STATEMENT



Sheila Luck - Lux Brunalis, 2025; acrylic on canvas. Image courtesy of the artist.

I never expected to be an abstract painter. In fact, I did not start painting abstract pictures until the second year of the Master's program at the U of A – to everyone's surprise, including my own. I had previously been puzzled by how abstract artists found their starting point, as I had always needed the natural world as a jumping-off point for my semi-abstract pictures. But suddenly, I felt an overwhelming need to jettison those starting off points.

Abstraction allowed me to be liberated from the strictures of naturalism that I chafed against; For instance, scale, which is tied to the states of miniature, life size, and overblown. I was now free to make shapes and marks the sizes I wanted on a support of any size I wanted. I have always worked concurrently on sizes small to big throughout my entire painting career. In an exhibition of mine as late as 1997, I exhibited half abstract paintings, and half large paintings based on a small drawing by Goya. My ties to figurative work remained strong.

Earlier, Naturalism (still life, for instance) was a means to an end to make shapes, a feature evident in even my very early student work. Now I could skip the means and go directly to the end, which was my drive toward shape making, coupled with a drive towards mark making and drawing. How to have them both in the same painting? This sums up my over forty years of making paintings, because it turns out it is not that easy. I have also, over these forty years, steadily continued to draw – still lives, landscapes, life drawing, copies after Old Masters, flowers, the odd abstract drawing, and trees. Lots of trees!

Many different artists have something in their work that I want in mine, but how to do that? As a viewer, I do not look at abstract art vs non-abstract art differently. The vocabulary is the same, and what I am looking for is the same. Art history shows how different cultures and times have made abstract art. A Yipwon carving from New Guinea has remained deeply embedded in my memory, for instance. I have drawn inspiration for years from the German Gothic carved wooden reliefs in the Metropolitan Museum.

I am fascinated by the tension between the inchoate, the unformed, the chaos, the organic, contrasted with the geometric, the inorganic, the spindly, brittle, and sharp. Something like life, the controllable and the uncontrollable!

As to what I have contributed to the territory of abstract art, I must leave that to viewers, current and future, to decide.

Sheila Luck

ABSTRACTION NOW - ARTIST'S STATEMENT



Carla Lam – Amarylis Moon, 2024; mixed media on board. Image courtesy of the artist.

Before I became a painter, I worked for years as a political theorist. Theory, at its root, simply means “a way of seeing.” Painting is another way of doing the same thing-testing how we see the world and what we choose to notice, ignore, or transform. Painting abstractly is both an escape from reality and a way of staying deeply grounded in it. It lets me step away from the literal story and still tell the truth.

Abstraction, for me, is a way of seeing that doesn't have to name everything. It lets me pay attention to mood, movement, and connection rather than just the objects in front of us. I'm drawn to skies, water, plants, and the natural world, but I'm not trying to paint them literally. I use them as a starting point to explore how a place feels and how memory, emotion, and environment are entangled.

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My starting point is rarely a fixed composition. Instead, I work through responsive mark-making-laying down gestures, disrupting them, and allowing unexpected structures to emerge. Tools shift constantly: palette knives, brushes, rags, and alternative implements are chosen for their ability to convey a meaningful gesture or emotion. The surface becomes an archive of these interventions, holding traces of earlier states even as they are partially obscured.

In this way, I can reflect that nothing in the world truly is; instead, everything that we perceive is becoming in negotiation with all else that exists. Light changes, weather shifts, we move and are moved. My paintings try to hold that sense of ongoing change without spelling everything out. They invite viewers to linger in the space between recognition and sensation, to notice not just what is “there,” but how they are seeing it.

Underlying the work is a concern with how meaning is produced materially. Colour, texture, and gesture are not decorative additions but active agents in shaping how the painting is encountered. I think of each piece as a site where bodily movement, material behaviour, and emotional experience intersect. The aim is not to illustrate an idea, but to let the alchemy of process-its interruptions, accidents, and revisions-generate forms that could not have been designed in advance.

In this sense, my contribution to abstraction is to insist on its emotional and relational grounding. These are not detached, purely formal experiments. They are attempts to translate the push and pull of daily life-loss and renewal, dislocation and belonging, silence and intensity-into paint. I want the viewer to feel that the painting is meeting them halfway: not telling them what to see but offering a place where their own experiences might echo or find room to breathe.

ABSTRACTION NOW - ARTIST'S STATEMENT



Mitchel Smith - Stele: Agitation; Green, 2025; golden acrylic on canvas. Image courtesy of the artist.

Ambition is the reason that I paint abstract pictures. This could all change tomorrow, but it seems to me that somewhere around Pollock the most serious painting became and has continued to be abstract. Of course, some of the most trite and pointless painting since Pollock has also been abstract – merely painting non-representationally guarantees nothing; a large majority of the best paintings ever painted are representational.

"We are musicians, and our model is sound not literature, sound not mathematics, sound not theatre, visual arts, quantum physics, geology, astrology, or acupuncture."

"The spectral adventure has allowed the renovation, without imitation, of the foundations of occidental music, because it is not a closed technique but an attitude."

The above quotes are from the French Spectralist composer Gerard Grisey, an artist whom I admire and feel a philosophical affinity with.

If you substitute 'modernist' for 'spectral' and 'painting' for 'music' in the second quote, this sums up my aesthetic creed very accurately. I also like how Grisey describes the process of artistic creation as an adventure, as that is precisely what it has to be. You need to feel like you are standing precariously at the edge of a precipice with a strong wind blowing.

The term 'Modernism' itself can be problematic if its meaning is misinterpreted and it is used to denote a particular style of painting. (This probably applies even more so to the term 'Formalism', but I have seen them used interchangeably). Modernism is not and never was a style. It was and is an attitude towards art making and a way to maintain high standards and to compete with the best painting that has come before.

Post-Modernism makes philosophical sense if one takes it to mean a different attitude than a Modernist attitude (it is), as opposed to a stylistic difference. I recently saw a Jean-Michel Basquiat picture, and he's just not a very good painter, but I don't think he was trying to be. That's the difference in attitude; a Post-Modernist attitude is the one that has less concern for and does not see as paramount the aesthetic quality. I do.

It's never been a matter of a painting being abstract or representational; it has always been a matter of a painting being good or bad. One cannot live outside of one's time. I would prefer to paint like Hieronymus Bosch, with tiny brushes and vivid tableaux, but my age will not allow it.

Mitchel Smith

ABSTRACTION NOW - ARTIST'S STATEMENT



Wiz Wensel – Attuned, 2024; acrylic and mixed media on translucent paper. Image courtesy of the artist.

Through much of my career as a painter and mixed media artist, I have chosen to work in an abstract format. Over the years, this approach to art-making has continued to fascinate and challenge me, providing depth and expansiveness without the traditional norms imposed on other genres of art.

As an abstract artist, I draw on the formal elements of art, experimenting with colour, paint application, tools, and materials. This creative process hinges on choices, decisions, control, and surrender. Can this be daunting? Absolutely. The outcome? Often unpredictable. Yet the breadth of possibilities is endless - and herein lies the intrigue.

With my creative practice rooted in abstraction, I am adding new perspectives through innovative uses of new and existing materials, including found objects. My uninhibited wielding of colour expresses

emotion subjectively, while I continue to explore diverse approaches to paint handling, application, and mark-making. My work expands the realm of non-representational art and, through this ongoing exploration, contributes to a renewed understanding of the abstractionist movement while continuing to challenge conventional views of art.

Wiz Wensel