

LISSON GALLERY

Art&Object
14 October 2025



In the Studio with Painter Joanna Pousette-Dart



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND LISSON GALLERY NYC

Joanna Pousette-Dart's studio, with paintings and works on paper in progress for her recent exhibition *Centering* at Lisson Gallery in New York.

Joanna Pousette-Dart has deep art-world credentials. Her husband is abstract painter David Novros, her father was iconic **Abstract Expressionist** painter Richard Pousette-Dart, and her mother, the poet Evelyn Gracey. Her home and studio are on Broome Street in lower Manhattan, accessible by street buzzer in a landmarked cast-iron building. Up a flight of stairs is her husband's studio on the second floor, then the living-dining-cooking area, and finally Pousette-Dart's bright, spacious studio, neatly filled with works in progress and tacked-up images of inspiration—a photo of a dancing Shiva, another of stacked blocks from an **Eduardo Chillida** stone **sculpture**, and then a book of miniature Mozarabic manuscript pages and Islamic and American Indian ceramic bowls.

One wonders where to begin excavating the 77-year-old artist's universe. The neat and proto-modernist appearance of her paintings belies a complexity that takes the viewer into a rich personal history embracing Pousette-Dart's time, place, and cultural history. She studied at Bennington College in Vermont with the likes of Kenneth Noland and Larry Poons; traveled widely through the American Southwest, Europe, Asia, and Latin America; and took in the **landscapes** and art histories of those regions, merging them with 20th-century modernist art practice as well as a 21st-century sense of artistic freedom. Pousette-Dart is a remarkably direct communication in her work, which is at once seductive and elusive. She takes us back to ancient Mayan ceramic works and then to the shapes and jewel tones of Italian Primitive paintings. As a surprise, she mentions the perception studies in the perspective distortions of Japanese conceptual/surrealist painter Jiro Takamatsu, who died in the 1970s.



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Joanna Pousette-Dart

All of her works are iterations of curved formats, although in the 1970s and '80s she relied on the rectangle and the grid. Her earliest works were unstretched strips of **canvas** woven to form a loose grid with irregular edges that she covered with layers of sand and pigment. The paintings floated on the wall attached by hidden grommets on the back and had a distinct physicality. But after visiting New Mexico in the early '70s, she became transfixed by the space and light of the place

and began stretching the sand grids and infusing them with complex color relationships. She frequently joined multiple panels to increase size and scale and affect the way the viewer moved through them. In the late '70s and '80s she traveled extensively in Europe, and one can see the effect that fresco cycles and altarpiece paintings had on her work as she began assembling rectangular panels in ways that consciously or unconsciously alluded to predella panels and fresco schema.

All this changed in the '90s when she and her husband took up residence in Galisteo, NM, and the dramatic elements of that particular landscape made her rethink how she was approaching her work. Fascinated by the place but at a loss to express what she was seeing, she began using disposable cameras to take 360-degree snap- shots of the Galisteo basin over and over again and taping them together to form panoramas. In an interview with The Brooklyn Rail she recounted how "the **photos** were a record of the way the passage of light changed the relationships of everything from shot to shot. From these I began making drawings and cutting them up. When I got back to New York I had the first [shaped] panels made by a furniture maker."

She recalls today, "In Galisteo I came to realize that it's all about what you feel is important enough to remember. Your gaze is a form of editing, and that's what I wanted to determine the shape of my paintings." She hangs one of the taped-together panoramas on the wall for us to photograph. It's an image in small format of a vast scene. You sense in the curvature of the landscape and the way in which the shapes keep transforming into something else, the formal interchange between earth and sky. As we talk about various connections between these and the images tacked to her walls of Arabic manuscript paintings, an Anasazi pot from the 11th century, a white, domed monastery ceiling with surrounding arched pediments, our conversation touches on the never-ending pathway toward becoming in which nature, art, and experience are intertwined in ways that Pousette-Dart points out are spiritual and sensual rather than literal. All the arts appear to be at play in Pousette-Dart's paintings. Certainly, and most naturally, **dance**, and, of course, poetry. There are rhyming segments and natural rhythms, as well as connections with music and architecture. The paintings are built structures, actually and conceptually. Snaking across the segments are ribbons of color that play in concert with the compositional shapes. They consist of panels of beveled wood covered with portrait linen and then paint. The beveling creates a sense of buoyancy.



CREDIT: JOANNA POUSETTE-DART

Joanna Pousette-Dart, photographs of New Mexico landscape from 1990, taped together to form a panorama.

Pousette-Dart works in stages, making large and small changes that gradually reveal what she calls “the visual logic” of the **painting**. In the course of working, she might find herself shifting the position of a line, which might change the motion of a form, which might entail the repainting of its coloration, each component inextricably bound with the other. “People like to say it takes an artist to tell one when to stop, but I don’t buy that,” she says, “Someone else can tell you when a painting looks good, but only you know what your ultimate intention for it is.”

She recalls a quotation from the novelist William Faulkner that was particularly striking to her: “The aim of every **artist** is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that a hundred years later, when a stranger looks at it, it moves again since it is life.”

Perceiving Pousette-Dart’s art involves walking around the works, as when we view them in a gallery. In her recent “Centering” series of paintings, she says, “I wanted to concentrate on cycles—the transiting from one kind of light or substance, or state of being, to another. I wanted the paintings in the gallery space to function as a cycle of cycles, and I wanted each painting to reflect my vantage point and to absorb the viewer into it so they could move through the space of the painting. In other words, the shapes respond to the body of the observer.” She adds, “Everything is in motion; you always feel things are about to change; it’s the gaze that freezes it.” What becomes obvious is how important the scale of the works is to this experience. Toward the back of the studio, there is a large table covered with stacks of small works on paper together with jars, tubes, and trays of paint and a captivating, bright-colored watercolor that, unlike what we see in the shifting tones of the shaped paintings, appears unexpectedly stable and even graphic, remarkably fresh-seeming. Nearby, leaning against the wall are a couple of bare wood panels that await being dressed in linen and then gessoed. The recent works are painted in a more fluid manner than the earlier paintings. “I wanted to bring the immediacy of my watercolors and works on paper into the larger works, so I used a variety of brushes in them rather than the painting pads I had used in the past, and they allowed me to work the **color** in a more immediate way, often painting wet into wet,” the artist says. One large, completed painting is in surprisingly pale, almost translucent blue and yellow tones reflecting light from the windows and charmingly playing off against the gridded **architecture** of the buildings directly across the street, their shadows appearing through white window shades. Clearly, the artist’s environment is unavoidably a part of her art.

Pousette-Dart is in many ways a product of her time and place, connecting intellectually with the attitudes, tastes, and cross-fertilizations of the late 20th century and bringing it all to bear with a 21st-century approach to material experimentation. Lately she even incorporates electronic technology into her production process. “I used to produce the shapes for my panels in a very exhausting and labor-intensive way by hand-drawing the templates to scale. But now I’m working with an assistant who enters whatever **drawing** I would like into a computer program where I further refine it. Then I project it on the wall to determine the right scale, and then she sends the finished program to

the fabricator," Pousette-Dart explains. "Most of my paintings are unique forms, but this process makes it possible for me to duplicate if I need to." It's a whole new modern.

Her shaped canvases are her signature—very different from those of her hard-edged, **Minimalist** predecessors, such as Frank Stella and Ellsworth Kelly. Their fluidity and sense of always being in transition, always being in a state of becoming, creates excitement and anticipation for what lies ahead for her. As she told fellow painter Shirley Kaneda in an interview in *Bomb* magazine on the occasion of her recent show, titled "Centering," at Lisson Gallery, "My practice has always been very intuitive. I find that the painting doesn't really take off until I've managed to stop thinking of it as an idea. I need the paintings to be surprising, at least to me; and I'm constantly pushing myself away from resolving them in ways that seem predictable. In the end, they are never like what I would have imagined."

Pousette-Dart repeatedly emphasizes, "I want my work to surprise me." And I realize how it certainly continues to surprise me.

Hyperallergic
23 January 2025

HYPERALLERGIC

WTF Is Planar Painting?

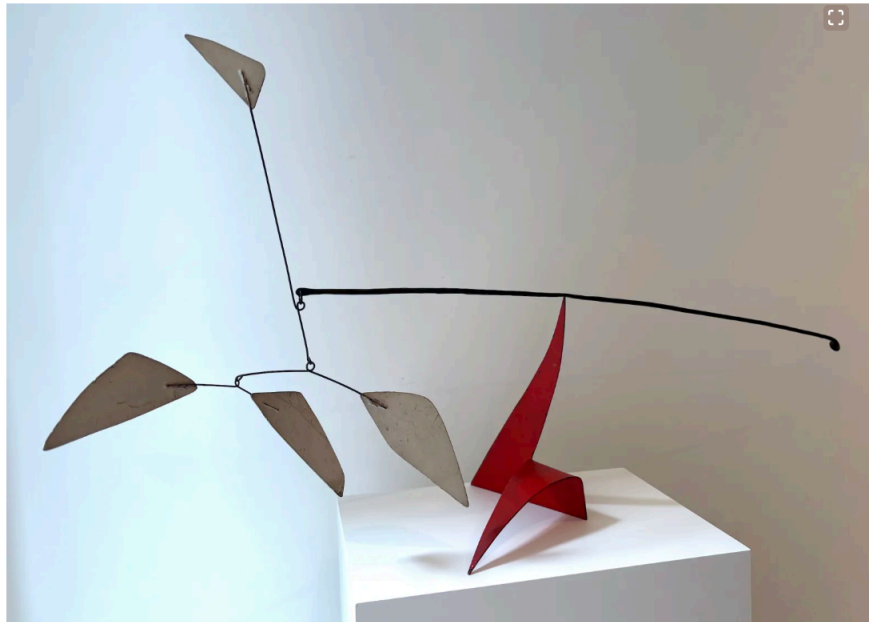
It is refreshing to see a group show that hews to its curatorial statement, and includes both old friends and unexpected twists.



Joanna Pousette-Dart, "Night Stripe" (2024), acrylic on canvas on wood panel, 30 1/2 x 37 3/4 inches (77.47 x ~98.89 cm) (© Joanna Pousette-Dart, courtesy Lisson Gallery)

I first saw Stephen Westfall's geometric abstractions in the mid-1980s, when he set his grids against monochromatic grounds. What soon set him apart from others working in this mode was that his grids were askew, as if his California upbringing and awareness of earthquakes made him conscious that everything could collapse. Along with creating and exhibiting his art at this time, Westfall — who seems to possess boundless energy — wrote regularly for *Art in America* and periodically organized exhibitions focused on geometric abstraction.

Westfall's passion for the roots of geometric abstraction in the United States, and his championing of lesser-known artists such as Ward Jackson and Ralston Crawford, revealed him to be heartfelt, non-dogmatic, single-minded, intellectually curious, and unconcerned with trends and the marketplace. These qualities, in tandem with the arc of his career, piqued my curiosity when I learned that he had curated an intergenerational exhibition, [*A Planar Garden*](#), at Alexandre Gallery.



Alexander Calder, untitled mobile (c. 1950–60s), painted metal, overall 17 1/2 x 36 x 14 inches (44.45 x 91.44 x 35.56 cm) (© Private Collection, courtesy Lachaise Foundation)

Westfall's definition of planar painting is straightforward. Everyone works on a rectangle and makes planes that have crisp edges without relying on tape or making gestural marks, or what might be construed as lines. It is refreshing to see a group show that hews to its curatorial statement, and includes both old friends and unexpected twists. (Surveying the exhibition, I realized that I had written about 10 of the 16 artists.) Asymmetric and always susceptible to the movement of air, an untitled tabletop mobile by Alexander Calder (c. 1950–60s) sets the tone for the exhibition, which I would characterize as an unfixed geometry. In his mobiles, a sculptural form he invented, Calder's playfully defiant exploration of a destabilized geometry runs counter to the geometric abstraction of the Abstract Expressionists and the logical progressions of Op Art.

I was happy to see "Untitled" (1999) by Harriet Korman, in which interlocking curved forms section off a rectangle. Three of the painting's sections are brown, a color that the artist has included in many works over the years; this is not an easy feat, since brown does not always work optically in abstractions.



Harriet Korman, "Untitled" (1999), oil on canvas, 54 x 54 inches (137.16 x 137.16 cm) (courtesy the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York)

Odili Donald Odita's use of scalene triangles and reconstituted black wood veneer, which composes a picture of Blackness, is a reminder that abstraction is not purely a White invention. Tiny vertical striations inflecting the paintings' prefabricated black surfaces add another visual element to this wonderful artist's work.

Two welcome surprises in the exhibition are works by Joanna Pousette-Dart and Polly Apfelbaum. Known for her stacked, gently arcing forms, Pousette-Dart's maverick, shaped paintings have not been sufficiently appreciated in the United States. In these pieces, as Carter Ratcliff wrote in *Hyperallergic*, Pousette-Dart "found an original way to be original." The two stacked forms in her recent painting "Night Stripe" (2024), measuring $30\frac{1}{2} \times 37\frac{3}{4}$ inches, made me want to sit in a room surrounded by similarly sized paintings.

The glazed terracotta work "Block Stripes" (2022) by Polly Apfelbaum is the exhibition's biggest surprise. I have come to think of Apfelbaum as an installation artist whose "fallen paintings," as she calls them, consist of many dyed fabric components arranged in situ on the floor. In the past, they've made a strong first impression on me that never lasted. "Block Stripes" (2022) is a promising outlier in her oeuvre. The muted colors of the vertical stripes are capped along the top and bottom by small blocks in another color. Perhaps this work signals a new avenue of exploration for the artist.



Odili Donald Odita, "Choir" (2024), acrylic latex paint on aluminum-core fabricated wood panel with reconstituted wood veneer, 45 x 45 x 1 1/2 inches (114.3 x 114.3 x 3.81 cm) (© Odili Donald Odita, courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York)

The linear elements and curving and arabesque shapes, each in a solid color, in Patricia Trieb's "Torque II" (2024) are derived from a wide range of sources. Thinly painted on an off-white surface, Trieb's works are drawings in paint, in which brushy areas are visible within the forms. Their languid sensuality is riveting. The figure-ground relationship oscillates between painted forms and the unpainted spaces between them. The interaction of the forms establishes another visual dialogue within the picture plane. The pieces are inviting and remote, direct and elusive. A well-researched museum survey of the artist is in order.

In Westfall's own "Summit" (2024), he interrupts his field of flat, overlapping triangles pushing in from the edges with a volumetric form in two colors descending diagonally from the painting's upper left corner. It is this kind of disruption that the viewer repeatedly encounters in the exhibition, a sense that geometry is never fixed and can still astonish.



Stephen Westfall, "Summit" (2024), oil and alkyd on canvas, 36 x 30 inches (91.44 x 76.2 cm)
(courtesy Alexandre Gallery)



Patricia Treib, "Torque II" (2024), oil on canvas, 80 x 60 inches (203.2 x 152.4 cm) (courtesy the artist
and Bureau, New York)



Polly Apfelbaum, "Block Stripes" (2022), terracotta and glaze, 22 x 22 x 3/4 inches (55.88 x 55.88 x ~2 cm) (courtesy the artist & Frith Street Gallery, London)

A Planar Garden continues at Alexandre Gallery (25 East 73rd Street, Second & Third Floors, Upper East Side, Manhattan) through February 1. The exhibition was curated by Stephen Westfall.

LISSON GALLERY

The Brooklyn Rail
2 October 2024

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

ArtSeen

Joanna Pousette-Dart: *Centering*



Joanna Pousette-Dart, *Untitled (6)*, 2023. Acrylic on wood panel, 86 1/4 x 104 x 11/4 inches. © Joanna Pousette-Dart. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

It is immensely satisfying to be in the company of the eight resplendent canvases on panel by veteran New York abstract artist Joanna Pousette-Dart. Each large scale painting—one per wall—is a showstopper. Their scale is characteristically ambitious, and the paintings seem even grander because their contours are rounded, which gives them a sense of expandability, of a pliancy and potential stretch that feels corporeal and not constricted by the adamant edges of a conventional rectilinear format. In fact, there are no straight lines here: a feminist stance?

Schooled in a modernist aesthetic, Pousette-Dart soon veered away from non-objective formalism to a more personalized, independent aesthetic. Abstractions sourced in landscapes and painted on multi-paneled shaped canvases have been her calling card since the early 1990s. They are also marvelously quirky—no one else makes paintings quite like these. What is new is that although consisting of two sections, the surface of each work appears unified, the sections meticulously fitted into each other, unlike many of her previous works in which the parts are stacked and distinctly visible, pulled slightly apart to thrust dynamically outward at the edges, with a nod to totemic structures. Another difference is a somewhat more equitable balancing of verticality and the horizontal, the equilibrium tauter, the asymmetry of the figurations verging on the symmetrical. The show is aptly called *Centering*, something that is an act in progress and, for most of us, relatable as a lifelong pursuit.

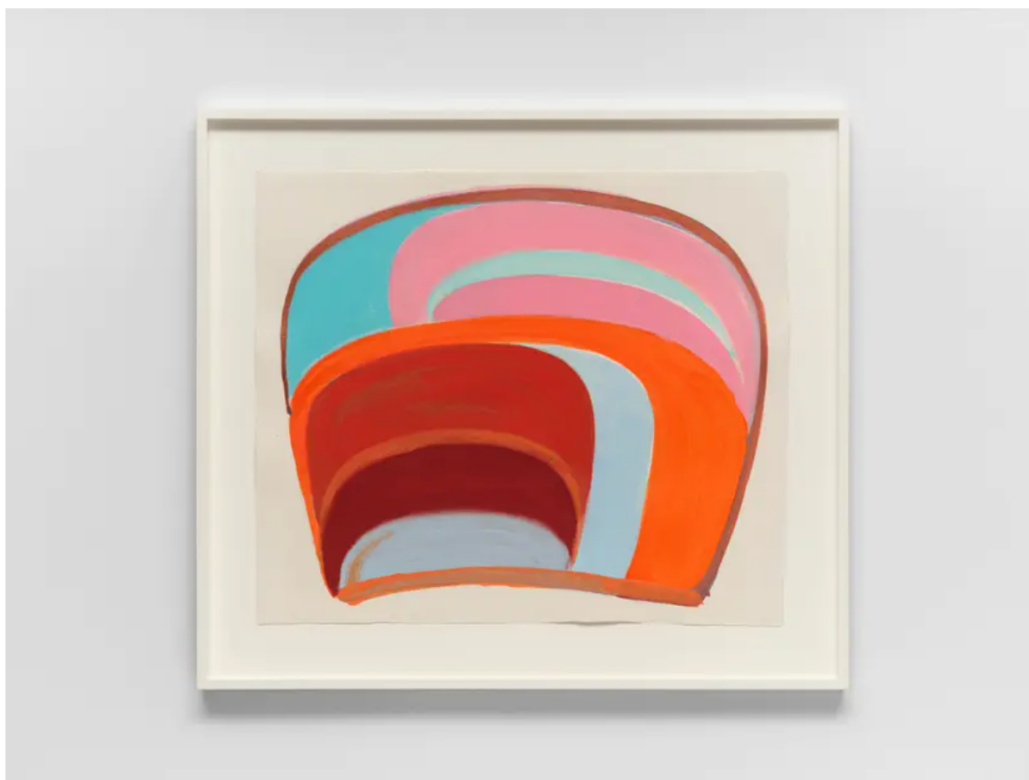


Joanna Pousette-Dart, *Centering #7*, 2023–2024. Acrylic on canvas on panel, 78 1/2 x 114 3/8 x 11 1/2 inches. © Joanna Pousette-Dart. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

The shape might suggest an elevation emerging from the land, a mesa, perhaps, or a mound, a kind of tumulus, something created by nature. Its top edge arches up, repeated in the curve of the bottom edge, which gives the whole a lively, compelling, defiant buoyancy that is unusual in works of this size. To further add to the sensation of lightness, the panels are beveled so that they seem suspended in space, floating away from the wall. Their

buoyancy recalls poet John Giorno's reassuring observation that everyone gets lighter—and, perhaps, everything as well. These recent works remain a cross between painting and sculptural relief that the artist has often referred to as a shaping of space, a framing of the world that is a consequence of her peripheral vision, and an essential point of departure.

Reading them yields a curious, captivating mix of oppositions: assertive and reserved, robust and delicate, warm and cool, dark and light, positive and negative, interpretations that can reverse themselves, the negative space, say, suddenly appearing as a kind of solid, a plenitude, suffused by a dense luminosity that is not empty at all. The nearly invisible split between the two panels acts like a horizon line, an intimation of the majestic sweep of the Southwest, of New Mexico and its spellbinding panoramas. The well-traveled Pousette-Dart has spent significant time there, and long ago fell in love with its natural beauties and the sublime range of colors that brush land and sky, smitten also by the ancient art of Native Americans, which has found its way into her imagination accompanied by influences from other cultures and countries, in particular Islamic, part of the challenge (and the fun) is to discover what they might be.



Joanna Pousette-Dart, *Centering #1*, 2024. Acrylic wash on Arches watercolor paper, 22 1/4 x 26 3/8 inches. © Joanna Pousette-Dart. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

She is a gifted colorist, although in this show, her range is best assessed in the works on paper than in the paintings in which the palette has been pared down to a few hues, predominantly blues and greens—although there is an array of shades—interspersed with strategically placed pale or warm areas. The paint is often more translucent, even wet-looking, and there is a pink of extraordinary tenderness in *Centering #4* (2024) that approximates the color of dawn that you should look for. The reduction of color forefronts the compositional structure, as evidenced in the deep blue and yellow of *Centering #5* (2024), topped by white. The most colorful piece on view is *Centering #3* (2024), its red alone brilliant enough to crimson the entire gallery. The application of the acrylic is looser, drips in evidence, the brushwork softer, smudgy, with traces of her touch throughout. In these works, the role of the panels has been taken over by the painting, now doing most of the work, part of the artist's intense, ongoing debate between content and support, between what constitutes painting, what constitutes subject.

Pousette-Dart has been working for more than five decades, and has always gone her own way, inspired by her own sophisticated, idiosyncratic vision. As abstraction of this kind is once again in favor, perhaps the times have finally caught up with her.

LISSON GALLERY

BOMB Magazine
30 September 2024

BOMB

WOMEN BY WOMEN

Joanna Pousette-Dart Dart by Shirley Kaneda

Reshaping painting.

SEPTEMBER 30, 2024



Joanna Pousette-Dart, *Untitled (2)*, 2023, acrylic on wood panel, 86.5 × 105.25 × 1.25 inches.
Courtesy of Lisson Gallery. © Joanna Pousette-Dart.

Joanna Pousette-Dart has been painting steadily since the 1970s. By following her visual perception and intuition, she has continued to paint her distinctive abstract paintings. Her approach to space and form came from looking at the immense vistas of the US Southwest alongside an ongoing interest in the arts of other cultures. Despite her works being two-dimensional and abstract, her ovoid-shaped canvases overlaid on top of each other combined with the gestures within produce a visual situation that is neither illusionistic nor absolutely flat. The inference is a space that is not containable within the boundaries of the works.

Modernist painters sought to use the simplicity of geometry as a sign of an ideal world in which anyone can partake. Of course, modernism failed in achieving this utopian ideal, but its art and objects continue to influence many artists who find useful ways of expanding this vocabulary and regenerate painting. Pousette-Dart is one of the foremost exemplars of this endeavor.

Women by Women, a series of interviews between women visual artists, is supported in part by the Deborah Buck Foundation with additional funding from the Judith Whitney Godwin Foundation.

Shirley Kaneda

Much has been written about your interest in the Southwestern landscape as well as your varied historical sources of inspiration. But I'm more interested in the specificity of your work in that it's quite independent of modernist categories like gestural or geometric abstraction. Your work is neither, but both are present and cumulatively express the bridging of these two poles, which are generally understood as the emotive and the intellectual.

Joanna Pousette-Dart

I'm trying to make something that reflects as closely as possible the way I perceive, and I'll basically use any means necessary to accomplish that. I have all sorts of modernist heroes, but I tend toward going back in time for inspiration to medieval art, mosaics, manuscripts, Sung-dynasty Chinese landscapes, and Indigenous art of all kinds. I'm interested in the larger arc of art-making all the way back to the caves. My work is not about mirroring or commenting on the moment, even though I'm interested in being in touch with it. I like the possibility of making something that transcends a single time and place, and that's visually compelling and dynamic enough to be enjoyed on its own through the senses, as you suggest.



Joanna Pousette-Dart, *Untitled (6)*, 2023, acrylic on wood panel, 86.25 x 104 x 1.25 inches. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery. © Joanna Pousette-Dart.

SK

Yes, your work seems to reference many cultures without being explicit. There is a generosity and an inclusive feeling of openness and possibilities because of the way you touch upon these associations. The shapes of the canvas structures also allude to the roundness of the world, even implying an infinite space. Maybe it's this combination that gives your works an eccentricity or peculiarity. They don't rely on previously conceived expectations.

JPD

My practice has always been very intuitive. I find that the painting doesn't really take off until I've managed to stop thinking of it as an idea. I need the paintings to be surprising, at least to me; and I'm constantly pushing myself away from resolving them in ways that seem predictable. In the end, they are never like what I would have imagined.

"I find that the painting doesn't really take off until I've managed to stop thinking of it as an idea."

— Joanna Pousette-Dart

SK

I know what you mean. At some point painting's generative potential takes over, and one follows what the painting dictates. It's a give and take during the process of making between you and the painting because it has its own way of being in the world once it makes its presence and other things start to permeate and produce possibilities that the artist may not have intended or expected.

JPD

Exactly. It's very much a searching process that I find alternatingly frustrating and thrilling. I tend to work on each painting for a fairly long time. My studies for them are only starting points, and once the panels are installed on the wall, they feel full of other possibilities. Even after the image asserts itself, there are endless revisions and recalibrations to align all the elements with the shape, and sometimes these adjustments can feel endless. I've come to identify with Piet Mondrian, who obsessed over moving a line incrementally one way or another.

SK

There is a lack of hierarchy in that all of the elements, including the shape, the color, and line, have a similar tonal dynamic that is also controlled by the opposing directions of the edges of the panels, some pointing upward and some downward in a way that defies any conventional reading of space.

JPD

I think this comes from the fact that there's no given construct in my work, so everything is activated, nothing is a given, and everything is interdependent. The interior drawing is in dialogue with the perimeter of the shape in a kind of spatial continuum, and there can be no separation if the thing is to function. I find it makes it difficult to begin a painting: it's the chicken or the egg conundrum. But honestly, it's challenging all the way through because everything is constantly changing in relation to everything else.



Joanna Pousette-Dart, *Centering #7*, 2024, acrylic wash on Arches watercolor paper, 29.25 x 34.5 inches. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery. © Joanna Pousette-Dart.

SK

I suspect these visual shifts and flux come from your taking risks to make something visually coherent, even though logically it isn't. And the reason for structuring these inconsistencies is to expose the limits of painting and bring about a different and unexpected solution. The outer shape is in dialogue with the internal drawing in your work, but unlike Frank Stella's shaped paintings, yours don't follow or logically mimic the outer shape on the inside. The curvature of the shape is related to the interior lines, but they don't echo each other. Scale is also what allows for these transgressions to function.

JPD

Stella explored so many different iterations of shape in so many contradictory and energetic ways. I found his work endlessly interesting. There have been quite a few artists working with shape whose work has interested me over the years. But my own move to shaped configurations came about very organically out of the need to express my perceptions of place, nature, and the figure in relation to them, not in response to any formal agenda per se. You mention scale, which had a lot to do with it. I wanted a way to imply big space and distance. I thought curvature was an economical and elegant solution. I could think of the shapes of the paintings as though they were my peripheral vision. They could also suggest spatial zones and expansion, buoyancy, and gravity. The somewhat precarious balance in how they were placed one on top of the other could imply movement, realignment, and the overall sense of mutability that feels central to existence. These are poetic concerns, and I was just trying to make a thing that was as accurate to my way of seeing as possible.

SK

The rounded corners imply weightlessness. Something floating as opposed to being anchored brings a feminine inflection because of the strong relationship to our bodies. The new works are somewhat of a departure, as the panels don't overlap as much. In fact, there is a lot more going on in the interior space.

JPD

My studio walls are filled with pictures of apses, domes, and glazed ceramic vessels from various cultures and periods. I've always been captivated by the inventiveness and skill it takes to wed an image to a curved surface. The circular and arched shapes seem to have a more cosmic space. My recent watercolors led me to want to make a series that dealt with cyclical imagery. Structurally speaking, these paintings are less involved with balance and stance. I want the viewer to feel integrated into the dynamic of the painting as a centering and balancing element. Each painting is subtly asymmetrical and has a tilt or spin and a single "horizon-like" break between the panels, which intersects the space differently and allows each work to exert its own sense of gravitational pull. The shape's interior space allowed me to explore an imagery that wasn't possible on the disjointed spaces of the stacked paintings. I don't see these as a departure but as part of an onward investigation of visual and poetic possibilities.



Installation view of *Joanna Pousette-Dart: Centering*, 2024. Lisson Gallery, New York City.
Courtesy of Lisson Gallery. © Joanna Pousette-Dart.

SK

Your works are not reducible to a concept, and they have a nuanced complexity that makes them difficult to interpret. The viewer's active participation is what makes them generate meaning.

JPD

The struggle is to make the contradictions and paradoxes feel so viscerally right and real that they won't require an explanation. They're simply a given because a painting is a circumstance; it is its own explanation. One of the jobs of art is to be disorienting and to transport you to someplace unexpected. Unfortunately, the great majority of people don't trust what they can't know.

SK

It's regrettable that we've been living in the age of information, much of it superfluous and fake. Abstract paintings can connect to the viewer in an immediate and, as you say, visceral way. One can look at the painting through thinking instead of looking and then thinking about it. To make works such as yours requires balancing what you know and don't know and a belief in art's ability to achieve the inaccessible. Has anything changed over the many decades that you have been working in this highly autonomous way?

JPD

I've been interested in the same things ever since I began making paintings seriously in the '70s. You can trace those elements all the way through my work, but it's developed in a very nonlinear and, as you say, autonomous way. When I began exhibiting with Susan Caldwell in the early '70s, I was making grid paintings with sand and pigment. Her gallery was a large space on West Broadway, and I showed different bodies of work there that were well received at the time. But I've always loved the process of painting more than the process of getting it out into the world. When the gallery closed, I went through a long stretch of exhibiting only sporadically, though I was painting constantly. It was a very formative and productive time during which I had a child, did a lot of traveling, and taught at Hunter College to make ends meet. My work took twists and turns it might not have taken if I had been feeling commercial pressures. The various times I spent in New Mexico and first experimented with an alternative to the rectangular format were part of that period. I found the freedom and space to just ruminate, experiment, and develop ideas at my own pace, which was essential to my finding a way of working that felt both formally and poetically entirely my own. Basically, I love painting and will always struggle to allow it to take me in whatever direction feels necessary.

Joanna Pousette-Dart: Centering *is on view at Lisson Gallery in New York City until October 19.*

First solo takes a new look at how we shape life



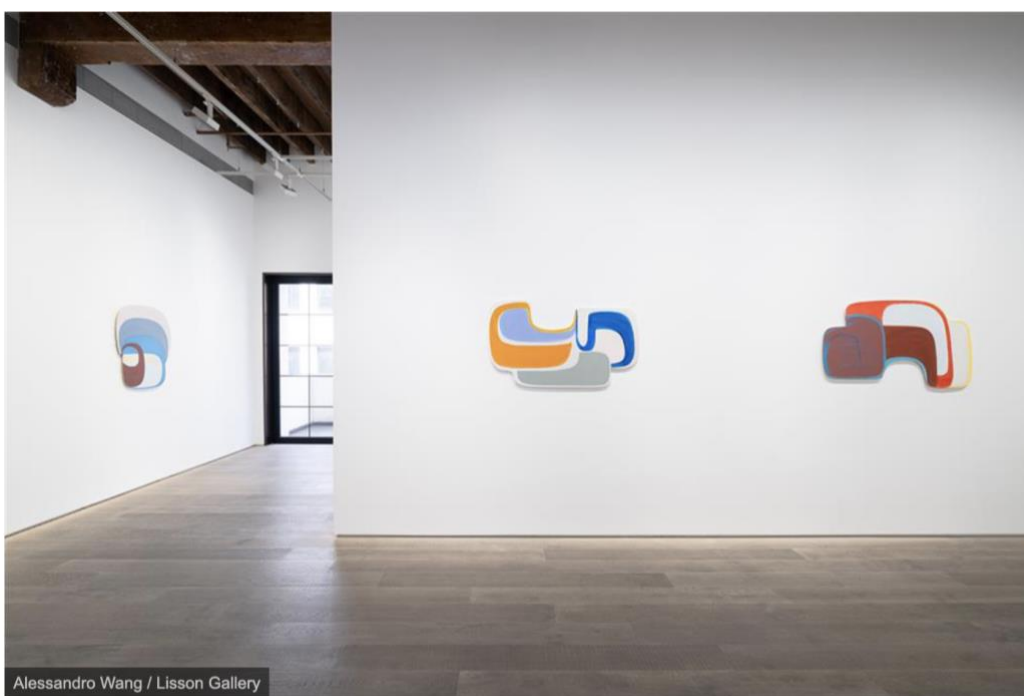
By Tan Weiyun

© 14:07 UTC+8, 2022-08-08

New York-based artist Joanna Pousette-Dart is presenting her first solo exhibition in China at the Lisson Gallery Shanghai. The works continue to explore the curvilinear format, a means of expressing her perceptions of the natural world.

Born into a family steeped in the arts, Pousette-Dart absorbed much through osmosis while also drawing her own inspiration from myriad sources, such as Mozarabic manuscripts, Romanesque paintings, Mayan and Islamic art, and Chinese landscape painting and calligraphy.

But trips to the southwestern desert of the United States in the 1970s and 1980s proved to be a turning point.



Installation "Joanna Pousette-Dart," 2022, at Lisson Gallery Shanghai

Standing on the boundless lands, with distant mountain ranges that extended for miles to meet the vast sky, the artist reconceived the primitive relationship of figure to the horizon, the seeming curvature of vast space and the editing element of one's peripheral vision.

In the 1990s, she abandoned the rectangular format and began experimenting with shaped panels, where she interpreted how she felt about the vast nature, the prismatic light, and the ever-changing dialogue between Earth and sky.

The 10 paintings, created for this exhibition, immerse viewers in an enormous expanse of nature.

Pousette-Dart's manipulation of colors, which shift subtly in tone from light to dark or warm to cool, possibly presents how the wild world looks from dawn to dusk, day to night, while the interplay of blues, ambers, oranges, yellows and grays evokes the constantly shifting light.

Each painting on each panel seems to have its own sense of light and its own particular stance.

Of the 10 paintings, two are configured in forms with a hollow on either the top or bottom edge of the canvas.

Unlike Pousette-Dart's typical smooth, long, curvaceous lines, the irregularity evokes the shape of clouds or some unknown elements of the landscape.

All the works in this exhibition are untitled – open for any interpretation.

To Pousette-Dart, the power of abstraction is that viewers find their own way to connect with a painting while the harmonic convergences of line, form and color set off a certain sensory connection that transcends a single meaning.

Exhibition info:

Date: Through August 27 (Tuesdays-Saturdays), 11am-6pm

Venue: Lisson Gallery

Address: 2/F, 27 Huqiu Rd

Source: SHINE Editor: Liu Qi

LISSON GALLERY

The Glossary
14 January 2022

FASHION | BEAUTY | HEALTH | WELLNESS *The* ARTS | CULTURE | FOOD | DRINK | TRAVEL | HOMES
GLOSSARY
THE LONDON STYLE GUIDE

CULTURE
DON'T-MISS
EXHIBITIONS

STYLE
CELESTIAL
JEWELLERY

BEAUTY
ATHOME TECH

TRAVEL
LUXURY
RETREATS

FOOD & DRINK
THE LATEST
OPENINGS

Bright
Future
Embracing London's
new beginnings

Joy Crookes
THE SOUND
OF 2022

Lakwena Maciver Mica Paris Bay Garnett
Alessandra Steinherr Louise Roe

ISSUE 16
NEW YEAR 2022
£5.00



WHAT'S ON & WHERE Agenda

By HARRIET COOPER



Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890). Self-Portrait with Dark Felt Hat, 1886-87. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

VAN GOGH SELF-PORTRAITS THE COURTAULD GALLERY

3 February – 8 May 2022

The inaugural show at the newly refurbished Courtauld Gallery was always going to be sensational – and indeed it is. This is the first ever exhibition dedicated to Vincent van Gogh's self-portraiture, with more than 15 paintings – many rarely, if ever, lent before – tracing the arc of Van Gogh's self-representation during his short years as a painter.

courtauld.ac.uk



SUPERBLUE 6 BURLINGTON GARDENS Until Summer 2022

Experiential art venture Superblue has come to London with the presentation of *Silent Fall*, a multi-sensory installation created for Burlington Gardens by artist duo A.A. Murakami. As the visitor walks through a seemingly endless forest, each tree produces hundreds of misty bubbles which, when burst, unlock aromas such as moss, rain and pine, serving as a metaphor for the fragility of nature.

superblue.com



Thomas Gainsborough, *The Blue Boy*, 1770 © courtesy of the Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino, California

Gainsborough's Blue Boy THE NATIONAL GALLERY

25 January - 15 May 2022

A century ago Thomas Gainsborough's *The Blue Boy* was sold to an American tycoon amid a huge outcry, so much so that it was hung in the National Gallery for three weeks as a public farewell. One hundred years on, to the day, the painting temporarily returns to the cultural institution, giving viewers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see this storied masterpiece.

nationalgallery.org.uk



Beatrice Potter aged 15, with her dog, Spot, by Rupert Potter, c.1890-1. Under Bequest. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, courtesy Frederick Warne & Co Ltd.

BELOW: Mrs Rabbit pouring tea for Peter while her children look on, 1902. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, courtesy Frederick Warne & Co Ltd.



Above: *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-duck* artwork, 1908. Watercolour and ink on paper. © National Trust Images

BEATRIX POTTER: DRAWN TO NATURE VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM

12 February 2022 – 8 January 2023

The V&A has teamed up with the National Trust to present the first ever exhibition to tell the complete life story of one of our best loved children's authors – Beatrix Potter. Playful and interactive, the displays of her personal objects, artworks from her most famous books and the sketches and stories that inspired them, all bring to life not just Beatrix Potter the storyteller, but also the natural scientist and conservationist.

vam.ac.uk



View across Esthwaite Water, by Beatrix Potter, 21 November 1909. Under Bequest. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London, courtesy Frederick Warne & Co Ltd.



Denzi Forester, *Am Shake*

Bloomberg New Contemporaries 2021 SOUTH LONDON GALLERY

Until 20 February 2022

New Contemporaries has been supporting the next generation of artists since 1949, by giving visibility and recognition to emerging talent. This exhibition – returning to the Gallery for the fourth consecutive year – includes 75 artists selected through an open submission by renowned creatives including Hew Locke, Tai Shani and Michelle Williams Gamaker.

newcontemporaries.org.uk



ABOVE: Elso James, *Black Girl Essex: Here We Come, Look We Here*, 2019; RIGHT: Tom Harker, *Spectral Perennials*, 2020.

WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

Until 5 June 2022

More than 50,000 submissions from 95 countries are entered into the annual Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition, which is developed and produced by the Natural History Museum. This extraordinary exhibition showcases 100 of the most powerful images, each chosen for its originality, narrative technical excellence and ethical practice. A true insight into the magic and magnitude of nature.

nhm.ac.uk/wpy



Head to head by Stefano Unterthiner, Italy. Winner, Behaviour: Mammals



Sound Mirror. Commissioned and produced by the São Paulo Biennial. Photo credit: Gai Gomes, 2016.

ROOTED BEINGS

WELLCOME COLLECTION

24 February - 29 August 2022

This major exhibition gives a whole new spin on our relationship with plants and fungi, presenting them as so much more than a resource for human consumption, tools or decoration. A series of new commissions and installations is displayed alongside intriguing botanical specimens and historic works, encouraging the viewer to not only rethink the way we see plant life but also our own relationship with the natural world.

wellcomecollection.org

JOANNA POUSETTE- DART

LISSON
GALLERY

Until 22 January 2022

This is the first London exhibition for New York-based artist Joanna Pousette-Dart. Her signature multi-panel curved canvases - inspired by her desire to go beyond the limitations of the rectangle and to create a space that reflects her own perceptions - line the gallery walls, their arresting colours giving a real sense of light and movement.

lissongallery.com



© Joanna Pousette-Dart; Courtesy Lissom Gallery



Peter Franc, Gorilla, 2017 © Museum of London

LONDON MAKING NOW

MUSEUM OF
LONDON

Until 24 February 2022

Creativity and craft flourishes in London - indeed, for centuries, it is what the city's culture and economy have been based on - and this exhibition features the work of 15 contemporary artists, all of them based in the capital, to exemplify this. Every exhibit has a unique story to tell, including Yinka Ilori's chair sculpture *What God Has Joined Together, Let No Man Put Asunder* (2015), an ode to his parents' marriage.

museumoflondon.org.uk



Yinka Ilori, *What God Has Joined Together, Let No Man Put Asunder* (2015) © Museum of London

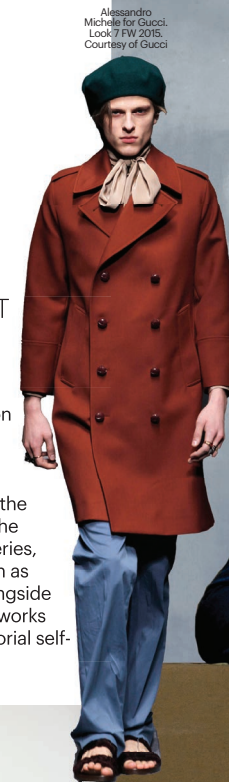
FASHIONING MASCULINITIES: THE ART OF MENSWEAR

IN PARTNERSHIP
WITH GUCCI

19 March - 6 November 2022

In what the V&A is calling "a celebration of the masculine wardrobe", this exhibition shines a spotlight on how designers, tailors, artists and their clients have all played a pivotal role in the metamorphosis of male fashion over the centuries. Displayed across three galleries, contemporary looks by designers such as Gucci and Grace Wales Bonner sit alongside historical gems and contemporary artworks and film, in homage to masculine sartorial self-expression at its finest

vam.ac.uk



Alessandro Michele for Gucci. Look 7 FW 2015. Courtesy of Gucci



Auguste Rodin, *The Age of Bronze* (Life of Adam), 1880-1914 (cast). © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Omari Victor Doo, *Jean Baptiste Balleu*, 2014. Courtesy MAGNINHA Gallery, Paris © Omari Victor Doo



Alessandro Michele for Gucci. Look 7 FW 2015. Courtesy of Gucci

Omari Victor Doo, *Jean Baptiste Balleu*, 2014. Courtesy MAGNINHA Gallery, Paris © Omari Victor Doo

FRANCIS BACON MAN & BEAST

ROYAL ACADEMY

29 January - 17 April 2022

The first exhibition to ever shine a light on Francis Bacon's fascination with animals and how this curiosity is reflected in his depiction of the human figure - 45 paintings have been chosen, spanning his earliest works in the 1930s right through to the final painting he ever made in 1991, via a trio of paintings of bullfights from 1969. Each reflects Bacon's deep-held belief that humankind is fundamentally an animal - something that lay at the heart of his oeuvre.

royalacademy.org.uk



Study for Bullfight No. 1, 1968. Private Collection. Photo: Prudence Cumming Associates Ltd.



Portrait of George Dyer, 1986. Private collection. Photo: Prudence Cumming Associates Ltd.

ArtSeen

Joanna Pousette-Dart

By **Barbara A. MacAdam**

Joanna Pousette-Dart's work is a visceral experience. Organic and warm forms embrace one another just as they do the viewer. Similarly, the paintings' colors are sweet and seductive and actively engage one another in often indefinable and unexpected contrasts. Ultimately, and together, the shapes and colors give form to feeling and emotion, but they are never overwrought. And when large, the scale of the canvases is not ungainly. Pousette-Dart knows when to stop. Compensating for the beauty of the paintings is their complexity. They are cerebral and widely allusive.

The four large (including *2 Part Variation #3 [After Pierrot]* (2015), measuring 87 1/2" x 120") multi-part, shaped paintings in this show could be viewed as alluding to landscape—desert, sea, sky, the curvature of the earth—but, actually, they don't describe any specific place or figure. Pousette-Dart creates and lays claim to her own particular territory—or "location"—as she would have it. Inhabiting that territory is *2 Part Variation #3*—two acrylic-on wood crescent-shaped panels stacked one atop the other, a pink panel below and a yellow one above. Navy-bluish limning on the pink one and a turquoise-ish intervention across the yellow renders the components lively and playful. At the same time, each element can be viewed as in an altarpiece, with the sections offering different commentaries on the color relations.



Installation view: *Joanna Pousette-Dart*, Lisson Gallery, New York, 2020. © Joanna Pousette-Dart. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

ON VIEW
Lisson Gallery
New York



Installation view: *Joanna Pousette-Dart*, Lisson Gallery, New York, 2020. © Joanna Pousette-Dart. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

Therein lies her serene originality. Despite Pousette-Dart's time in Mexico and New Mexico as well as Europe, and the Far East, with stops in the ancient and modern worlds—all of which inspired her and are deeply embedded in her paintings—the cultural references are in no way identifiable. The shapes and hues are not only her own, but are, remarkably, always in transition. The paintings' curves lead to an open-endedness, a nondeclarative quality. And, although the paintings look computer-screen flat with unmodulated hues, we readily perceive their depth of tone. We could view this in relation to some works by Kenneth Noland from the early to mid '90s, where the segments, many of them also crescent-shaped, are predominantly vertical: the colors are darker, cooler, and almost uncomfortable together and connected by a Plexiglas band of contrasting tone. Noland's forms are definitively measured and hard-edged with more graphic finality. Could we call it guy stuff?

As with animation, Pousette-Dart's shapes segue into one another, regularly conveying motion and pulling our eyes off the canvas. There is the inescapable allusion to boat shapes, which adds to the perception of movement as the horizontality of the canvases suggests progression. And, more to that point, there is an overriding appearance of liquidity and, by extension, shape-shifting.



Installation view: *Joanna Pousette-Dart*, Lisson Gallery, New York, 2020. © Joanna Pousette-Dart. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

These works are conversational. We might read them from east to west before being led around and back again. Not, however, without pausing at a few Brechtian links, such as an improvisational squiggle atop the segments or a narrow snake-like shape with a pointed tip stretching downward and connecting the panels as an interlude. At the same time, colors have been extensively tinkered with and layered, creating an atmosphere in which light and space shift expression.

Also in the show are six watercolors (actually gouache and acrylic on paper) and a suite of four sumi-ink-on-rice-paper drawings. The watercolors, consisting of stacked shapes in a vertical format have a different attitude and affect from the large shaped and composite works. The richly colored passages are very compact, and almost squashed together, claiming their turf, and unlike the horizontal works, they have an architectural quality. The small drawings take another direction. They call to mind Brice Marden and automatic writing, which leads us into the realm of poetry, where we can follow Pousette-Dart's imagining and lines of thought. In that sense, the works are direct and refer to the venerable Eastern and Western traditions of writing as drawing and vice versa. Following these lines forces a different kind of reading, a closer, more internal one. That's where we step in.

Contributor

Barbara A. MacAdam

Barbara A. MacAdam is a freelance writer and former long-time editor at *ARTnews*.

LISSON GALLERY

The Brooklyn Rail
March 2020

 **BROOKLYN RAIL**

ArtSeen

Joanna Pousette-Dart

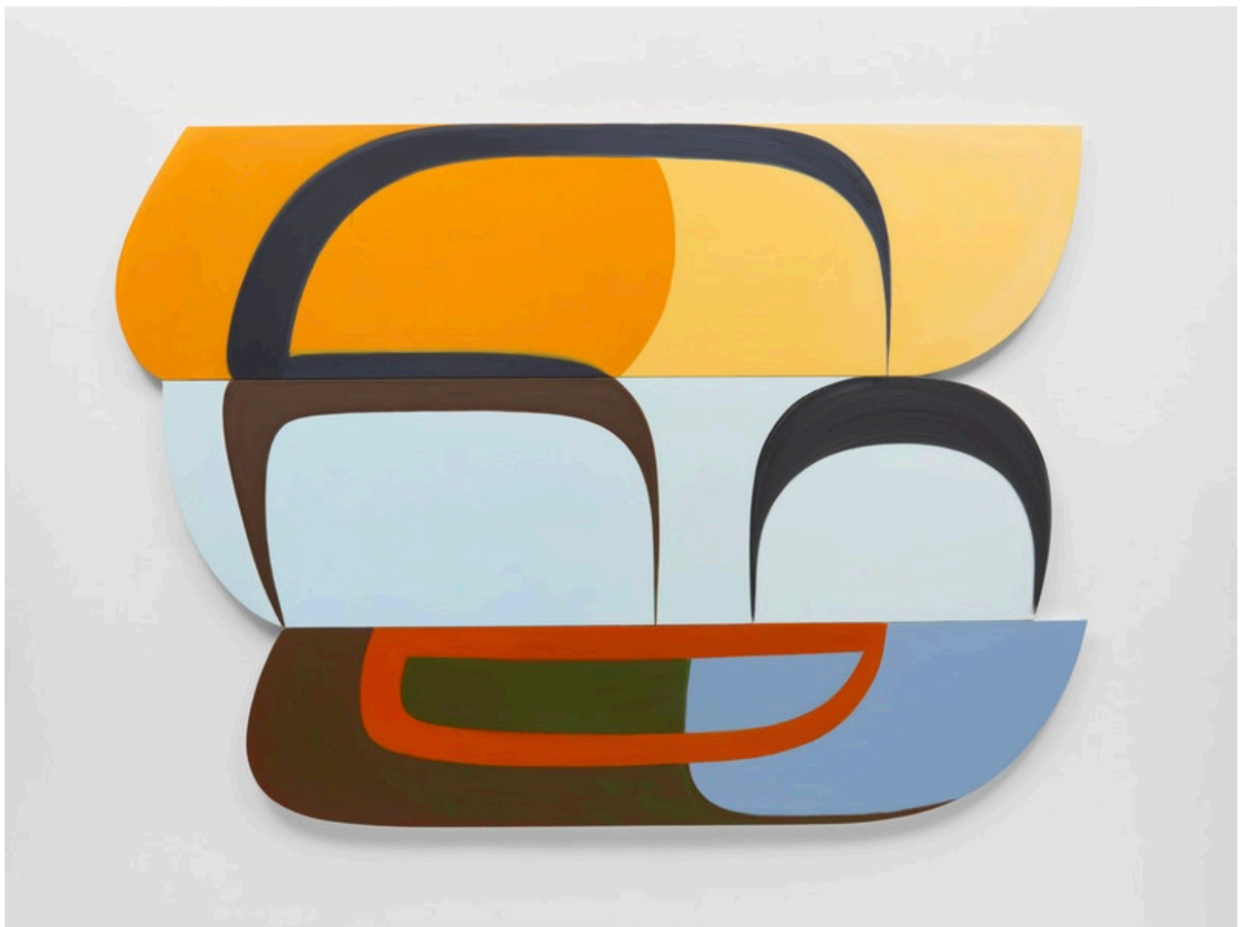
By [Amanda Gluibizzi](#)



Installation view: *Joanna Pousette-Dart*, Lisson Gallery, New York, 2020. © Joanna Pousette-Dart. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

The Etruscan Tomb of the Leopards at Tarquinia is rife with playful paradoxes: a spacious entombment celebrating the cheerfully deceased, the wall paintings are alive with brilliant color and twitchy patterning, although they repose in a dark enclosure. It doesn't surprise me at all that Joanna Pousette-Dart mentioned Etruscan tomb paintings in an interview in the *Brooklyn Rail's* June 2019 issue as part of a list of art experiences that have "particularly affected" her, as her work exhibits its own intriguing contradictions, rewarding viewers for their attempts to "unlock" the paintings' "logic."¹

In her first solo exhibition at Lisson Gallery, Pousette-Dart has included larger-scale paintings alongside vivid 12-inch square gouache and acrylic studies that at first glance look like they mimic the paintings, before going their own ways, and similarly-sized fuzzy sumi ink sketches that have seeped into the weave of their rice paper grounds. These last are spontaneous and responsive to happenstance, especially when compared to the studies, which feature disciplined application of color in the artist's signature blade shapes. In contrast, Pousette-Dart's recent paintings seem hard-edged when seen from a distance, but reveal her hand in drips, brushstrokes, and in the case of *2 Part Variation #3 (After Pierrot)* (2015), frenetic squiggles filling in the space between a complex blue and blushing salmon pink. *Plateau* (2019) looks flat until our eyes adjust to the subtle gradient of a cerulean blue that travels from dark to light, right to left, in the lower half of the painting, following yellow-orange arcs that undulate from the right-hand corner. The brown hue in the lower left of *3 Part Variation #12* (2017) almost appears to be developed by combining an orange outline painted over it with the green shape the orange circumscribes. It is entropically blended, like the colors in a wonderfully expensive faux-fur coat.



Joanna Pousette-Dart, *3 Part Variation #12*, 2017. Acrylic on canvas on shaped wood panels, 66 1/2 x 90 x 1 1/2 inches. © Joanna Pousette-Dart. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

Such is the intricacy of Pousette-Dart's paintings that even when they are not internally contradictory, they seem nearly so. *3 Part Variation #12*'s color feels like a crisp day that is, implausibly, also humid. Contour lines do not contain volume so much as open up fields to space; I suspect this is because they do not always close and even when they do, they thicken and thin elegantly. The paintings are both allusive and singular. The artist's swoops somehow manage to remind me simultaneously of the graphic assuredness of a Haida thunderbird as well as the loping sinuousness of pulled taffy.



Installation view: Joanna Pousette-Dart, Lisson Gallery, New York, 2020. © Joanna Pousette-Dart. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

The paintings included here are constructed of multiple parts, and these offer the most surprising revelations. They are painted on canvas that has been stretched over panel. Though deep, their beveled edges slant inward, covering most cast shadows and causing them to appear as though they are hovering over the walls on which they are hung. The stretching is pristine and permits the panels to snuggle up to each other without necessarily touching. The two panels comprising *2 Part Variation #3* fit so neatly together that I am tempted to compare them to nestling spoons. The gravity of spoons isn't quite right, though, because the panels do not rest on top of one another. Instead, maybe they are like a skate and ice, incising and resisting simultaneously. In *3 Part Variation #6* (2013), the charcoal black of the topmost panel looks like it respects this division, but when we draw close, we

topmost panel looks like it respects this division, but when we draw close, we see that its lower painted edge dips into the middle panel, just overlapping by a few centimeters and pressing into its partner's space. As a result, the middle seems to compress and bulge, a light blue parabola that swells in response. The panels themselves, though, remain discrete. They are physically distinct even as they visually touch, their intermittence quietly suggestive, Pousette-Dart's intelligently intimate paintings excitingly defying initial expectations.²

Endnotes

1. Barbara Rose, "Joanna Pousette-Dart with Barbara Rose," *The Brooklyn Rail*, June 2019, <https://brooklynrail.org/2019/06/art/JOANNA-POUSETTE-DART-with-Barbara-Rose>.
2. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 9-10.

Contributor

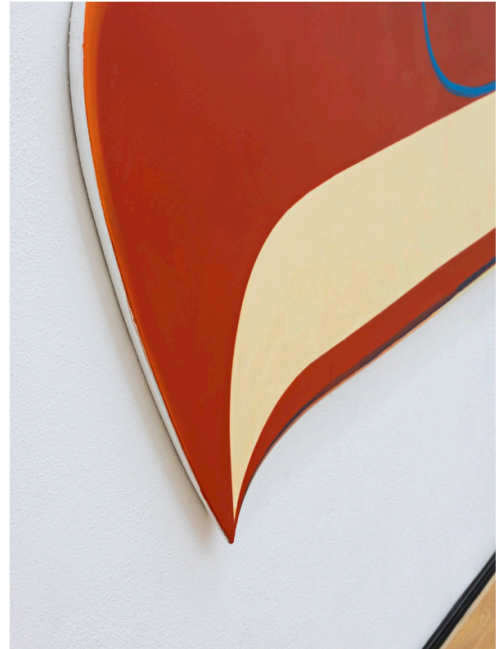
Amanda Gluibizzi

Amanda Gluibizzi is an art editor at the *Rail*.
An art historian, she is the Co-Director of The
New Foundation for Art History.

Art | In Conversation

JOANNA POUSETTE-DART with Barbara Rose

“To be uncompromising in
developing and following your
own vision is a radical act in itself”



Joanna Pousette-Dart, *Two Part Variation #2 (red, yellow, blue) (Detail)*, diptych, 2012 - 2013, 81 x 123 inches. Photo: Bernd Fickert. Courtesy the artist.

I first wrote about Joanna Pousette-Dart's work in 1985 in an article titled "Rule Breaker's" published in *VOGUE*. I have followed her work from the very beginning. Her paintings always fascinated me because of their uniqueness and originality, but I could not figure out exactly how she made them or what her inspirations were. I did this interview to make her processes and intentions clearer. I asked the questions to which I wanted the answers myself.

Barbara Rose (Rail): You've recently returned from Germany where you had a major exhibition at the Wiesbaden museum. Why do you think there is interest in American art in Germany? Is there more support for painting there?

Joanna Pousette-Dart: It seems perhaps they're more open, more idealistic, and less market driven. Museums there seem to have a creative latitude—maybe because they're funded differently—commercial issues don't drive them.

Rail: Do the Wiesbaden paintings constitute an installation or are they discrete individual works?

Pousette-Dart: They're individual works done over a period of 10-12 years. In the studio, the paintings begin to speak to one another. I wanted to set up a similar situation in the museum. I didn't want it to be strictly chronological. Jörg Daur who is a brilliant curator, was very open to this idea. He gave each room its own logic, its own sense of light and drama. The beauty of the

ON VIEW

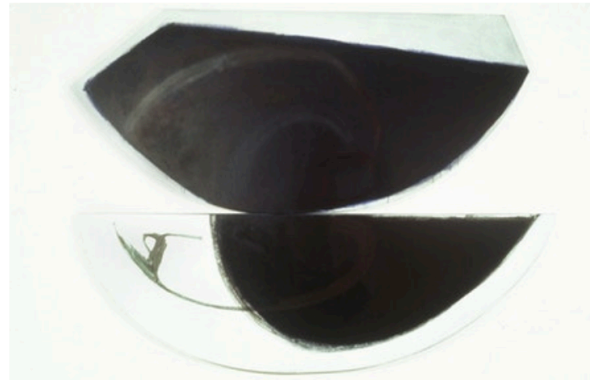
Museum Wiesbaden

March 29 – June 30, 2019
Weisbaden, Germany

museum is that there are clear vantage points from one room to another. This allowed us to amplify the conversation between works.

Rail: When did you begin to use shaped wood panels and how did you arrive at the shapes?

Pousette-Dart: I began in the late 1990s. I traveled to New Mexico in the mid-70s. It was a huge turning point in my work. But it wasn't until I returned in the '80s that I conceived of abandoning the rectangle and developing curved panels to achieving the sense of scale I was after. At the time I was staying in the Galisteo Basin in New Mexico. Being in this enormous expanse surrounded by distant mountain ranges in each direction makes you aware of the primal relationship of figure to horizon and earth to sky. In the mornings and evenings I'd take snapshots with throw-away cameras and tape them together to create 360 degree panoramas. They were a record of the way the passage of light changed the relationships of everything from shot to shot. From these I began making drawings and cutting them up. When I got back I had the first panels made by a furniture maker.



Joanna Pousette-Dart, *Untitled (Dark Edge)*, 1993 - 1996, 9 x 12 feet. Boston Museum of Fine Art.

Rail: What did the first shaped paintings look like?

Pousette-Dart: One of the best examples of the early shaped paintings is in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. It was made in 1993 and is composed of two roughly half circular shapes that rested one on top of the other with the curved sides down. The drawing in the painting unraveled from the point where they met. These early paintings were all quite large, 9' x 12' or so. I hadn't begun to bevel the edges so they were about two inches thick. They were more limited in color because I was concentrating more on how the drawing within the panel was going to interact with the shape.

Rail: Why do you think people often see the image of boat or canoe or the forms of Native Americans of the Northwest Coast in your work?



Joanna Pousette-Dart, *Three Part Variation #1*, 2010, 68.5 x 125 inches. Photo: Bernd Fickert. Courtesy the artist.

Pousette-Dart: That's not my intention. The shapes are based loosely on parts of hemispheres. As time went on these forms got flattened, elongating the areas where they came together so the forms may resemble forms that people associate with canoes or boats. I think it becomes a way to associate or describe them. The configurations, their balance, and the way they're painted all suggest motion and this may be another factor. I think the correspondence with Northwest Coast art has to do with a sort of animist quality they have. The painting morphs between being an object and also a way of seeing. To me the power of abstraction is that people find their own way to connect with a painting. The particular use of line, form, color set off a certain sensory connection that transcends a single meaning. I'm not interested in telling people how to see what I make. This is one reason I don't generally title things except in the most open ended way.

Rail: You draw a lot in a free, one might say "automatic," style that does not depict things. How would you describe the relationship of your drawing to your painting?



Joanna Pousette-Dart, all *Untitled*, 2019, 18 3/4 x 16. Photo: Bernd Fickert. Courtesy the artist.

Pousette-Dart: I do two types of drawing. Drawings that start as studies for paintings and drawings which are totally improvisational. The first deal with shape and line in a way that's similar to the paintings, although they rarely end up having a one to one relationship to a painting. The improvisational drawings are relating to the rectangle of the page and they are freewheeling and associative, like dreaming. The physical kinesthetic motion of making them somehow stays with me and ends up in paintings.

Rail: You paint large and small paintings. How do you create a sense of monumentality in small paintings? Is there a reason you make small works?

Pousette-Dart: The small paintings are, for some reason, harder for me to make. But I like making them because I can cut them and alter the shape as I'm working so they can undergo either massive changes or a kind of fine tuning which isn't possible on the large pieces. What gives something scale is a mystery. You know when something has it but there's no formula for achieving it. People always wonder if the small paintings are studies. If anything, I would say they're exploratory because I have never made a larger painting based on a smaller one. If they work, their rightness and their scale seem inseparable.



Joanna Pousette-Dart, all *Untitled*, 2019, 16 1/2" x 16 1/2". Photo: Bernd Fickert. Courtesy the artist.

Rail: Your work takes a long time to make and a long time to experience visually because it's complex and detailed.

Pousette-Dart: The initial stages are time consuming. To arrive at the shape I make a drawing in actual size on paper mounted to the wall. This wall drawing usually begins from non-specific watercolors or notebook drawings. When I feel it's right I give it to the fabricator to be cut. Then the panels are stretched and gessoed in the studio. Once I'm actually painting on them they develop at their own rate: some faster, others more slowly.

The process of finding the image feels like unlocking the painting's logic. Ideally, I let things sit for periods of time and go back to them or consider them finished. I spend a lot of time sitting and ruminating.... I want to make something that is absorbing enough to draw you in and keep you there.

Rail: Who are the contemporary artists who've worked with shape that have most interested you?

Pousette-Dart: The artists I'm interested in were first dealing with the sense of painting as wall or as object. Many who showed at Park Place Gallery were important to me and to my thinking about what a painting could be. But my work is less programmatic. Many of the artists who showed with Bykert Gallery in the '70s and '80s continue to interest me: Paul Mogensson, David Novros, Brice Marden. There are others like Robert Mangold and Elizabeth Murray. Frank Stella's work has also affected my thinking. But I think my use of shape is uniquely about movement and creates a kind of spatial continuum in a novel way.

Rail: Did Monet's or other Abstract Expressionist artists' horizontal extension of the canvas—so that the viewer is lost inside the pictorial field—impress you?

Pousette-Dart: Yes but I'm inclined to go back to earlier sources—the caves and Giotto's Arena Chapel for example. There's just nothing comparable to the experience of a painted *place*. The sad reality is that few artists—even if they're actively pursuing it—get a chance to paint on that scale. I think the experience of these places has absolutely affected what I make. I've tried to bring some of the resonance and complexity of this experience into my own work.

Rail: You've spoken of the sense of peripheral vision in your work. What do you mean by that?

Pousette-Dart: I think of the shape of the painting as a space being edited by my peripheral vision. So while the painting is meant to be whole within itself, I would like it to feel as though it's part of a larger whole extending beyond the frame. I'd like the rhythm and the light of the painting to reverberate beyond its edges.

Rail: You and Larry Poons have both told me the most important element in painting is light. Many old masters believed that as well. Color, through which light filtered, is definitely a primary concern in your work. It's obvious to me that the law of simultaneous color contrast that launched Impressionism is at work in your choice of tints and shades. Why do you use a more extensive palette than the primary colors of Constructivism?

Pousette-Dart: I think one of the primary jobs of a painter is to transform color into light. The kind of light is different for different artists. Since I'm interested in a certain relationship between light and form which I associate with the natural world, flat, planar use of color doesn't work for me. I use whatever colors I need to in order to create the quality of light or the placement in space I'm looking for. I try to establish color relationships that feel somehow believable or "real" in an ambient way. I don't have a fixed or identifiable palette, but I think my paintings have an identifiable quality of *light*.

Rail: What was it like to grow up surrounded by a world of art? Your father and grandfather were both painters and your mother and grandmother were writers. How has being surrounded by artists affected your own practice?

Pousette-Dart: You have no way of knowing how different it is until you go out into the world. I grew up completely steeped in music and art. I learned a tremendous amount through osmosis. But then ultimately you have to find a way to own it, which is a challenge in itself. There's not much to rebel against so you have to invent yourself from another place. I feel incredibly fortunate for having grown up with the sense that painting is something you do for the love of it—that making something is its own reward. This idea made me very resilient and aesthetically self-reliant, but also a bit of a perfectionist.

Rail: As a Bennington graduate, you were surrounded by Color Field painters like Kenneth Noland, and Jules Olitski who taught there. How did you avoid becoming a Clement Greenberg follower? Did anything at Bennington influence you?

Pousette-Dart: I felt completely at odds with the whole Greenbergian Formalist thing, but there weren't many alternative points of view. I thrashed around not being able to find any real direction, just knowing what I didn't want to do. It was kind of depressing. I took a lot of literature courses because Bennington also had a really stellar literature department and at the time and I thought I might be interested in writing. I figured out a schedule that would allow me to escape to New York for extended weekends.

Rail: Your early paintings were done off the stretcher in a manner that parallels the aesthetic of the Support/Surface group who came into prominence in Paris in the '70's and '80's. Do you know their work? They were heavily influenced by theory. Is theory or conceptual concerns important to you?

Pousette-Dart: I consider the paintings you're talking about to be my first serious paintings. I wasn't aware of the Support/Surface group at the time but there were many people in New York in the '60s and '70s who were challenging the notion of the traditional painting support. Artists who were showing at Park Place who were interested in painting as an object interacting with the wall and others like Alan Shields, Sam Gilliam, Elizabeth Murray so these precedents were important for me at the time.

My paintings from this period weren't driven by theory. They were much more intuitive in origin. I had been drawn to indigenous art of all kinds so I came up with this approach of making something that could acquire shape organically the way you might weave a basket or make a painting in the sand. The paintings were not stretched. They were woven together from six irregularly cut strips which created a very loose grid and then coated with multiple layers of rhoplex, sand, and pigment. They were relatively rigid and hung by hidden grommets on the back. I showed one in the Whitney Biennial in 1972. I maybe made 15 or 20 of these in all. Then I went to New Mexico and I began to stretch the paintings and they became more rectilinear and colorful.



Joanna Pousette-Dart, *Anashuya*, 1972, 72 x 72 inches. Courtesy the artist.

Rail: You spent years traveling. What specific art works particularly affected you?

Pousette-Dart: The Alhambra in Granada, Spain; wall paintings in Taüll, Catalonia; Giotto's Arena Chapel; the tomb of Galla Placidia in Ravenna; the Etruscan tomb paintings; the caves... I could go on, and I haven't mentioned Mexico. Painted places that meld art with architecture have always been a huge source of inspiration for me. The experience of being in these places made me want to try to build some of the feeling of encompassing space into my own work and to make the paintings interact with the wall to create their own sense of place.



Joanna Pousette-Dart, *Untitled diptych*, 1975, 7 x 14 feet. Private Collection.

Rail: You are a woman, a wife, and a mother as well as a painter. How do you feel about Feminism? You seem to shy away from groups to stand on your own. Is that difficult?

Pousette-Dart: I'm a committed feminist and can't believe how fast things are sliding backward. My grandmother was a suffragette and refused to adopt my grandfather's name, hence the hyphen in Pousette-Dart. It's still harder for women in every field. But I've never been drawn to making overtly political art. I think to be uncompromising in developing and following your own vision is a radical act in itself. Painting well is the best revenge! I realize this isn't going to move abortion rights forward but I actively support women's issues in whatever other ways I can.

Rail: What is your objective as a painter? How do you understand the role of art in life?

Pousette-Dart: I always think, wouldn't it be great to be able to make something that moved people like Aretha Franklin or Bob Marley, that immediate, visceral, emotional, sensual hit. Obviously music is its own communication, but there is a visual equivalent.... People feel it in the prehistoric caves or in Chartres in front of certain works of art that just seem to be ineffable. So I'm in search of that. I'm an idealist and believe painting can be transporting.

I found this quote by William Faulkner on a book jacket a couple of years ago and I think it's spare but says it all. "The aim of every artist is to arrest motion, which is life, by artificial means and hold it fixed so that a hundred years later, when a stranger looks at it, it moves again since it is life."

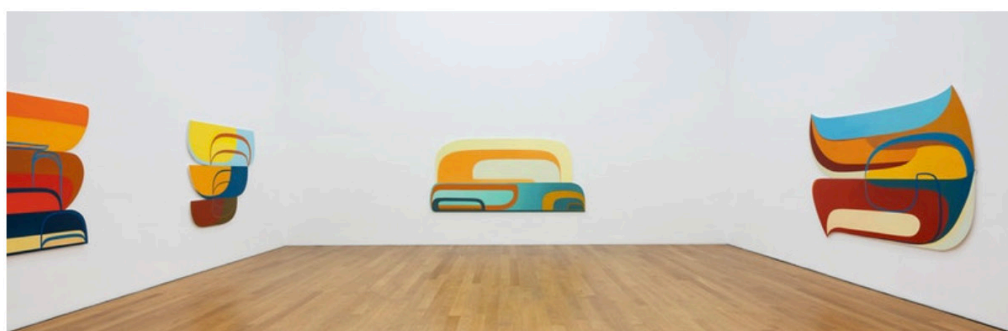
Portfolio of Installation shots from Weisbaden Museum



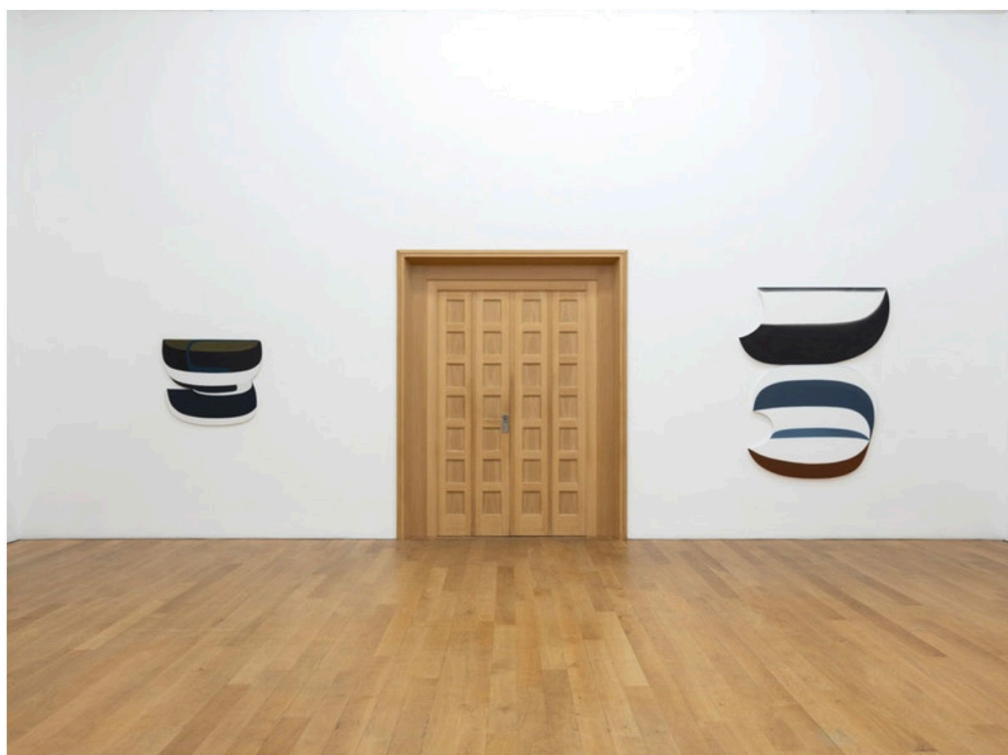
Installation shot. *Joanna Pousette-Dart* at Wiesbaden Museum 2019. Photo: Bernd Fickert. Courtesy the artist.



Installation shot. *Joanna Pousette-Dart* at Wiesbaden Museum 2019. Photo: Bernd Fickert. Courtesy the artist.



Installation shot. *Joanna Pousette-Dart* at Wiesbaden Museum 2019. Photo: Bernd Fickert. Courtesy the artist.



Installation shot. *Joanna Pousette-Dart* at Wiesbaden Museum 2019. Photo: Bernd Fickert. Courtesy the artist.



Installation shot. *Joanna Pousette-Dart* at Wiesbaden Museum 2019. Photo: Bernd Fickert. Courtesy the artist.



Installation shot. *Joanna Pousette-Dart* at Wiesbaden Museum 2019. Photo: Bernd Fickert. Courtesy the artist.



Installation shot. *Joanna Pousette-Dart* at Wiesbaden Museum 2019. Photo: Bernd Fickert. Courtesy the artist.



Installation shot. *Joanna Pousette-Dart* at Wiesbaden Museum 2019. Photo: Bernd Fickert. Courtesy the artist.



Installation shot. *Joanna Pousette-Dart* at Wiesbaden Museum 2019. Photo: Bernd Fickert. Courtesy the artist.

Contributor

Barbara Rose

BARBARA ROSE is an art historian and curator who lives in New York and Madrid, Spain.

Joanna Pousette-Dart's Landscape

Pousette-Dart's career is proof that the art world hardly ever embraces single-minded women in the middle of their careers, whereas with men it is different.



John Yau April 14, 2019



Joanna Pousette-Dart at Museum Wiesbaden, installation view: "3 Part Variation #10" (2014–15), acrylic on canvas on shaped wood panel, 60 x 81 inches (left); "3 Part Variation #6" (2013), acrylic on canvas on shaped wood panels, 60 x 81 inches (right); with a painting by Morris Louis visible through the doorway (all photos by the artist for Hyperallergic)

I went to Joanna Pousette-Dart's studio in mid-February of this year. I have gone there a number of times over the years, starting around 2007, when I first wrote a catalog essay for her show at Moti Hasson in 2008, which was the last time that she had a solo exhibition in New York. In 2017, she was included in a four-person show, *Aspects of Abstraction*, at Lisson Gallery, which I [reviewed](#).

The reason I went to her studio was to see a group of paintings and drawings that were about to be shipped off to Germany, where she was having a show, *Joanna Pousette-Dart*, at the Wiesbaden Museum (March 29–June 30, 2019). Since I wouldn't be able to see the show, I decided I would write about my experience of her work around the time that it would be on view in Wiesbaden.

The fact that Pousette-Dart has not shown regularly in New York throughout this century but now has a solo museum show in Germany is – to my mind – just further proof of how obliged many institutions are to their trustees; they prefer to exhibit their board members' assets rather than art.

From the mid-1970s to the early '80s, Pousette-Dart was represented by the Susan Caldwell Gallery in New York. After that gallery closed, she stopped showing regularly in the city, but, more importantly, her work changed. These paintings, which are among the strongest she has ever made, offer us a chance to stop and think about the assortment of inspiration she has drawn upon over the past 30 years.



Joanna Pousette-Dart at Museum Wiesbaden: installing “Untitled (Blue, Black, Red)” (2011/13), acrylic on canvas on shaped panels, triptych, 9 panels, approximately 8 x 25 feet

In the late 1980s, Pousette-Dart lived in Galisteo, New Mexico, which is on a desert plain surrounded by mountains. Other artists associated with that particular geography were Agnes Martin, Bruce Nauman and Susan Rothenberg, and Allan and Gloria Graham. This is how Pousette-Dart described the landscape to Joan Waltemath in *The Brooklyn Rail* (October 2008):

The Gallisteo Basin is a vast flat expanse and it's surrounded by four mountain ranges. The main sensation I felt there was the curvature of the earth, and painting within a rectangle seemed increasingly arbitrary—it seemed to turn the experience into a picture. I was taking 360-degree photographs, which I stuck together with tape to create a continuous flattened landscape. In taking the photographs I could see the light changing the interrelationship of all the elements from frame to frame as I was shooting. I began making drawings with the photos in mind, cutting shapes and putting them together and these drawings ultimately led to the shaped panels.

As her statement suggests, she was interested in a state of constant motion, as underscored by the light and sky. The first shaped paintings consisted of two boat-like shapes, with their curved sides facing down, stacked one on top of the other. While some critics have seen these works as being influenced by Northwest Coast Indian art and the Indian Space Painters, such as Steve Wheeler and Peter Busa, this is not the case. They were inspired by a terrain in which the changing light is often dramatically embodied by its interactions with the landscape.

Pousette-Dart was educated at Bennington College when the faculty included Kenneth Noland and Jules Olitski, artists who were aligned with Clement Greenberg. Early in her life, she chose not to connect herself to this or any other club and pursued an independent path, which, as I see it, is one reason why recognition came late, as it has to other self-determining women (Louise Bourgeois, Alice Neel, Joyce Scott, and Maria Lassnig). The art world hardly ever embraces single-minded women in the middle of their careers, whereas with men it is different.



Joanna Pousette-Dart at Museum Wiesbaden, installation view: “3 Part Variation #8” (2014), acrylic on canvas on shaped wood panels, 65 1/2 x 83 inches (left); “3 Part Variation #9” (2014), acrylic on canvas on shaped wood panels, 77 x 91 inches, Collection of Emily Leland Todd (center); “Plateau” (2018), acrylic on canvas on shaped wood panels, 66 x 139.5 inches (right)

If Pousette-Dart were going to make a shaped canvas, it had to be for a personal reason rather than a formal one. The sloping forms evoked the earth’s curvature and mountains of the New Mexican landscape: it gave her a format in which to establish a relationship between the outer shape and the inner forms, explore shifts in hue and value, as well as overlay the stacked forms with an arabesque line. Sequence, disruption, panorama, and alteration — all ways of perceiving an immense, elemental landscape — became central to her paintings.

In the work that she was sending to Wiesbaden, she vertically stacked between two and three of the curving shapes. The bottommost section could be either the widest of the group or the smallest, which means that the compositional balance struck by the work ran the gamut from secure to precarious. The curved sides can extend down or up. The succession of internal shapes can be read vertically as well as horizontally, with the seams between the shapes conveying both disruption and sequencing. In three blue, slightly different shaped canvases, which have been vertically stacked from the smallest up to the largest, Pousette-Dart has painted a cropped, circular, tan-colored shape inside each of the panels, its top defined by the panel’s physical edge. It is as if we are watching an animated progression of the moon rising up from the horizon.

In another painting, the interplay of reds, browns, and oranges, along with two different dark blues (each confined to its panel) becomes a carefully orchestrated sequence of changes and shifts, with no

particular relationship dominating the others. While we might notice at first the internal color relationships in a single panel, other correspondences come into play once we enlarge our focus to take in the whole work. This connectivity is further enhanced by the relationship of the interior elements to each other. The shapes and lines within one panel are variations on those in another. And yet, even as we cue into these harmonic convergences, Pousette-Dart is likely to introduce a different kind of shape or line into the panel that prevents us from viewing the connections reductively.



Joanna Pousette-Dart at Museum Wiesbaden, installation view: “3 Part Variation #2 (3 reds)” (2015), acrylic on canvas on shaped wooden panels, 77 x 91 inches (left); “Untitled (Blue, Black, Red)” (2011/13), acrylic on canvas on shaped panels, triptych, 9 panels, approximately 8 x 25 feet (center); “Banded Painting #5” (2015–16), acrylic on canvas on shaped wood panels, 82 x 78 inches (right)

Her boat-like shapes can evoke the earth’s curvatures, or mesas rising in the distance, or the changing sky, which we can never see in its entirety — the rounded forms thereby also invoke the limits of our sight. These forms feel simultaneously expansive and compressed. Some are elongated and narrow, while others are squat and compacted. She seems to never repeat a particular configuration.

Pousette-Dart's use of yellows, umbers, blues, reds, oranges, and greens is connected to the landscape and sky above, but the logic of each painting is internal, as it moves from dark to light, and from warm to cool. Moreover, for all their evocation of the interaction of light and desert landscape, they elude any geographic name or phenomenological concept we might apply to it. This is one of the many deep strengths of Pousette-Dart's work: you cannot simply say what you are looking at. You have to open yourself up and discover just what the colors, forms, and lines are doing.

Pousette-Dart arrived at these paintings through her experience of the landscape. To do so, she had to internalize a vastness that is both awe-inspiring and deeply unsettling. In other words, she had to embrace her subjectivity and recognize that she did not experience the world the same way everyone else did. There is persistent myth that all experience is secondhand. It is a way to influence people to conform. Thankfully, Pousette-Dart did not buy into this art world fairy tale.

Joanna Pousette-Dart *continues at the Museum Wiesbaden (Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 2, Wiesbaden, Germany) through June 30.*

Art | In Conversation

Joanna Pousette-Dart with Joan Waltemath

OCT 2008



On the occasion of the painter's recent exhibit at Moti Hasson Gallery, which will be on view until November 1, Joanna Pousette-Dart welcomed *Rail* Editor-at-Large Joan Waltemath to her Broome Street studio to talk about her life and work.

Joan Waltemath (Rail): I'm sure you've been asked many times before what it was like for you to grow up with a father who was well known as a painter?

Joanna Pousette-Dart: Well, there is the obvious difficulty of being taken on your own merits, but overall I think it was a tremendous advantage. I was able to absorb so much organically. I was lucky that my father was very generous with his time and his ideas—he didn't retreat to a studio and shut everybody out. I spent a lot of time working there, drawing, watching his processes, listening to music, talking. He was a great collector so the studio was filled with all sorts of wonderful objects and things from other cultures. It was an organized chaos and very rich. Also he passed on the belief that one's work is its own reward.

Rail: After having grown up working in your father's studio, how did you find school in Bennington?

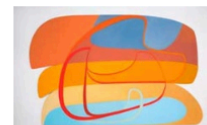
Pousette-Dart: There were a lot of interesting people teaching at Bennington at the time I was there but the art department was heavily tilted toward a Greenbergian philosophy. [Jules] Olitsky, [Kenneth] Noland, [Larry] Poons were there, so were Isaac Witkin, Phillip King, as well as Vincent Longo, who I taught with years later at Hunter College. But, I found the whole formalist line difficult to swallow. To a large extent the other art students there were compliant and there was little Art History, so, I felt kind of embattled and aloof. The way I dealt with it was to take a lot of literature courses and to find ways to escape to New York.



Portrait of the artist. Pencil on paper by Phong Bui.

Rail: It seems now that there's a paradigm for younger artists to go directly from school into a residency program, or into graduate school, and really start building their resumes right away, but when I graduated from school in the seventies that paradigm did not exist. And I cannot imagine you experienced that either. So what did you do when you left school?

Pousette-Dart: I worked for a law clerk, I worked as a photo-stylist, I worked in the welfare department, and I painted at night or on weekends. I finally landed a teaching job at Ramapo College, which gave me a bit more time to paint. But at the time I really didn't think about running out and getting a gallery. I loved the activity of painting, planned to be doing it for the long haul,



"Untitled (Cañones #4)" (2007-2008). Acrylic on canvas over wood panels. 69 1/2 x 106 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Moti Hasson Gallery, New York.

and was prepared to do other stuff to pay the way. The people I hung out with were doing the same kinds of jobs, and I think most of us were just trying to survive and concentrating on our work. It was actually very liberating.

Rail: When I was at your opening, David Levi Strauss mentioned the Northwest Coast Indians, and the relationship between the shapes of your shaped canvases and those works. I'm wondering if that is coincidental, or if you have investigated those particular tribes and what they were doing shape-wise? Or the group of painters called Indian Space Painters, including Steve Wheeler, Peter Busa, Will Barnet, and few others, who very consciously referred to the Northwest Coast Indian artists in creating a kind of language of abstraction.



"Untitled (Cañones #2)" (2007-2008). Acrylic on canvas over wood panels. 79×121 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Moti Hasson Gallery, New York.

Pousette-Dart: I love the Native American art of the Northwest Coast. I'm very drawn to it and have been aware of it from the time I was very young. That said, I haven't set out to make work that specifically identifies with it or looks like it. But my work is about a kind of visceral interchange with nature and I want it to transport the viewer and I think it's this connection that people feel.

I actually began experimenting with shaped paintings when I was living in the Southwest. At the time I was making very large rectangular paintings composed of multiple panels. I was interested in the way Greek and Russian icons and early Italian painting made use of multiple panels to compress different aspects of a story into one painting, and I was intrigued with the way the artists moved you through this complex experience with color and form. It was almost a form of animation. Anyway, I was staying in Gallisteo, New Mexico, which is a very strange landscape. The Gallisteo Basin is a vast flat expanse and it's surrounded by four mountain ranges. The main sensation I felt there was the curvature of the earth, and painting within a rectangle seemed increasingly arbitrary—it seemed to turn the experience into a picture. I was taking 360 degree photographs, which I stuck together with tape to create a continuous flattened landscape. In taking the photographs I could see the light changing the interrelationship of all the elements from frame to frame as I was shooting. I began making drawings with the photos in mind, cutting shapes and putting them together and these drawings ultimately led to the shaped panels.

Rail: When I was looking at your drawings and then looking at the paintings I became aware of the movement between them. One can see from the outside that there's a very complex relationship between the drawings and the paintings. I'm wondering if you could elaborate on that a little.



"Untitled (Cañones #1)" (2007-2008). Acrylic on canvas over wood panels. 72 × 150 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Moti Hasson Gallery, New York.

Pousette-Dart: Drawing is about a very different kind of focus for me and I find it hard to do when I'm in the middle of paintings. I tend to draw when I'm between things or have hit a snag. It's a bit like dreaming to me, freewheeling, unedited.

The first shaped paintings I did consisted of two curved shapes that met on a tangent and the place where they met didn't allow for a lot of drawing. They met at a point and everything expanded or unraveled from that point. The kind of drawing that formed out of that juncture was very different from the drawn forms in the more recent work, because there is a longer expanse where the panels meet. I wanted to change the nature of the shift between the interior forms and the exterior shape.

Rail: What you're describing about the line on the outside of the shape and the line on the inside of the shape suggests, like your drawing itself, a very complex relationship between the part and the whole. I wonder if you have any conscious thoughts about that part/whole relationship or if you could even say that your pieces are wholes, in and of themselves? Once you go beyond the relationship of that interior line to that exterior line, which creates a part/whole relationship, it throws into question whether or not the whole of the painting isn't itself a fragment of some larger whole.

Pousette-Dart: Well, that's all very true. You know, it's a kind of conundrum because I think the whole painting is formed in a sense from a certain feeling of peripheral vision. It's like what I can see and make sense of or what my memory has taken in—because really, these are remembered light-space situations. In a sense I feel the observer becomes present in the painting; the paintings are like a mask you look through.

Rail: I'm reminded of Carl Andre's quote about sculpture as a thing being "a whole and a thing it is not." You really turn that around in your work. It's not a whole and a thing it is not, in that sense; rather, it's a whole and a thing that it's part of, and that's a radically different position. That brings me to what I find really compelling about your work: you seem to be able to very easily and clearly set up metaphoric structures that allow for philosophical ruminations that make your position about things clear. For me, that's the real key to what abstraction can do—its optimum possibility.

Pousette-Dart: I think I do this through a largely alchemical process—I start with these elements that in and of themselves have no meaning and in putting them together in a particular way, I come up with a third thing, and how I got there is a kind of mystery.

Rail: I also notice that within those contours or lines (it's hard to categorize them since they have very ambiguous and different functions in the drawings as opposed to in the paintings), there are subtle changes in colors especially in the paintings. Could you tell us a bit about that?

Pousette-Dart: In both the drawings and the paintings I try to suggest line moving through light, but I rely heavily on transparency and gesture in the drawings. In the paintings I want light to appear as though it's constantly readjusting as it does in nature. I layer the surfaces to create variations in temperature and tonality to make the ground feel as if it's moving. The lines are built up out of thin layers of colors, which can change incrementally according to their relationship with the ground.



*"Night Road" (2008).
Acrylic on canvas
over wood panels.
65½ × 83½ inches.
Courtesy of the artist
and Moti Hasson
Gallery, New York.*

Rail: One can see the different tonalities of green, for instance, in "Untitled (Cañones #3)." Likewise with the subtle changes of red in "Untitled (Cañones #4)."

Pousette-Dart: Right. It's a way of creating depth without resorting to illusionistic space.

Rail: Are they painted in slow or quick pace?

Pousette-Dart: It depends. There are different stages. In the beginning I use tape and move it around to get a sense of various possibilities. This can go on for days or weeks. Then I get rid of the tape and begin to draw freehand. An image can appear very quickly but it's always subject to change at any given moment. I move from line to concentrate on the ground, and vice versa. The painting process is a continual adjustment back and forth between the two.

Rail: Is there a special kind of brush you use for that function?

Pousette-Dart: I have a pathetic brush collection. I buy wonderful brushes that end up sitting in water or full of caked paint and ink. Occasionally this makes them better. I use watercolor brushes, house paint brushes, calligraphy brushes, foam brushes, and frequently use wood extensions so I can work from a distance.

Rail: Your paintings are very buoyant and I could almost say lyrical, especially the color. Do you see yourself related to Lyrical Abstraction?

Pousette-Dart: Whether or not it's true, the word lyrical always has the connotation of romanticism to me. I don't really see the paintings as being romantic. But I dislike categorizations in general. The paintings are very much about sensation and how the act of perceiving becomes conscious. I would like them to be visceral and animate, like seeing *a thing* for the first time. I don't go about trying to put colors together in a nice way, I'm not trying to soothe or idealize. I don't ever think about color or shape for that matter, in a "what would look good with this" way.

Rail: One thing I was thinking about, in terms of your painting, and this is something I consider with nearly every work, is the idea that either form or color must predominate. When I look at your paintings I see that there's this very interesting balance between form and color, and that, you'd be hard pressed to say that one is dominating. The first thing that hits you is the outline of the shaped canvases, so you're seeing the form. But then the space of the canvas is really determined, to a large degree in my eye, by the color. So you have this tension working between these two things, which gives your work a great deal of dynamism.

Pousette-Dart: Yes, I think my work involves the disparate elements being brought into momentary balance. I would be hard pressed to really say whether I thought line or color predominated. For me, the originating impulse for a work is light. But then that light is always wedded to place, wedded to a particular event. And that is where the drawing comes in. I found that in order for the painting to satisfy me I have to interweave those two elements in some way in which they can't be separated.

Rail: That brings me back to something you said earlier when we were talking about the resemblance between some of your forms and the Northwest Coast Indians. You clarified how your forms evolved out of landscape, which speaks to the idea that there's a language of form operating here to speak about the land, the mountains, and the sky. Have you ever thought about what you're doing in any sense as a language? Do you feel that you've developed, within abstraction, your own language of form?

Pousette-Dart: All I know is that every painting creates a new set of problems. I arrive at the shape by making an actual scale drawing on paper stapled to the wall. Sometimes I have drawings in the notebook which suggest this configuration, and sometimes not. When the panels are fabricated and arrive in my studio, it's always a shock and a surprise. It's as though I've never seen them before and everything that I've previously thought about doing goes out the window.

Rail: After I spent some time with your work and I could see how they started breathing, in a sense—opening up or unfolding might be a better way to say it—so what one might initially perceive as flatness really becomes a spatial experience. I started to see the shapes almost like barques. And I started to think of the Egyptian barques, which were conceived of as carrying the bodies into the other world. It's a beautiful metaphor for what you said earlier about wanting your works to transport the viewer.

Pousette-Dart: Yes, that's interesting. I think that's something that people see and feel in many of the paintings, that boat-like form.

Rail: Is that alien to you or is that something that you could embrace?

Pousette-Dart: If you're dealing with circular forms, that shape can be arrived at without consciously thinking: "boat." But that's okay, I like that reference. Though I sometimes attach a name to a group of paintings just to identify them; I resist titling work because I don't want to close down people's interpretations, or suggest how the paintings should be looked at. Ideally I'd like people to arrive at them fresh with nothing but their own experiences. When I first showed paintings related to these about four years ago, people saw sails and boats and all sorts of things and these were paintings that I had made in the desert!

Rail: There's a real performative aspect to what you're doing—I mean as a painter one can just look at these long curvaceous lines on your canvas and see how they're done with such a seeming ease. It makes the scale of the larger paintings seem exactly right. When I first came in and I saw the smaller paintings, I questioned the scale of those paintings and it made me want to ask you how you determine the scale of these larger pieces. Do you feel them in a particular relationship to your body, your gesture? I noticed in your catalogue that all of the smaller ones were labeled studies.

Pousette-Dart: Yes, perhaps this is misleading. It suggests that one day they might be bigger, but that's not the way I work. I almost never "blow up" the smaller work. The smaller ones I cut out of board by myself rather than having them fabricated. I'm able to adjust the shape as I work which makes the process quite different. You could say that I tune the shape to the drawing in these and the drawing to the shape in the larger ones. I arrive at the scale of the larger paintings through working and reworking the initial drawing, the one given to the fabricator until it feels right and I think that sense of rightness is definitely related to my body, my field of vision, and my reach.

Rail: It seems like the smaller ones are scaled down.

Pousette-Dart: I don't intend them to be smaller versions of larger paintings. I would like each to have its own sense of rightness, to use your word.

Rail: Have you been bothered at all by discussions about the irrelevance of painting?

Pousette-Dart: I don't think painting will ever be irrelevant. I think it's a very human thing to do. I am concerned though, that people's attention spans are getting shorter and shorter. I think painting depends on people being able to spend time with a work, to be intimate with it, and to want to make the effort to meet it halfway. My one worry is that people don't have the time or the interest to look at something complex. I think the museums are complicit in this. They've become increasingly mall-like and moving crowds seems the dominant concern. It's hard to feel you can stop and be alone with a work. The insistence on telling people what they should be seeing through wall texts and audio machines doesn't help.

Rail: What do you look at to nourish yourself on the kind of complexity that you're creating in your work? Or do you look at simple things?

Pousette-Dart: My idea of a good time is to wonder around the Met. I have very broad tastes, though I've been so into the studio lately, I haven't seen much in the last several months. My paintings have been inspired by many things—Mozarabic manuscripts, Romanesque painting (particularly from Catalonia), Mayan art, especially those exquisite vases, Islamic art, Chinese landscape painting, Chinese calligraphy to wall paintings, De Kooning, Mondrian...I could go on.

Rail: I think it's interesting what you remember that you saw.

Pousette-Dart: Yes, we have a very beautiful big red spiral painting by Paul Mogenson, who I think is a terrific and underexposed painter. For years it had been just outside my studio, at the top of the stairway. We took it down when we did some renovation and I realized, when it was no longer there, how big a part it had played in the development of this work. I loved that it had such impact and seemed so much larger than its size. I realized these were criteria I was after in my own work and every time I left the studio and went down the stairs I was unconsciously sizing up my own work in relation to this painting to see if it passed muster.

Rail: Other painters have reconfigured the shape of the canvas in the seventies, such as [Ron] Gorchov and [Ralph] Humphrey, not to mention [Ellsworth] Kelly. Have those artists been important to your work during that time?

Pousette-Dart: I was certainly influenced by looking at all this work. I also thought a lot about David Novros's work, his shaped paintings that bring the wall into the painting, as well as his frescos and painted rooms.

Rail: As you spoke I was thinking, one could take a long time to consider the way that you are dealing with boundaries—the boundaries between a line and a form that also struck me as a very powerful subject of exploration in your drawing. In looking for that moment when you could say where line becomes form, I see, in some cases, you seem to say that it's impossible to demarcate. There are other cases where you see the boundaries between two shapes running along a tangent and it is clear. There are boundaries made from voids, lines and the place where the edges of colors meet; all of these subtle shifts have significance in terms of how one moves forward with thought.

Pousette-Dart: That makes me think of the sculptures of New Ireland, which have always intrigued me. They are intricately, three dimensionally carved out of a single piece of wood. All the surfaces are then painted with delicate patterns. They are so complicated you never feel like you're able to see the whole at once and part of that is because the painting seems to dematerialize the object. You have two worlds perfectly interlocked and so complicated that you really can only take them in intuitively.

Rail: Do you aim to achieve this kind of balance in your own work between the object and the painted surface or could you see yourself moving further into the third-dimension, akin to Elizabeth Murray?

Pousette-Dart: I prefer the power of suggestion.

CONTRIBUTOR

Joan Waltemath

JOAN WALTERMATH is an artist who lives and works in New York City. She writes on art and has served as an editor-at-large of the *Brooklyn Rail* since 2001. She has shown extensively and her work is in the collections of the Harvard University Art Museums, the National Gallery of Art, the Hammer Museum and the Museum of Modern Art. She is currently the Director of the LeRoy E. Hoffberger School of Painting at MICA.

The New York Times
18 June, 2004

The New York Times

ART IN REVIEW

ART IN REVIEW; ***Joanna Pousette-Dart***

By Ken Johnson

June 18, 2004

Charles Cowles

537 West 24th Street, Chelsea

Through June 26

Joanna Pousette-Dart has been making high-quality, nonironic abstract paintings for more than 30 years. But in the last 20 she has had only three solo exhibitions, counting this one, and her last was nine years ago. So this excellent show is something to savor.

Why Ms. Pousette-Dart waits so long between shows is hard to say. The paintings here -- compositions of flat, curvy shapes and fat, swooping lines on two-part canvases shaped like shields, boat hulls or billowing square sails -- give the impression of having been made with effortless grace. (Late Willem de Kooning and recent Brice Marden come to mind.) But maybe that is crucial: in art as in sport, it is hard to make it look easy.

Ms. Pousette-Dart is serious about Modernist abstraction, but there is nothing too sober or sanctimonious about what she does. Her paintings have lovely, slightly dry eggshell surfaces and a colorful, slightly muted palette with pastel tendencies. They have been made with a caressing touch that suggests thoughtful spontaneity. While the compositions of loopy shapes and lines fit tightly into the eccentrically shaped panels -- in some cases evoking Northwest Indian design -- they don't feel cramped; they convey a buoyant, free feeling. There is a mutually responsive relationship between the container and the contained -- or between body and soul -- that is a pleasure to behold. KEN JOHNSON