

JILL NATHANSON (b. 1955)

The “active life” of color, as Jill Nathanson has described it, has been the central pursuit of her work throughout her career, and serves as the means and subject of the luminous abstract works for which she has become known. With early interests and education rooted in Color Field painting of the 60’s and 70’s, Nathanson has over the past decades developed an original approach to abstraction that combines the unstable dynamics of pure color interaction with the possibility of complex and associative readings. Her layered, richly hued works both invite and transfix.

Nathanson was born and spent much of her youth in New York City. She attended the LaGuardia High School of Music and Art and at age seventeen began studies at Bennington College in the Fine Art Program. It was an exciting time and place to be studying painting: in Nathanson’s account students and professors were either deepening – or adamantly rejecting – the formalism that had defined visual arts studies in previous decades. Here Nathanson encountered Larry Poons, Kenneth Noland and Sophia Healy, among others, who were discussing color in varied and sometimes unconventional frameworks, making correspondences between personality, psychology, physical sensation and spirituality.

Nathanson quickly became fluent in the variations and implications of these conversations, and her earliest work signaled a desire to “deep dive” into the pursuit of color in all its potentiality. Beyond the important lessons of formalism, Nathanson’s work became aligned with the belief that abstraction’s unique relationship to vision, sensation and cognition allows it to serve an important conduit for human meaning and transformative perceptual experience.

The first works Nathanson exhibited publicly explored abstraction through reference to the grid and contradictory approaches to space in a range of scales and opacities, but always with color as the central focus. Nathanson came to develop the idea of “Color Desire”, referring to a logic of incompleteness and interdependence that defined the relationship of pure colors within her paintings: “The colors in the painting call forth one another and they need each other across the painting. They ask for each other. They might expand, constrain, illuminate or contradict each other but they end up a uniquely active unity.”

Nathanson received an MFA from Hunter College in 1982 and over the next years exhibited her works within the context of contemporary abstraction at Tibor de Nagy, Triangle Art Association, Elizabeth Harris, June Kelly and Ethan Cohen Gallery as well as at Stanford Museum, Hunter College, Roanoke College, Virginia Polytechnic Institute in Blacksburg and Galerie Marie-Louise Wirth in Zürich. Her work was included in the 2006 Painting Center exhibition *The Legacy of Hans Hofmann*, curated by Karen Wilkin.

In the early 2000s Nathanson began the task of giving visual shape to her ongoing study into the texts and practice of Judaism – an internal aspect of her life that would have presumably been easier to

have left as a parallel, rather than an intersecting, course with painting. As Nathanson wrote of the experience: “I have an intuition that abstract art and Jewish thought have, with intention, areas of overlap. I wanted the sense of insight that one feels when looking at art to join with the insight into the study of sacred text.”

Wary of engaging in an arbitrary or simplistic approach, Nathanson decided to work directly with one of her teachers, Stanford University Professor Arnold Eisen, on a collaboration titled *Seeing Sinai*, consisting of texts by Professor Eisen, and four large-scale paintings based on close readings of Exodus 33-34. As an independent continuation of this study, Nathanson in 2010 produced a series of paintings, *New Translations*, based on the Genesis 1. Both projects were shown at Derfner Judaica Museum in 2011. Working in this series in part with collage items taken from the detritus of her studio floor, Nathanson succeeded in conjuring through these materially humble works maximal-scaled themes of chaos and creation, prompting Joan Waltemath to write that the series “expands the notion of beginnings to imagine the world as being created for the first time at every moment.”

Although Nathanson views *Seeing Sinai* and *New Translations* as distinct and separate projects within her larger body of work, it is possible to see the influence of this period of study as an enduring one, that can be intuited in a sense of weight, purpose and focused attention within her present-day abstractions.

For the last two decades, Nathanson has been composing with pure-color transparent planes, scaling up from acetate collage studies in veils of pigmented acrylic pours on panel. The process incorporates the unpredictability of the fluid paint with the structured intention of the original composition to create a contrast of open planes and layered, almost glazed, transitions. The completed works are clear and complex, replete with mysterious passages and unexpected tonal range yet resplendently alive with color.

In a recent interview Nathanson intriguingly framed her interests as a painter as a series of oppositions: shape vs. field, color as light vs. color as matter and image vs. process. It summarizes the ideas and methods of abstraction between which Nathanson’s works are poised, in which aspects of her painting operate in different roles simultaneously. The pour forms of her abstractions maintain a geometry of composition, for example, while evoking in their expansiveness color sensations a boundless nature; the depth and translucency of the paint explicitly captures, filters and reflects light’s spectrum waves; and the “image” of her works reveals itself in time, moving from recognition to subtler sensations, mirroring—and elevating—the energy of our own vital presence.

Nathanson’s work is usefully considered as part of an increasingly acclaimed peer-group of the near-past and present, from Brenda Goodman and Louise Fishman to Susan Frecon and Keltie Ferris. Despite differing approaches to their work, these women painters are re-imagining abstraction after Minimalism in the 21st century, positing anew the qualities unique of their medium as a means of subtly re-ordering our perceptions of the world.

BERRY CAMPBELL

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Jill Nathanson's works are represented in museum collections throughout the US and have been shown in major exhibitions including at the Philadelphia Museum of Jewish Art, Yale University Slifka Center, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Jacksonville, Sheldon Art Museum, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, where her works were recently acquired and exhibited in the exhibition *Drawn to Color*. Her exhibitions have been reviewed in publications such as *ARTnews*, *Arts* magazine, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *The Hudson Review* and *The New York Times* among others. She is represented by Berry Campbell Gallery in New York.

Christina Kee, Artist and Art Writer

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CV

EDUCATION

1976, Bennington College 1982, Hunter College, MFA

1982, Triangle Artists Workshop 1992, Triangle Artists Workshop

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

Berry Campbell, New York, *Light Phrase*, 2021.

Berry Campbell, New York, *Cadence*, 2018.

Berry Campbell, New York, *Fluid Measure*, 2015.

Messineo Art Projects/Wyman Contemporary, New York, *The Air We Swim In: New Paintings*, 2013.

Messineo Art Projects/Wyman Contemporary, New York, *No Blue Without Yellow*, 2010.

Derfner Judaica Museum, New York, *Sacred Presence/Painterly Process*, 2010.

Seeing Sinai Collaboration, Philadelphia Museum of Jewish Art, Pennsylvania; Makom Center for Mindfulness, New York; Yale University, Slifka Center, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, 2006.

Elizabeth Harris Gallery, New York, 2002.

Elizabeth Harris Gallery, New York, 2000.

June Kelly Gallery New Paintings, New York, 1997.

June Kelly Gallery *Paintings*, New York, 1995.

Ethan Cohen Gallery, New York, 1987.

Triangle Center Gallery, New York, 1984. Hunter College Gallery, New York, 1982.

Roanoke College, Virginia, 1982.

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, 1982.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Art Students League, New York, *Instructor Salon 2025*, 2025.

Berry Campbell, New York, *Perseverance*, 2024.

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, *Drawn to Color*, 2023.

Sheldon Art Museum, Lincoln, Nebraska, *Point of Departure: Abstraction 1958-Present*, 2021.

Berry Campbell, New York, *Artist Insights/ Contemporary Highlights*, 2020.

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Columbia Museum of Art, South Carolina, *Selections from the Permanent Collection*, 2020.
Art Students League, New York, *Instructors Exhibition*, 2019.
Berry Campbell Gallery, *Summer Selections*, 2019.
Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock, *Annual 50th Collectors Show and Sale*, 2018-2019.
Berry Campbell Gallery, New York, *Summer Selections*, 2018.
Museum of Contemporary Art, Jacksonville, Florida, *Call and Response Paintings from the Permanent Collection*, 2017.
Berry Campbell Gallery, New York, *Summer Selections*, 2017.
Museum of Contemporary Art, Jacksonville, Florida, *Confronting the Canvas: Women of Abstraction*, 2016.
Art Wynwood, Berry Campbell, 2016.
Rush Arts, New York, *Twentieth-Century Abstract Painting and Sculpture*, 2016.
Berry Campbell Gallery, New York, *Summer Selections*, 2016.
Art Miami, Berry Campbell, 2015.
Berry Campbell Gallery, New York, *Summer Selections*, 2015.
Merton Simpson Gallery, New York, *Iconomania*, 2014.
Berry Campbell Gallery, New York, *A Year in Review*, 2014
Taylor University, Upland, Indiana, *Crosscurrents in Contemporary Abstraction*, 2012.
National Academy Museum, New York, *The Annual*, 2012, 2012.
Triangle Gallery, Dumbo, Brooklyn, *What Only Paint Can Do*, 2012.
Lori Bookstein Fine Art, New York, Karen Wilkin, Curator, *Color as Structure/ Structure as Color*, 2007.
The Painting Center, New York, Karen Wilkin, Curator, *The Legacy of Hans Hofmann*, 2006.
Lori Bookstein Fine Art, New York, 2005.
New York Studio School, *Painting Abstraction*, 2000.
Elizabeth Harris Gallery, New York, *Up and Coming*, 1999.
Tribes Gallery, New York, *Small Gems*, 1995.
Shirley Fiterman Gallery, Borough of Manhattan Community College, Michael R. Chilsom, Curator, *Undoing Geometry*, 1995.
Gallery One, Toronto, Canada, Karen Wilkin, Curator, *Inner Landscapes*, 1995.
Galerie Marie-Louise Wirth, Zurich, 1995.
Switzerland American Topography, 1991 Ethan Cohen Gallery, New York, 1988.
Inaugural Exhibition Ethan Cohen Gallery, New York, 1987.
110 Greene Street Gallery, New York, *Individuals at Triangle*, 1986.
Jerusalem Gallery, New York, *New Modernists*, 1986.
Danforth Museum, Framingham, Massachusetts, Kenworth Moffett, Curator, *Abstract Art in New England*, 1981.
Stanford Museum, Connecticut, *Abstract Art in New England*, 1981.
Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York, Dan Cameron, Curator, *The Broken Surface*, 1981.
Bennington College, Vermont, 1981.

COLLECTIONS

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Agnes Etherington Art Center, Queens University, Kingston, Ontario

Columbia Museum, Columbia, South Carolina

Hines Industrial, Boston Lord Peter Palumbo, London

Maimonides Hospital, Brooklyn, NY (Boardroom of CEO)

Museum of Contemporary Art, Jacksonville, Florida

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas

Philadelphia Museum of Jewish Art, Pennsylvania

Sheldon Museum of Art, Lincoln, Nebraska

Syracuse University Museum of Art, New York

Telfair Museums, Savannah, Georgia

Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts