

11 Emerging Artists Redefining Abstract Painting

Alina Cohen | Jan 6, 2020

The divide between abstraction and figuration is a false, but helpful, dichotomy. Painters who are primarily concerned with the interactions between color, line, and form also make marks and shapes that may suggest body parts, landscapes, and objects traditionally relegated to still lifes. Even monochrome paintings can conjure familiar settings: A gray canvas might evoke a rock face, while a blue one may suggest the sea.

This principle can go the other way, as well. “I would consider myself a figurative painter fundamentally,” artist Louise Giovanelli told me, “but I certainly have a loose idea of figuration—anything that suggests a form, even if this suggestion is faint.”

A new generation of painters, all 40 years old or younger, are rethinking what we might call, for lack of a better term, abstraction. For them, labels aren’t important. They’re more interested in the infinite ways paint can be applied to develop suggestive, beguiling, and transcendent compositions. They explore what it means to make a painting in the digital age and use contemporary research to generate new patterns and designs. Despite the diversity of these artists’ practices, a near-mystical devotion to the act of making and a desire to communicate via symbols and hues unites them all.

Yevgeniya Baras

B. 1981, Syzran, Russia. Lives and works in New York.

Yevgeniya Baras textures her paintings as she layers oil and paper pulp onto stretched and unstretched canvas. The rough surfaces alternately feature letters, numbers, squares, circles, squiggles, and a variety of suggestive shapes. Look hard enough, and you might see a keyhole, a river, or a clock. A sense of improvisation and play unites her disparate symbologies—a tinge of the faux-naïf, perhaps, or an attempt to access some primal understanding of the world and systems around us.

Baras values the experimentation and invention that abstraction allows. “My process is rooted in my feeling for the material and for transforming those materials,” she said. Though her work appears abstract, she notes that it “considers the body” and attempts to capture ethereal emotions with concrete elements. Her paintings aren’t ideas, but gritty, swirling, explicitly three-dimensional objects.

