

# ***Liberal***

The five painters in Liberal teach at colleges and universities in the NW5 consortium: Lewis and Clark, Reed, the University of Puget Sound, Whitman, and Willamette. Because affiliations with a particular set of institutions determines their participation in this show, connections between each artist are somewhat serendipitous. However, relationships do exist and each artist works in ways that align with underlying liberal arts values such as an open examination of ideas, logical thinking, criticality, and imagination.

The NW5 painters all work with self-imposed restrictions that act as models for visual systems. The works in this exhibit are grounded in the fundamentals of painting, exploring mark, form and color as building blocks for personal languages uttered in abstract tongues. Painted forms concretely represent symbolic understandings of materialized memories, embodied histories, emotional complexity, philosophical yearnings, and hope.

The paintings in this exhibit provide contained spaces for the free expression of expansive ideas proposed in colored matter. They embody the life force of the mind, celebrating the act of making as a vital methodology for liberal and artistic forms of understanding.

# ***Phenomenal***

Perception based painters engage in decision making processes that rely on direct, responsive observations. The five painters in Phenomenal employ distinct acts of transmutation as they evoke spaces, construct ideas, materialize emotion, and layer multiple moments out of piles of palpable pigment.

The paintings in this exhibit embody action motivated by vision while fusing material marks and mental intentions. Each artist activates a rich interplay among sensory faculties, physical acts, and critical thinking processes, thereby exemplifying painting's phenomenal potential to represent and reveal subjective experience through its shared perceptual language.

Each painter in Phenomenal, whether abstract or figurative, has a unique entry point and means of sustaining a form of inquiry that is as haptic as it is optical. The immediacy of touch is present in these works. The paintings contain the pressure of each unique mark and the traces of visible and invisible choices.

Color provides the syntax that differentiates while it connects discrete gestures and layers. It is color that tinges each painting with moody sensations and provides a distinct structure to each picture plane. Together these moods and compositions provide a testament to the diverse, nuanced complexity of painting's potential as well as the experiences that inform living, breathing painters.

# Eric Elliott

## *Artist Statement*

Painting and Drawing are my primary connection to the world; they are a ritual where I meditate on the space I inhabit and the objects that surround me. The structures of my everyday life become inspiration for exploration. The focus of each painting or drawing varies, some become more about the objects and some become more about the light, atmosphere, abstraction, or color. Working from a still life gives me time to spend with my subject so that I can get to a place where I do not see the objects as things but as shapes that are part of a larger whole.

## *Biography*

Eric Elliott completed his MFA in Painting and Drawing at the University of Washington in Seattle in 2007, and his undergraduate work at the University of California, Berkeley in 2003. Elliott also completed a year-long Kickstarter funded art residency at the Jerusalem Studio School, Israel in 2014. He was the 2009 winner of the Behnke Foundation's Neddy Artist Fellowship, received the Seattle Art Museum's 2008 Kayla Skinner Special Recognition Award, and was in the 2009 Northwest Biennial at the Tacoma Art Museum. Eric Elliott is represented by the James Harris Gallery in Seattle and he currently works as the Assistant Professor of Painting at Colorado Mesa University.

# Ann Gale

## *Artist Statement*

Paintings, like people, can have a complexity that is not revealed in a glimpse. In my studio I search for what is apparent beyond the guarded stance each individual has practiced. The figure is so familiar, it is challenging to see past prejudged ideals of the body and face. My painting process is a way to ponder what I see and to grasp any visual truth. The paintings and drawings become witnesses to the experience of observation, with lines and color documenting the path of my gaze.

In my paintings, I have focused on measuring and distilling my observation - trying to capture and understand light, form and space. The radiance of color becomes a dominant force, existing as accumulated marks that define the pressure of mass and gravity. The emotional content is conducted as much through the manifestation of light as through the figure.

In my more recent work, I've focused on the acute physiological presence of my models. Throughout the process of the work, every alteration of color, distance or proportion, changes my point of view, re-measures our proximity and indicates a slightly different relationship. During the adjustment of the figure, the space itself becomes an emotional character; it has specific proportion and weight which presses upon or wraps around the person. While there is a precision to the measuring, there is also an intimacy that is revealed and is equally crucial to the process. The image exists as an intricate composite of observations revealing the fragile and momentary nature of perception.

# Ann Gale

## *Biography*

Ann Gale is an American figurative painter based in Seattle, Washington. Gale received her BFA from the Rhode Island College and her MFA from Yale University. She has been the recipient of several awards including: Western States Art Federation/National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Grant, Washington Arts Council Individual Artist Fellowship and a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship. She received an Academy of Arts and Letters Museum Purchase Award and is an Academician of the National Academy of Art and Design, NY. Gale's work has been shown in galleries and museums across the United States including solo exhibitions at the Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon and the Weatherspoon Art Museum at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Her work is in the permanent collection of the Portland Art Museum, Tulsa Museum of Art and the National Academy of Art and Design, NY. Her work is represented by the Dolby Chadwick gallery, San Francisco, Prographica gallery, Seattle and Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects, New York. Gale is a professor of painting and drawing at the University of Washington School of Art, Seattle.

# Emily Gherard

## *Artist Statement*

The surfaces of my work record the history of their existence. Like old shoes, they are worn smooth through touch and deteriorate over time. Even the rigid staples that encrust some of my paintings sag with fatigue and weight. Through a nuanced surface, I imbue my work with its own tactile autonomy. I provoke an empathetic response through the accumulation of material, marks, and form. This evident vulnerability creates an emotional connection between the viewer and the work.

My paintings are intimate and quiet. Several of the paintings float off the wall; their backsides painted florescent pink. This reflects a glowing halo of color that extends the painting's presence into the room. The work made out of hundreds of industrial staples glitter as you move past them. I have controlled the height of the staples to create a glimmering mass. Light shimmers across the shifting forms, mimicking the rise and fall of breath. Although my imagery is simple and low contrast, the surface is complex. The work is built out of small lines and marks that pile up on top of each other. I polish and sand so that sometimes the "imagery" is only created by a change from matte to gloss. This repetitive mark-making and reworking of the surface of the painting allows me time to contemplate my own intentions and to discover the work's particular presence and identity.

## *Biography*

Emily Gherard received her BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design (2002) and her MFA from the University of Washington (2004). Emily was represented by Bridge Production Gallery in Seattle. Her work has been featured in shows at Francine Seders Gallery, Cornish College of the Arts, 4Culture in Seattle, Soil Art Gallery, Henry Art Gallery, and University of Arkansas. Emily has received PONCHO Special Recognition Award (2006) and a GAP Grant (2014). She has taught for the last 10 years throughout the Puget Sound area, including North Seattle College, Everett Community College, Bellevue College, and Western Washington University.

# James B. Thompson

## *Biography*

James B. Thompson was born in Chicago, Illinois and earned a BA degree from Ripon College in Ripon, Wisconsin and an MFA degree from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. His art has been featured in numerous national and international solo and group exhibitions throughout his career and is included in public and private collections in the United States and abroad. An inter-media creative practitioner working in painting, printmaking, mixed-media, drawing and kilnformed glass, Thompson has established a formidable artistic reputation as one of the most innovative and intriguing artists and educators from the Pacific Northwest and is the recipient of awards, honors, grants, fellowships, purchase prizes, commissions and artist residencies. Thompson currently serves as Professor of Art, Curator at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon.

# James B. Thompson

## *Artist Statement*

### **Water is Sacred: Water is Life**

We can live without food for days on end but not without water or we perish. Our bodies are comprised of up to 75% water. The earth is made up of 2/3 water and yet most of the earth's water and marine life forms are but a mystery to us. Every day water still provides us with myriad sources of food. Water freezes solid into ice, forms glaciers but can evaporate into thin air. Water exists above and below ground. Water can be dead still or flowing in currents, waves and tides. Water is clear and sweet in springs and aquifers but can be saline and salty in oceans, seas and lakes. Water drives down as rain and gathers in floods. It can rage as tempests and swallow us whole. Water can end droughts, put out fires and bring new life. Water is power when it spreads across land, percolates downward into the earth or rises up as a tsunami.

Water is at once a barrier and a mode of transport we must navigate. Water was the vehicle with which humans have developed trade, farming, communication, culture and language. Every culture has at one time or another revered water, used it in rituals and as part of spiritual practice. Its significance to early peoples can be read in the way it punctuated the landscape and how the ancients responded to its absence, presence, ebb and flow. Desert dwellers worshipped water deities in legend and song. Irrigation channels and wells were dug to access, divert and contain this life sustaining fluid. Dykes have been constructed to control it. Structures were built and erected through the ages to bridge all manner of waters.

Water is considered to have healing properties and is celebrated as a source of life itself. Water must break before we are born and it is into the water we return when the boat is pushed out. Yet we waste this precious substance and put it at risk to our peril. If, in fact, water is sacred and water is life - rather than a commodity to be bought and sold - then, what on earth have we done here and what is to become of life itself?



# Richard Martinez

## *Artist Statement*

For me the paintings show a history of process evident in the thin layers and changing decisions that relate to time, and memory. There is only a loose plan as I paint, and I don't know what it will look like when resolved.

Influences include geometric form and pattern in architecture, as well as early abstract painting. I've been using fairly traditional materials, oil paint, enamel, and graphite. With these paintings working with minimal color, geometric form and shapes. There are simultaneous ways a piece

can be interpreted and that conversation between possibilities is precisely the space through which the viewer enters.

How do simple elements of paint, form, and process create references to ideas and feelings in us? This is where hopefully viewers will take time to let their subjective response guide them. I think much of the "content" in this work is often unnamable or non-verbal.

## *Biography*

Some highlights of Richard Martinez' exhibition history include solo shows in Oregon, California, Washington, and Texas, and numerous group exhibits across the United States. He earned a BFA from Southern Oregon University, and an MFA from University of California at Davis. Currently he teaches painting in the Art Department at Whitman College. His work explores subtleties in process, and shape relationships through the language of abstraction.

# Cara Tomlinson

## *Artist Statement*

I work with painting as a moveable set of rules that I elaborate on, hold fast to and extend. A painting is an object ruled by a condensed historical, pictorial, and material language. In dialog with the long and varied tradition of modernist abstraction, my work explores tensions between simplicity and complexity, order and entropy, and inside and outside. My most recent paintings present bodies as verbs and processes, exploring heredity, digestion, vision, metabolism and sedimentation.

I paint in layers over time. This layering makes a conversation visible; positing form and erasing it maps the discursive process of painting. I think through the matter of paint. This means giving up control, letting material, hand, and the unconscious assert their demands. Painting is an embodied philosophy. It continually moves between the two poles of potential and limitation.

## *Biography*

Cara Tomlinson received her B.A. in Painting and Literature from Bennington College and her M.F.A. in Painting from The School of Architecture and Allied Arts at the University of Oregon. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally and has been supported by numerous grants and residency awards including: the Ucross Foundation, Millay Colony for the Arts, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and the Willapa Bay Artist Residency, Ford Foundation Grant, Individual Artist Fellowship Grant from the Oregon Arts Commission and two Professional Development Grants from the Portland Regional Arts Council and Oregon Arts Commission. Her teaching extends to traditional and experimental art practices, with an emphasis on drawing and painting informed by historical methods, painting as hybrid practice and contemporary art theory. She has taught at Dartmouth College, University of Iowa, Syracuse University and is currently an Associate Professor at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon.

# Jan Reaves

## *Artist Statement*

My work searches for what is elemental in an experience. The sheer joy in the quiet act of observation and speculation feeds and propels the work in the studio. The current paintings explore ideas about the body and the natural world through the language of gesture and materiality. The images occupy the edge between representation and abstraction. The ovoid, elliptical form in the painting, *Rigorous Devotion* functions as a primordial, non-denominational element: a carrier of meaning, similar to the metaphoric use of words in language. The shape could be a wheel, a moon, a head, a cipher, a lethal projectile or a letter of the alphabet, depending on its location within the constructed narrative of the painting. A cognitive shimmer happens when the image triggers a memory or recognition in the viewer. This shimmer occurs just prior to understanding, distinct from the comprehension that we associate with naming. To name is to fix our understanding. I would like to momentarily suspend the viewer between the "recognition" and the "fixing".

## *Biography*

Eugene, Oregon based artist Jan Reaves received her MFA from the University of Oregon in 1983. She paints primarily large-scale works with an interest in gesture and the formal relationships of shapes and signs. Her work has been selected for the Oregon Biennial four times since 1985. She has won various awards including the Juror's award for the 2001 Oregon Biennial at the Portland Art Museum. Her work is in many public and private collections. She has taught at Western Michigan University, the University of Iowa and is currently teaching painting and drawing at the University of Oregon. She is represented by the Russo Lee Gallery in Portland, Oregon.

# Elise Richman

## *Artist Statement*

My paintings reference water, which I observe in the natural world, through aerial photographic images, Google earth, and in the more controlled studio environment where I generate ripples in a wave tank. Water's dynamic fluidity, relevance to political and social issues and its physical properties operate on optical and metaphorical levels in my paintings.

Color relativity and interaction is powerful and provides a model for nuanced, contextual thinking. Colors change based on context, they are affected by surrounding colors. I am interested in color's ability to be expansive and inclusive. My work honors the inherent properties of a wide range of pigments and explores how these properties respond to other pigments' defining optical and material properties.

The *Ripple Ellipse* series explores the notion of "ripple effects" through color contrast and layered, elliptical gestures. Emanating ripples of water act as a reminder of the reverberations of action/acts. These paintings begin with direct, intuitive acts, gestures that are informed by observing ripples in pools, fountains, rivers, and this university's namesake, the Puget Sound.

The paintings retain the energy of their initial gesture as they evolve while also embodying discrete, elliptical applications that are layered over time. This interplay between singular, immediate action and sustained, accumulative acts is fundamental to my paintings' overall, visual structure and models the direct sources and elliptical repercussions inherent to ripple effects.

# Elise Richman

## *Biography*

Professor Elise Richman currently serves as chair of the Department of Art and Art History and teaches painting and drawing at the University of Puget Sound. She received a BFA in painting from the University of Washington and MFA from American University. Richman has exhibited her work nationally in commercial galleries, non-profit spaces, and university galleries. Her paintings are included in private collections in San Francisco; New York; Washington, DC; Baltimore; and Seattle as well as The Hallie Ford Museum, King County, the Greater Tacoma Community Foundation, and the City of Tacoma. Richman was a recipient of the 2014 Greater Tacoma Community Foundation art award, 2014 and 2017 Davis teaching awards, and was finalist for a 2015 Neddy Award in painting. She is also active in the campus and broader community, serving as a co-chair of the 2010 and 2014 National Race and Pedagogy Conference's Arts and Special Events committees as well as on the Advisory Board of The Tacoma Art Museum's *30 Americans*. Richman also writes about art, publishing "The Ethics of Painting: Affect, Aesthetics, and Agency" in the *The Arts in Society International Journal* in 2015.

# Michael Knutson

## *Artist Statement*

For many years I have been intent upon constructing vertiginous and slippery geometric pictorial spaces. Monet's panoramic water gardens and Pollock's entangled fields were strong, early influences. My paintings from the past six years are composed of four layers of transparent spiraling forms, either distorted ovals or the spaces between them, the lattices. Single or multiple spirals have underlain my paintings since 1999. They initially serve as armatures, but eventually dissolve into disturbances, like the movement of water or wind across the fields. The paintings may suggest cosmic, atomic, or biological spaces, which is not uninteresting to me, but I'm not illustrating them. The ambiguity of positive and negative, the pervasive overlapping of kinetic, off-kilter forms, the array of contrasting and intermixed colors, and the surprising underlying symmetry of the fields vie for attention. Someone once told me that the paintings lead one to consider not WHAT one is seeing, but HOW one is seeing. I like that.

My process: The paintings begin with a drawing on paper of an expanding spiral. I triangulate the spiral into hexagonal clusters, and draw a distorted ovoid in each triangle. I then scan the drawing into Photoshop, make three duplicate layers, and flip or rotate them into different orientations. I next make the ovoids on each of the four layers a different color so that I can differentiate them after they are merged onto a single layer. This results in a linear tangle with either biaxial or inverted diagonal symmetry. *Symmetrical Four-layered Ovoids & Lattices III* and *Split Symmetrical Field I* are biaxial fields; *Four-layered Rotational Symmetry VI* is an inverted diagonal field. I then enlarge and adjust the proportion of the image and print it onto paper or canvas. Before painting I make a color chart that contains up to sixteen colors: a different form (ovoids or lattices) color for each of the four layers, eleven intermixtures where two, three or four forms overlap, and the background color. The intermixtures create illusions of transparency where the forms on all of the layers are wholly visible. *Split Symmetrical Field I* contains only five colors (red, yellow, blue, black and white) and no intermixtures, but their different values create an illusion of luminous steps. In the divided paintings, *Symmetrical Four-layered Ovoids & Lattices III* and *Split Symmetrical Field I*, the colors invert from one side to the other.

# Michael Knutson

## *Biography*

Michael Knutson was born in Everett, Washington in 1951. He received a BFA from the University of Washington and an MFA from Yale University, and has taught at Reed College since 1982. He was awarded the Alice Kimball English Traveling Fellowship from Yale in 1975, an NEA Individual Artist Grant in 1982, Juror's Awards in the 1985 and 1999 Portland Art Museum Oregon Biennials, a Betty Bowen Award from the Seattle Art Museum in 1995, an American Academy of Arts & Letters Exhibition Purchase Award in 2010. In 2006 a mid-career survey, "Michael Knutson, Paintings and Drawings, 1981-2006," was presented in two parts, at The Art Gym, Marylhurst University and the Eric and Ronna B. Hoffman Gallery, Lewis & Clark College. He is represented by Blackfish Gallery in Portland and Greg Kucera Gallery in Seattle.

# Ron Graff

## *Artist Statement*

I painted subjects directly from observation and invention for over forty years. For the past ten years the work has become abstract dealing with issues that were only implied in my past landscapes, still lifes and figure paintings. The recent work has been about compression, light, space, presence and the lack of it, and images that are socially, politically, and personally felt.

The paintings are about transitory subjects; memory relating to perception and time, patterns relating to communication and mapping, entropy, chaos, and how it positions itself in relation to painting in the expanded field of art.

## *Biography*

Ron Graff is Associate Professor of painting at the University of Oregon since 1980 following six years teaching at the University of Iowa. He has exhibited his work nationally in museums and galleries, has work in numerous private and public collections, has received several awards including the Oregon Arts Commission, and a Ford Foundation Grant, as well as lecturing on his work at numerous distinguished Universities and Art Institutes. He received his BFA from the Kansas City Art Institute, and his MFA from Yale University. Professor Graff teaches all levels of painting and drawing.