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3: Brenda Goodman, Christina Tenaglia, and Marie Vickerilla

CROSS CONTEMPORARY ART | JULY 6 – JULY 29, 2018



Curated by gallery founder Jen Dragon and prominent New York art writer Eleanor Heartney, 3: Brenda Goodman, Christina Tenaglia, and Marie Vickerilla includes the abstract paintings of Brenda Goodman, Marie Vickerilla, and the painted composite constructions of Christina Tenaglia. The works, seen in a long, spacious gallery upstate in Saugerties, look formally like near relations. All the women are interested in pushing abstraction ahead, to a place where painterly memory gives way to forward thinking; at the same time, Goodman's work includes figuration. Given that abstraction has held a dominant place for several generations in New York—the three artists have either lived in New York or worked in close proximity to the city—it is inevitable that their idiom belongs generally to modernist abstraction and, more particularly, to the New York School. To the curators' credit, the exhibition asserts a language that is innovatory, well crafted, and, at the same time, accessible in light of what preceded it.

A long-time resident on the Bowery in lower Manhattan, Goodman moved to the northern Catskills ten years ago. Her earlier work was notable for her harrowing self-portraits in which she described her body in extreme variations of weight. But this new work is entirely abstract and achieves a high level of sophistication and, even more important, a sense of departure. The large painting, *Tomorrow's Promise* (2017), is an amalgam of different patterns and effects: the background consists of two major amorphous forms, orange on the top and a dark charcoal-gray beneath. Both areas have thin black lines drawn on them, which look a lot like anarchic nerve patterns. On top of them is a paper-like strip creased in places and also covered with thin striations. On the right, beneath the heavy end of the orange splotch, is a light yellow form and, underneath it, a green one. They too have

line decorations, with checkerboard imagery on some of their edges. The entire painting is a vivid consignment of variable effects, which communicate change even as they adhere to a single gestalt.



Brenda Goodman, *Tomorrow's Promise*, 2017. Oil on wood, 36 x 50 inches. © Brenda Goodman. Courtesy Cross Contemporary.

Two smaller works, both six by eight inches in dimension, show that Goodman is remarkably gifted in small pieces as well as large. *The Thinker* (2017) consists of a big head topped with two shocks of black hair. The face has no features, but instead presents a larger white over a gray area, each filled with slanted lines that cross and create spaces, some of which are filled with black. There is a round neck on top of a white shoulder and a deliberately simple arm and hand; a dark brown ground, again taken up with thin black lines, holds the forms together. The other work, *Turtle Head* (2017), is recognizably exactly that—at the top we see a curved, gray cap-like form from which an eye protrudes, under which we find an area with criss-crossing black lines with black fillings on the right. Below is an open ovoid, likely where the creature's neck would have been. Both drawings actively and forcefully incorporate nonobjective imagery into a recognizably realist theme. Perhaps this is their strength: the successful combination of abstraction and figuration.

Vickerilla received a B.F.A. from the California College of Arts & Crafts and an M.F.A. from Bard College. She is a close colleague, stylistically speaking, of Goodman. *Power of Small* (2017) is a large painting: fifty-four inches square. In this painting, a large black mass takes up the lower-left quadrant; its edges are mostly linear, but in a couple of instances, are also slightly curved. On the upper right is an open square; the gray background shows through. On the lower right of the black form, just above the bottom of the composition, is a longitudinal opening, also filled with gray. To its right is a small, red, vertical stripe, the only true color in this bold work of art. Maybe the title refers to the small reddish form, whose importance to the painting's balance is disproportionate to its limited size. Abstraction here is based on the eccentrically formed black mass at sea in gray, with the background asserting itself in its own right. Its ambience is slightly melancholic, even if we do not know what the painting means personally to the artist.

Vickerilla's other works are both untitled; their dimensions are a foot square. One painting made in 2017 is composed of a purple stripe that forms a maze-like line on top of a brushily green background. Near to the center is a black triangular form that rests in the crux of the line as it moves upward from a horizontal. As a piece it is wonderfully structured, with the mauve stripe giving measure to the inchoate green backdrop. A work made in 2016 reiterates the psychic power of Vicerilla's larger painting—it consists of a large black form covering the lower half of the left side of the painting and almost the whole of the right half, with a red vertical stripe on the left edge. The spaces left free by the black form are, on the upper left, tan-colored with drips of black, and on the right, we see a thin green stripe that separates the black from the painting's edge on the right and bottom right. These works declare their own interest as pure abstractions; they do not imply something that is realistically imaginable. They work marvelously as nonobjective art.

Brenda Goodman, *The Thinker*, 2017. Oil on paper, 6 x 8 inches. © Brenda Goodman. Courtesy Cross Contemporary.



Marie Vickerilla, *Power of Small*, 2017. Oil on canvas, 54 by 54 inches. © Marie Vickerilla. Courtesy Cross Contemporary.



Christina Tenaglia, *untitled*, 2018. Wood, paint, ink, nails, and screws. © Christina Tenaglia. Courtesy Cross Contemporary

Sculptor Tenaglia teaches at Vassar College. She received her B.A. from Vassar College and her M.F.A. from Yale University. Seen in the gallery, her sculptures maintain a ready dialogue with the other two painters.

Her works are made primarily of wooden elements, pieced together with screws, along with porcelain and clay. They feel like highly gifted, nuanced revisions of cubist relief sculpture, along with the American penchant for honesty with materials. One untitled piece from 2016 consists of wood and fired clay. Essentially frontal in its orientation, the work presents three pieces: a tannish-yellow oval sandwiched between two black shapes, both of which are sharply angular—one of them is clearly a triangle. Extremely well made, this work quietly points out the need for good craft, a quality not always present in what we see today. Tenaglia connects with the classic modernism of roughly a century ago and makes good her wish to maintain an open dialogue with it, even as she pushes ahead.

Another untitled work from 2018 hangs from a gallery wall. It is made with a wooden piece shaped slightly like a painter's palette, with a nearly circular white form on its right bottom—the circle is cut off by the edges of the wood. Two fan-like shapes, yellow with ink on their lower edges, hang from the top of the wooden piece. A thin stick of wood maintains a horizontal line crossing the dip between the ends of the piece of wood serving as a backdrop. It is a work about measure—how differing parts can be put together in ways that keep the audience interested, even fascinated, by the way the works' parts conjoin and interact. The final piece, made this year and like the other works, is unnamed, consists of wood, stoneware, and porcelain. It too is a wall relief; a black disk—placed on top of a squared piece of wood with a partial circle of green echoing the disk's edge—dominates the left half of the structure. On the right we see an egg-like shape in the upper part; beneath it is a horizontal band with vertical stripes, while to the right of the wooden piece is a green vertical bar to which the striped piece is attached.

These descriptions make Tenaglia's sculptures sound more complicated than they actually are. Her art is a model of simple, compound forms that result in pieces that are formally direct in the sense that they transparently reveal their making but are also heterogeneous in their active manipulation of the components. The works are considerably greater than the sum of their parts.

Goodman, Vickerilla, and Tenaglia all demonstrate a thorough knowledge of modernism and its penchants for abstraction, but they are not constrained by the past. All three are excellent artists dedicated to visual change. It is significant that stylistic formulas are changing, for the art of these three people feels original, something we sorely are in need of. It is obvious that the artists cannot escape their forebears, but it is equally true that they have committed themselves to a journey going somewhere new. This is highly desirable, especially at a time when lyric abstraction remains a mainstay—to the point where its gestural finesse is lost in imitation. As hard as it seems, it is clear that these three artists remain devoted to exploration—the very quality that originated abstract art. They leave us with the hope that art can continue to renew itself, even in the shadow of extraordinary achievements.

In the galleries: Powerful messages that require few words

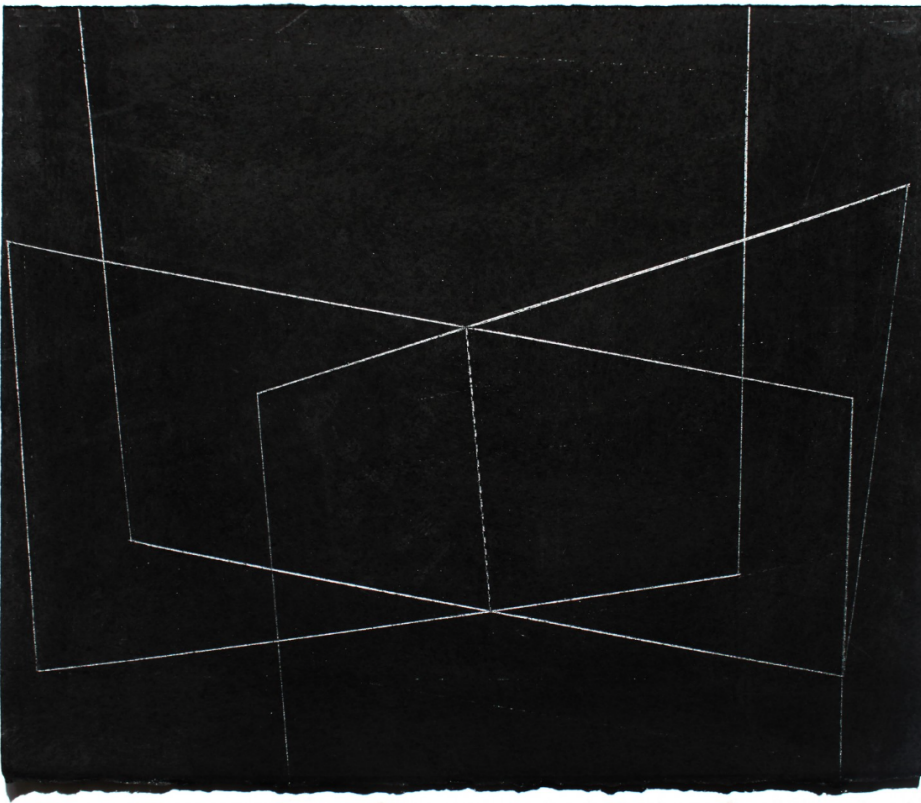
By Mark Jenkins May 25



Christina Tenaglia's "Untitled 422," on view at Adah Rose Gallery through June 4.
(Christina Tenaglia/Adah Rose Gallery)

Anne C. Smith & Christina Tenaglia

Both artists of Adah Rose Gallery's "In This Moment" are builders of a sort. Christina Tenaglia actually works with construction materials, assembling wall sculptures from pieces of wood, sometimes painted. Anne C. Smith draws shapes, mostly rectilinear, in graphite on black charcoal backgrounds, suggesting architectural blueprints.



Anne C. Smith's "Pinwheel," on view at Adah Rose Gallery. (Anne C. Smith/Adah Rose Gallery)

That may not be the intent: Smith's stated inspirations are night, memory and landscape. But the D.C. artist's spare abstractions do conjure a sense of space. Although earlier works included here are more textured, the recent drawings are all line and tonal contrast. They're stark, yet suggest invisible expanses.

Tenaglia's pieces have literal depth, yet emphasize straight lines, whether painted or indicated by wooden edges — or drawn by the shadows the latter cast. The New York artist also contrasts unfinished wood and neutral hues with patches of bright color. Tenaglia's closest connection to Smith's work is in drawings that follow the same compositional model as her sculptures. But both artists employ a similar repertoire of minimalist gestures, whether in three dimensions or two.

Anne C. Smith & Christina Tenaglia: In This Moment On view through June 4 at Adah Rose Gallery, 3766 Howard Ave., Kensington. 301-922-0162. adahrosegallery.com