

BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Blanton Museum to Present *Expanding Abstraction: Pushing the Boundaries of Painting in the Americas, 1958 to 1983*



Exhibition features experimental and groundbreaking paintings from museum's collection

Austin, TX—September 2, 2020—The Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas at Austin will present *Expanding Abstraction: Pushing the Boundaries of Painting in the Americas, 1958 to 1983* in the Butler Gallery from October 4, 2020 to January 3, 2021. The exhibition explores material, conceptual, and formal innovation in post-war abstract painting through the Blanton's collection of modern and contemporary art from the United States and Latin America.

"The Blanton is honored to present *Expanding Abstraction: Pushing the Boundaries of Painting in the Americas, 1958 – 1983*, the museum's first new exhibition since the pandemic closed our doors in March," said Blanton director Simone Wicha. "We are grateful to see our community again and to welcome them back by highlighting more than 50 beautiful paintings from formative areas of the Blanton's own collection. We hope our visitors will enjoy seeing longtime favorites, iconic works, and new acquisitions alike in this vibrant exhibition."

Abstract painting from the two decades in the exhibition is a strength of the Blanton's collection—reflecting two early collecting priorities of the museum dating to its founding in 1963. In particular, James Michener and his wife Mari Yoriko Sabusawa Michener's foundational gifts of abstract paintings are well represented in 15 works in this exhibition. Similarly, early collector and scholar of Latin American art Barbara Duncan's gifts make up nine works in the exhibition.

"This exhibition examines how artists continued to innovate in painting, even in an era when many were declaring the medium worn out and dead," said Carter E. Foster, Blanton deputy director for curatorial affairs. "As contemporary avant-garde movements like Minimalism and conceptual art, and new genres such as performance art and experimental film and video, emerged in this time period, boundaries among conventional mediums began to blur more and more. *Expanding Abstraction* explores this moment of innovation through the lens of the Blanton's collection—how painters experimented with new materials, especially newly available acrylic paint, and challenged conventions of flatness and rectilinearity—transforming the medium in the process."

The exhibition has six sections that emphasize several trends and new approaches, many of them with overlapping qualities. They are *Emphatic Gestures*; *Stained, Poured, Sprayed*; *Material Radicality*; *Between Painting and Sculpture*; *Opticality*; and *Geometries*.



Emphatic Gestures

This section includes relatively large-scale works that were created through bold bodily movements, many with vibrant colors. "Emphatic Gestures" features impressive paintings by Iberê Camargo, Fernando de Szyszlo, Norman Lewis, Hans Hoffman, Oliver Lee Jackson, and Beverly Pepper.



Stained, Poured, Sprayed

This section includes paintings by artists that poured, stained, and dripped paint on canvases, often working horizontally rather than vertically. Helen Frankenthaler's early innovative technique of staining unprimed canvas on the floor with thin paint is represented with the work *Over the Circle* (1961); her work inspired other practitioners included in this section such as Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland. "Stained, Poured, Sprayed" also features the rarely seen Dorothy Hood painting *Space Bolts* (1967), inspired by the moment of space exploration in Houston, where she lived in the late 1960s.



Material Radicality

This section includes artists working with new and unconventional materials ranging from found objects to industrial supplies. Notable works include Richard Tuttle's *Light Pink Octagon* (1967), a canvas dyed pink with no frame, brushstrokes, or front or back; María Luisa Pacheco's *Sin título* [Untitled] (1966), a painting with a rich surface made from thick layers of oil paint applied with a knife or trowel and splinters of balsa wood; and Yayoi Kusama's *No. 62.A.A.A.* (1962), one of her first three-dimensional assemblages that is made from egg cartons and mattress stuffing covered in a layer of sprayed and brushed paint.



Between Painting and Sculpture

Between Painting and Sculpture features works that respond to the question: “How can a painting be like a sculpture and how can a sculpture be like a painting?” Artists like George Sugarman and Alejandro Puente answer this question with three-dimensional works that have features of rectilinearity, gesture, and color that are often associated with painting. A highlight of this section is *Untitled II* (1961) by acclaimed artist Sven Lugin, which consists of a rectangular canvas stretched over a plywood frame to bow outward at the top and bottom; it is bisected by a wooden beam that similarly bows outward at the ends.



Opticalities

Artists working in the modes of Op Art and Kinetic Art produced visually stimulating works, often creating optical illusions or apparent movement through painted forms or physical materials. Some of

the canvases included in this section seem to buzz and dance before the eye, such as Julio Le Parc's 1972 *Untitled* or Richard Joseph Anuszkiewicz's 1960 *Plus Reversed*. Other highlights of this section include Jesús Rafael Soto's *Paralelas vibrantes (de Série Síntesis)* [*Vibrant Parallels (from Synthesis Series)*] (1979) and Tadasky's *C-109* (1964).



Geometries

This section includes works often described as “hard edge” or “geometric” abstraction—paintings with precise, flat shapes in varying combinations and designs and often expansive, large fields of color. This genre of painting had an especially rich history in Latin America. Here, Latin American artists who embraced geometric abstraction in diverse forms are featured in dialogue with their North American counterparts, such as Argentine artist César Paternosto alongside American artists Edwin Ruda and Dean Fleming.

Expanding Abstraction: Pushing the Boundaries of Painting in the Americas, 1958–1983 is organized by the Blanton Museum of Art.

Generous funding for this exhibition is provided by Choongja (Maria) and Stephen Kahng, Peter Kahng, and Jeanne and Michael Klein; with additional support from Suzanne Deal Booth, the Robert Lehman Foundation, and the Carl & Marilyn Thoma Art Foundation.

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About the Blanton:

Founded in 1963, the Blanton Museum of Art holds the largest public collection in Central Texas with around 19,000 objects. Recognized as the home of Ellsworth Kelly's Austin, its major collecting areas are modern and contemporary American and Latin American art, Italian Renaissance and Baroque paintings, and prints and drawings. The Blanton offers thought-provoking, visually arresting, and personally moving encounters with art.

Image Captions:

Alice Baber, *Lavender High*, 1968, oil on canvas, 75 1/2 x 75 1/2 in., Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Michener Acquisition Fund, 1969

Norman Lewis, *La Puerto Del Sol*, 1958, oil on canvas, 51 1/4 x 63 3/4 in., Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Gift of the Longview Foundation, Inc., 1960

Helen Frankenthaler, *Over the Circle*, 1961, oil on canvas, 84 1/8 x 87 in., Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Gift of Mari and James A. Michener, 1991

Alejandro Puente, *Estructura (3 panels) [Structure (3 panels)]*, 1966, oil on canvas, 74 13/16 x 63 x 78 3/4 in., Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Purchase as a gift of Margaret McDermott in honor of Barbara Duncan, and Judy S. and Charles W. Tate, 2005

Yayoi Kusama, *No. 62.A.A.A.*, 1962, paint, mattress stuffing, and cardboard egg crates on canvas, 70 1/6 x 79 1/2 in., Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Gift of the Center for International Contemporary Arts; Emanuel and Charlotte Levine Collection, 1992

Tadasky, *C-109*, 1964, acrylic (synthetic polymer) on canvas, 68 1/16 x 68 1/16 in., Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Gift of Mari and James A. Michener, 1991

Dean Fleming, *Snap Roll*, 1965, acrylic (synthetic polymer) on canvas, 65 3/4 x 99 5/8 in., Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Gift of Mari and James A. Michener, 1968