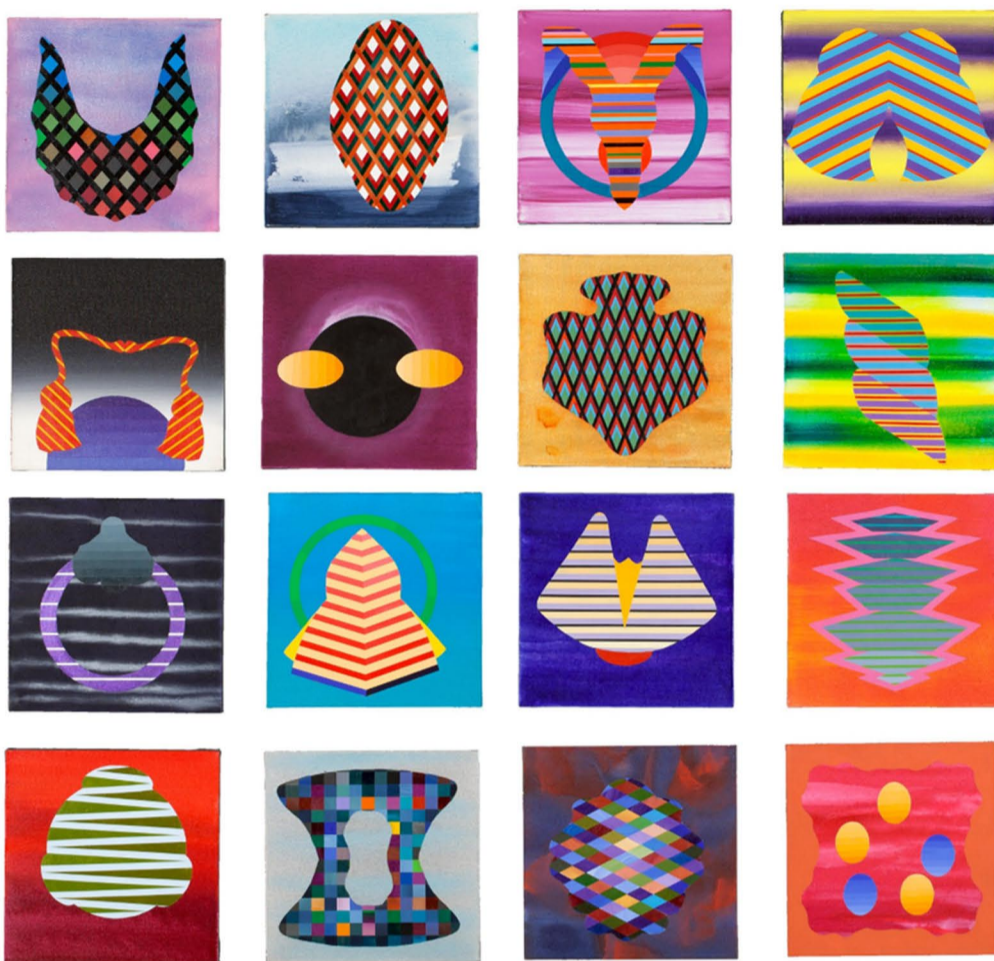


The New York Times

What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week



Untitled works by Stephen Mueller from 2004–07, acrylic on canvas, 16 panels, in the show “Orchidaceous.” Neuberger Museum of Art/Purchase College/Gift of Pat Steir

Oct. 17, 2018

Stephen Mueller

Through Oct. 28. 205 Hudson Gallery, 205 Hudson Street (enter on Canal Street), Manhattan; 212-772-4991, 205hudsongallery.org.

If being transfixed by paintings is your idea of a good time, treat yourself. Go see the funny, radiant, sexy, quasi-abstractions of Stephen Mueller (1947-2011). Consistently mesmerizing in their extravagant colors and surprising contrasts of shape and background, they deserve to be better known. This exhibition of more than 40 paintings, watercolors and notebooks is the largest yet devoted to his work.

Artists of Mr. Mueller’s generation often strove to undermine or subvert Color Field Painting, which he did by adding thick flourishes of paint to canvases delicately stained with color. In two paintings from 1987, the impasto brushwork evokes obstreperous actors before refined stage sets.

By the early ’90s, the impasto was gone, and Mr. Mueller was brilliantly synthesizing East and West, high and low. Drifting about the richly hued atmospheres of his paintings are flat silhouettes suggestive of prayer beads; the Buddhist temples called stupas; fans; lattices; medallions; and bulbous cartoony shapes, sometimes with glowing auras. At the same time his background colors evolved into soft plaidlike grids or rosy sunsets, like the one in a work titled “Mr. Meltemi.” One of Mr. Mueller’s last paintings is dominated by a big levitating black shape suggesting mouse ears.

This TriBeCa show, subtitled “Orchidaceous,” has been organized by Carrie Moyer, a professor at Hunter College, and Sarah Watson, director of exhibitions and chief curator at the Hunter College Art Galleries, who collaborated with two Agnes Gund curatorial fellows, Evan Bellantone and Sophia Ma, and 12 Hunter students working toward an advanced curatorial certificate. So many cooks have made this effort a little erratic and short on truly outstanding works. But there are enough to thrill, show us what we’re missing and make us hope for further curatorial initiatives centered on Mr. Mueller’s art.

ROBERTA SMITH