

Nov 6, 2017, 11:26am EST

# Learning Artist: Molly Zuckerman-Hartung At Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York

Clayton Press Former Contributor

Arts

Looking at abstract art is a bitch. How do you distinguish one artist from another in a dense, overpopulated field? How do you compare artists' efforts and outputs? To measure the success of any abstract work of art, irrespective of media, you have to ask yourself, "Did I surrender to it?"



Molly Zuckerman-Hartung. Chaos and Cosmos. 2017. ©2017 MOLLY ZUCKERMAN-HARTUNG; COURTESY RACHEL UFFNER GALLERY.

So much postwar abstraction is pretty unremarkable. There is just one Louise Nevelson, just one Lee Krasner and just one Lee Bontecou. These artists can lay claim to technique and visual territory. Molly Zuckerman-Hartung is getting closer and closer to her own domain, much like Michaela Eichwald with her melancholy abstractions or Anna Betbeze

with her raw terror flokati works. Zuckerman-Hartung is letting you in to her exceptionally complex and creative mind, which at times seems like the product of alien recombinant DNA.

Zuckerman-Hartung is an art maker whose work cannot be neatly categorized as painting or sculpture. She works in an in-between space. She does not use or rely on technology and gimmickry, which is a relief. Through her thinking, questioning and risk-taking, you see the handmade results of her labor. Her latest exhibition at Rachel Uffner Gallery on the Lower East Side is half dream and half trial. Harsh though it sounds, this is an honest, genuine compliment. Zuckerman-Hartung sprints and stumbles with equal flair. Where she succeeds, she has made—no, fabricated—painting-like objects that are sewn or quilted from various fabrics, studio remains and personal stuff. A sewing machine and safety pins are just as important tools as a paintbrush or palette knife. Paint appears, but does not dominate. Where Zuckerman-Hartung totters is with trying to translate her wall works into more traditional sculptural forms.



Molly Zuckerman-Hartung. Big Top. 2017. ©2017 MOLLY ZUCKERMAN-HARTUNG; COURTESY RACHEL UFFNER GALLERY.

Zuckerman-Hartung messes around with materials and methods. She is learning from her own experiments. Her consistency is in her diverse output. The works—like Charline von Heyl's—cannot be easily categorized or visually branded. It is too weird. This is one of its strengths; another is scale. This is welcome in a market where size is queen, making most art impossible to display in a domestic setting. The scale of the work remains collector friendly.



Molly Zuckerman-Hartung. Synchronic and Diachronic Time in the Same Object. 2017  
©2017 MOLLY ZUCKERMAN-HARTUNG; COURTESY OF RACHEL UFFNER GALLERY.

*Synchronic and Diachronic Time in the Same Object*, an irregularly shaped wall work, condenses Zuckerman-Hartung's talents in one work. Made of the artist's clothing, remnants of a paper lunar calendar, bleach, enamel and safety pins, the work has a rough slash, like a wound, hinting at the work's interior biology. The object is an exhibition unto itself, inviting and sensual. *Cosmos and Chaos*, hung high on the gallery's east wall, unites voile, canvas, silk, velvet, coat lining, hair weave, oil paint, bleach and acrylic paint. It is a reminder of Zuckerman-Hartung's exceptional talent as a fearless colorist and





Molly Zuckerman-Hartung. Dick Box. 2017 ©2017 MOLLY ZUCKERMAN-HARTUNG; COURTESY RACHEL UFFNER GALLERY.

The artist's sculptures need more time, more work and disciplined engineering. This is okay. By her own admission, she is learning by doing, and we are her witnesses. *Dick Box*, for example, has a decorative lightness (with an underlying feminist stance.) The idea is there, but it and other sculptural works do not exude the confidence found in her wall objects.

The artist has filled Rachel Uffner's voluminous downstairs gallery from rafters to floor, from wall to wall. You can sense the presence of—but never directly see (or fixate on)—other artists like Ree Morton and Richard Tuttle; Alexander Calder and Sarah Sze. None of Zuckerman-Hartung's works are pastiche, thankfully. You just feel the other ideas and artists, like channeled spirits. This is fitting for an artist who is well schooled in theory, history and technique.

Zuckerman-Hartung teaches at Yale. She is simultaneously confident and uncertain, as any good teacher should be as they test new ideas and methods. She quotes Jacques Ranciere, a kind of anti-philosopher, "To teach what one doesn't know is simply to ask questions about what one doesn't know." For this exhibition, she states, "I'm still trying to understand the Formal, I get tangled between Formalism, Formality, and the Formless." This is well put and not a cop out.

Zuckerman-Hartung's work catches you off guard, and just when you are ready to give up and walk out of the gallery, a detail or work shouts, "Hey, here I am!" You stop. You look. Your vision caroms around the gallery, picking up additional clues and details. The artist keeps you in the gallery, but not hostage in it. Hers is not a 2-to-3-minute rinse-and-spin gallery exhibition, which is a mainstay of safe painting and safe decorative abstraction. She offers unapologetic adventures in art.

*Learning Artist.* Molly Zuckerman-Hartung at Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York, through December 23, 2017.

Follow me on [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#). Check out my [website](#).

Clayton Press