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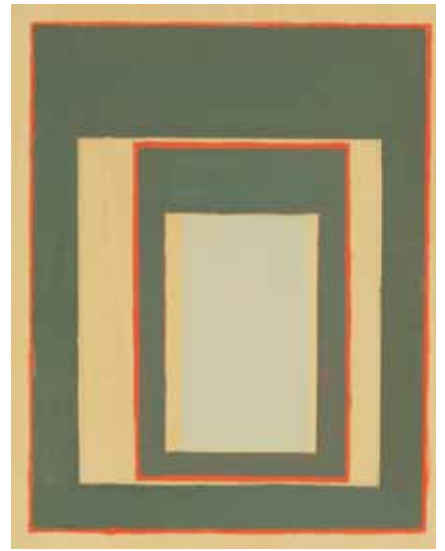
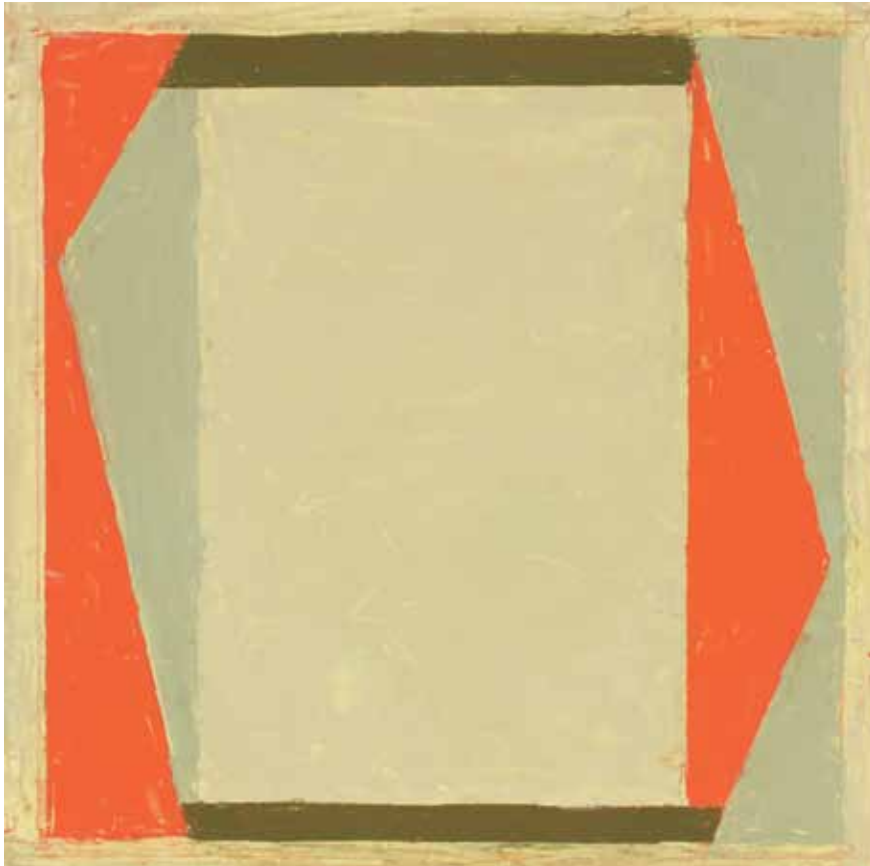
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Transcendent Moments

Behind the straightforward geometry of Elizabeth Gourlay’s paintings lies an evocative narrative that probes the subtle dynamics between color and form.



BY CAROLINE CUNNINGHAM

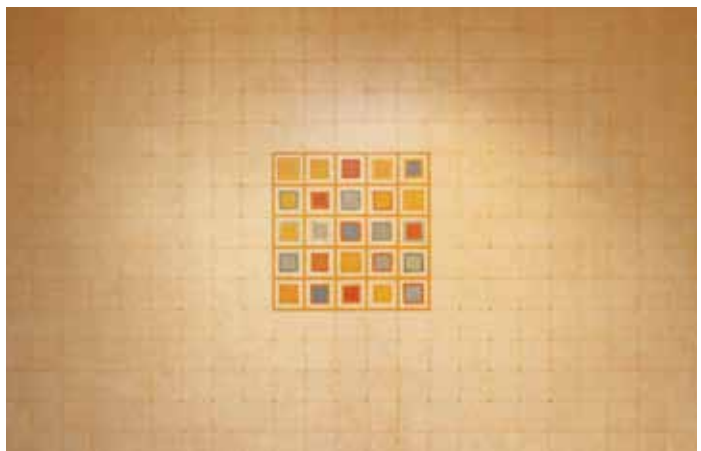


Elizabeth Gourlay explores the dynamic interplay between color and form in abstract paintings that have extraordinary power. The bold geometry, such as the mesmerizing repetition of a horizontal grid, may draw you in, but the small details, the suggestions of inadvertent imperfections, demand your attention. Gourlay brings an exacting rigor to the process of revealing subtle undercurrents of visual dissonance, and these surprising notes—an accent of deep red against a backdrop of moody gray, or a jagged edge of cerulean blue—elevate her work beyond simple beauty into something far more complex.

There is a distinctive contrast between what at first glance appears to be Gourlay’s straightforward, if gorgeous, paintings and the emotional charge that her deliberate constructions of line and color create. And that’s exactly the point. Past masters of minimalism, from Anni Albers to Piet Mondrian to Agnes Martin—all of whom Gourlay cites as important influences—focused on reducing artistic elements to their essential form. Gourlay’s work demonstrates, as theirs did, that an elusive narrative isn’t any less evocative. In fact, the freedom to interpret the meaning behind any work of art allows for the most intimate of connections.

Finding these transcendent moments of connection through art has been Gourlay’s guiding principle from the

TOP LEFT: *Zeri 10* (2013), graphite and oil on panel, 8" x 8". TOP RIGHT: *Red Gray B* (2014), Flashe on wood panel, 10"H x 8"W. LEFT: *Enzian 2* (2014), graphite and oil on linen over panel, 5"H x 7"W.



time she was a little girl in Connecticut and watched an older friend paint a landscape using a simple watercolor set. Gourlay was transfixed as she saw soft clouds and an expansive sky emerge from the sweep of a brush across the paper, and says she realized then that she would become an artist. "It was a magical moment that got etched into my memory," she says. "I just knew that there was no other path."

Following high school, Gourlay studied at the Edinburgh College of Art. The curriculum emphasized a traditional academic approach to fine art, which allowed Gourlay to refine her figurative

technique, but she was also encouraged to explore her burgeoning interest in color theory and abstraction. She was inspired by the monochromatic tonality in the old Scottish city in which she lived. "It was all gray," she recalls with a smile. "I would take long walks around the city,

and was fascinated to see how elements of color would pop against this neutral background."

She returned to the United States to get an MFA from Yale University School of Art, and then launched herself into the art world as most young artists do: by living a peripatetic life defined both by serendipitous housing arrangements and jobs as a studio assistant, a teacher, a waitress, and a crew supervisor for a group of housepainters in New Haven. Her breakout moment came in a show of small works on paper at The Drawing Center in New York City, the first significant exhibition in what is now a long list that includes galleries and museums around the world.

There is a unifying integrity in Gourlay's work that has remained constant over time, even as it has changed

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: *Wall Drawing with Terre Ercolano* (2003), in the collection of the Ashforth Company, Stamford, 17'H x 15'W; *Coquelicot* (2013), pencil and acrylic on canvas, 40" x 40"; *Wall Drawing with Orange, Yellow, and Brown Ochre* (2003), in the collection of the Ashforth Company, 8'H x 15'W; *Cadence 6* (2014), graphite and gouache on vellum, 11½" x 11½"; *Legato 10* (2014), ink, acrylic on linen, 40" x 40". FACING PAGE: The artist in her studio.



to reflect both the artist's evolving vision and an ever more confident hand. It's the integrity that comes from Gourlay's open and vulnerable approach, but it would be a mistake to confuse this vulnerability with fragility. Behind Gourlay's serene, almost ethereal, outward presence, there's an absolute will of iron that's reflected in her paintings and drawings. Through elaborate collage, strong blocks of color, or the intricate layering of lines, Gourlay establishes a firm balance between intellectual calculation and spontaneous expression,



“Although I often have an image in my mind, I try to keep my conscious mind, the editor, in another room,” says Gourlay.

exploiting the inherent tension between these dualities, and never allowing one to be ascendant over the other.

“Although I often have an image in my mind, I try to keep my conscious mind, the editor, in another room,” she says. “This allows freedom to explore and expand intuitively on the initial vision, to incorporate unexpected and playful juxtapositions, to enter into ‘dialogue’ with the piece while remaining honest to the original image.”

In other words, Gourlay's deeply personal meditations are transferred onto her canvas, and then become ours to share. •

EDITOR'S NOTE: To see more of Elizabeth Gourlay's work, visit elizabethgourlay.com or Fox Gallery NYC, foxgallerynyc.com.



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