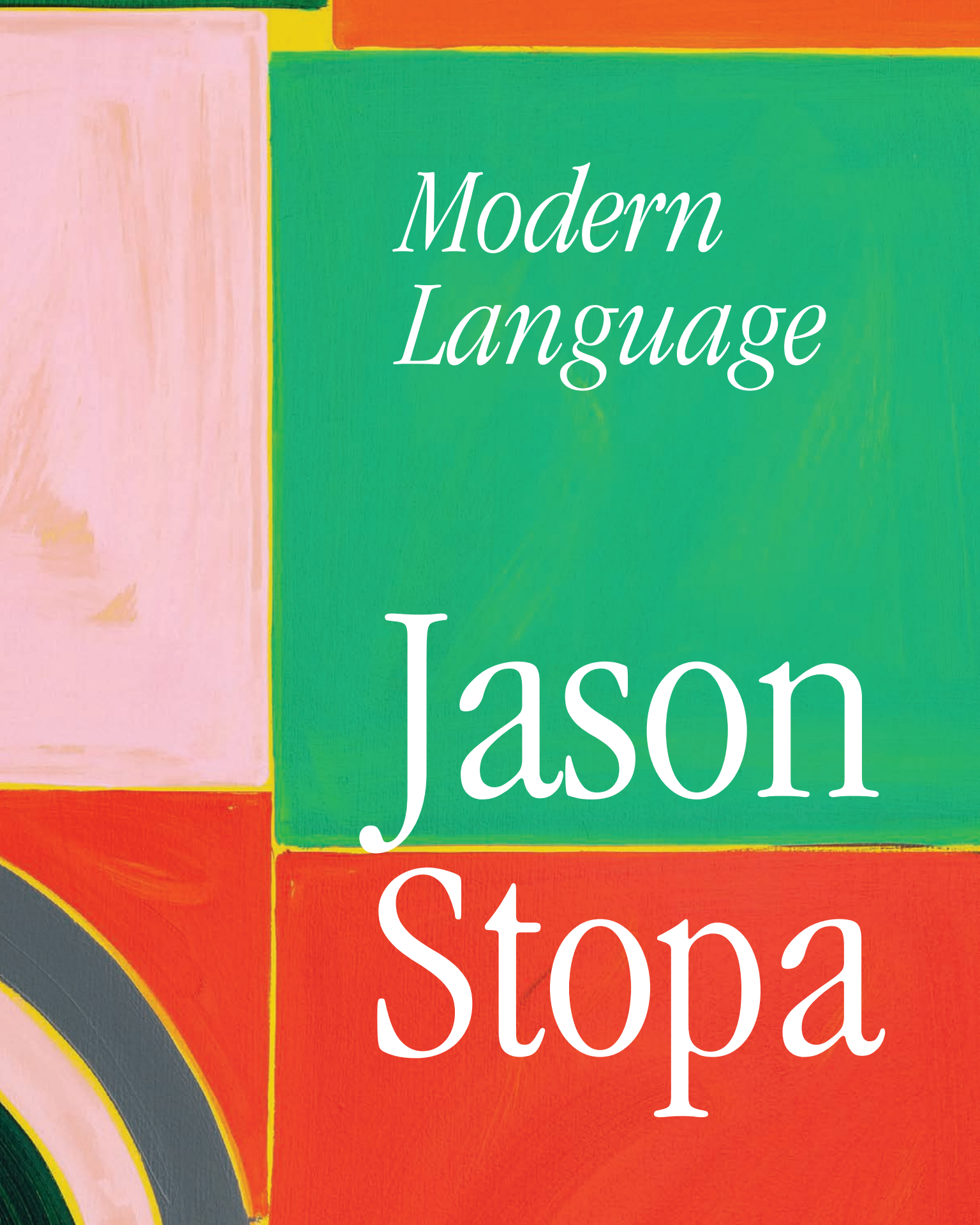


The background is an abstract composition of color blocks. A large green rectangle occupies the upper right portion. Below it is a red rectangle. To the left of the green rectangle is a light pink area. In the bottom left corner, a portion of a rainbow arc is visible, showing colors from dark green to yellow. The text is overlaid on the green and red areas.

*Modern
Language*

Jason
Stopa

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Jason
Stopa

THE SCHNEIDER MUSEUM OF ART

SEPTEMBER 25 THROUGH DECEMBER 13, 2025

COVER

Jason Stopa

Origin Of, 2024

Oil on canvas

60 x 50 inches

Collection of Dimin, NY, NY

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Foreword

We are pleased to present “Modern Language”, a solo exhibition by Jason Stopa. Stopa is no stranger to the Schneider Museum of Art. We shared his work in our fall 2023 curated show, “Intuitive Nature, Geometric Roots and Organic Foundations”, an exhibition about a personalized set of tools that artists use to reflect their intuitional play on geometric roots and organic reflections. “Modern Language” allows us to take a closer look at Stopa’s work with a survey exhibition. For this exhibition, we have borrowed work from around the United States.

Jason Stopa’s recent solo exhibitions include “Interior Monument” at Sevil Dolmaci Gallery in Istanbul, Turkey; “Glass Arcadia” at Thomas Park Gallery in Seoul, Korea; “DIY Paradise” at Assembly Gallery in Houston, TX; “Garden of Music” at Diane Rosenstein Gallery in Los Angeles, CA; and “Joy Labyrinth” at Morgan Lehman Gallery in New York, NY. In addition to his studio practice, Stopa is also an arts writer contributing to *Art in America*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, and *Whitewall Magazine*. Stopa received his MFA from Pratt Institute in 2010. His work has been reviewed in *Galleri Magazine*, *Hyperallergic*, *The New Criterion*, *Artforum*, *Black Book*, and *Interview Magazine*, among others, with interviews in *Bomb* magazine, *Vogue Istanbul*, and *Point Contemporain*. He is represented by Morgan Lehman Gallery in New York, NY and Diane Rosenstein Gallery in Los Angeles, CA. Stopa lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.

I would like to thank Jason Stopa for working with us and Elizabeth Buhe for contributing an insightful essay for the exhibition. In addition, I’d like to acknowledge the Schneider Museum of Art’s staff and support team, Maureen Williams, our Museum Preparator and Gallery Manager, Emily McPeck, our Associate Director of Administration and Communication, our student staff and our Museum Council; Cindy Barnard, Roberta Bhasin, Sandy Friend, Michele Fulkerson, Mary Gardiner, Vivian Stubblefield, School of Art & Communication Dean, Andrew Gay, catalog design by David Ruppe and printing by Brown Printing in Portland, OR.

Scott Malbaurn
Executive Director
Schneider Museum of Art







JASON STOPA: Painting as Lexicon

When I visited Jason Stopa in his Brooklyn studio in November 2024, he had eight drawings laid out neatly on a table in two rows. Discussing the relationship between these and the several large paintings on the walls, Stopa explained that the drawings are not direct preparatory studies for the paintings (and, preceded by sketches in a notebook, they are not the first step of his process, either). They are a place of trial and creativity, a place where “pure undiscoveredness” happens.¹ In them, pointed ovals tip at ninety degrees, rectangles stack in rows, and rectangular framing devices that do not quite stretch to the edges of the composition provide a structure to work within. Generally, Stopa’s shapes seem locked in relation contingently, as if they are a set of transparent color forms that can be shifted and maneuvered within the space of the page or canvas.

Despite the works’ internal framing devices, they do not read as illusionistic windows to a pictured, perspectival elsewhere. Therefore, they repudiate humanist models of visibility and depth that position the artist/viewer as a centered eye/I. Instead, Stopa’s drawings, all lined up on the table in the studio, conjured a model of making closer to the “flatbed picture plane” put forward by Leo Steinberg in a 1968 lecture. For Steinberg, addressing first and foremost Robert Rauschenberg’s collages, the flatbed picture plane was any horizontal “receptor surface on which objects are scattered . . . [or] on which information may be received, printed, impressed,” and this surface of tabulation was radically different from a simulated vertical field.²

1. Jason Stopa in conversation with the author, November 14, 2024.

2. Leo Steinberg, “Other Criteria,” in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 84. “The Flatbed Picture Plane,” originally presented as a lecture at the Museum of Modern Art in 1968, appears as a subsection (82–91) of the essay “Other Criteria” (55–91) in the anthology.



Jason Stopa
The Garden (Allegory of Time), 2021
Oil on canvas
72 x 60 inches
Collection of Sasha and Charlie Sealy

In the studio, narrating shifts in his work over the last decade, Stopa summated that his earlier interest in sensation and touch has given way to one in abstraction as a language. Now, he views composition as “a lexicon of moves that shifts as the work is built.”³ Building on his word choice of “lexicon,” reading Stopa’s work through semiotics is compelling, in part because—despite obviously trafficking in the markers of modern painting and high-modernist abstraction such as shallow space, gestural mark-making, saturated color fields, and geometric shapes—Stopa does not engage the category of sign most frequently associated with abstract paintings of this lineage: the index. As art historian Isabelle Graw has noted, “it is specifically in painting” where the indexical sign predominates, “forcefully point[ing] to the absent author who seems to be somewhat physically present in them.”⁴ Graw refers to a history of interpretation that culminated with abstract expressionism wherein brushwork indicates authenticity because it is a trace (an index) of the hand, and therefore of authorship, or even of genius.

Stopa’s paintings do indeed showcase the gestural mark. The interior of the white cup-like shape in *The Garden (Allegory of Time)* (2021) is a good example, as are most passages of any canvas in this show. Yet in Stopa’s paintings there is a quality of openness and casualness—they impart a sense of “fill it in, just enough”—that is no less serious than the gestural mark, but meaningfully different. By redeploying the gesture in this way, Stopa recodes the assertiveness of the indexical mark as pointing not right back at the authorial self, but to a lively openness and flow. Writing in the early 1990s, painter Shirley Kaneda lauded such subversions of the masculine tradition in painting as feminine and androgynous, irrespective of the gender of an artwork’s maker, and Stopa has long engaged with Kaneda’s ideas about “feminine” painting being a proposition as opposed to a “male” assertion.⁵ As critic Alex Bacon has noted, the gaps Stopa leaves between strokes contribute to the feeling that his paintings “sparkle and vibrate” with movement.⁶ The looseness derives both from Stopa’s hand and from the possibility his compositions imply that shapes or fields can slide and

3. Stopa in conversation with the author, November 14, 2024.

4. Isabelle Graw, “The Value of Liveliness: Painting as an Index of Agency in the New Economy,” in *Painting Beyond Itself: The Medium in the Post-Medium Condition*, ed. Isabelle Graw and Ewa Lajer-Burcharth (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 80.

5. Shirley Kaneda, “Painting and Its Others: In the Realm of the Feminine,” *Arts Magazine* (Summer 1991): 58–64. Stopa told me that in his view, his work toggles back and forth between these feminine/masculine modes. Jason Stopa email to the author, April 4, 2025.

6. Alex Bacon, “Painting After Irony,” in *Jason Stopa: Garden of Painting* (Los Angeles: Diane Rosenstein Gallery, 2023), n.p.

flip around, or move in and out of the frame, and that this imaginative play or storytelling across paintings is not fully within the artist's jurisdiction because it is partly the purview of the onlooker.

The spatial shallowness (not modernist “flatness”) I am locating in Stopa's work, therefore, opposes the “depth” of the psychological models of creativity, expression, and interiority associated with indexicality in painting. Art historian Rosalind Krauss explained the major interpretative shift from historicism to structuralism in analogous terms in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (1985). For the nonstructuralist critic, Krauss wrote, interpretation is based on the “analogy between the work of art and its maker: the work's surface thought of as existing in relation to its ‘depth’ much the way that the exterior of the human subject is understood to relate to his internal, or true, self.”⁷ By contrast, the structuralist model of substitution and nomination (out of which meaning arises through the selection of one word over another, subtly different one) calls forth the image of shallowness, “substitution being able, after all, to take place by moving pieces on a plane surface.”⁸

Stopa attended graduate school in the aughts, earning a BFA from Indiana University in 2007 and an MFA from Pratt Institute in 2010. While conversations in undergraduate class concerned the Young British Artists, sensationalism, and regionalism in the Midwest, Stopa—arriving in New York for the first time in 2008—was simultaneously learning the legacy of abstract painting that unfolded there, from Mark Rothko and Ad Reinhardt forward.⁹ Although enthralled with these figures, the romanticism or negation associated with their work no longer felt viable fifty years later. A subsequent generation of painters on view in New York galleries, including Jonathan Lasker, Mary Heilmann, and Stanley Whitney, who were reducing and transforming lingering ideas about originality, the self, the grid, the event, and the binary between abstraction and representation, seemed to offer a way forward. At Pratt, Stopa read semiotics in class and worked as a teaching assistant to adjunct professor Robert C. Morgan, who taught Ferdinand de Saussure and philosophy of language. The richness of this new formation laid the groundwork for Stopa to ask how signs communicate, and how a gesture or mark corresponds to a vocabulary of forms.

7. Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 3.

8. Krauss, 3.

9. Stopa in conversation with the author, December 11, 2024.





This returns us to the paintings on view in this exhibition and the signs Stopa deploys in them. In semiotic terms, a sign is a *signifier* (the sign's form) plus its *signified* (the concept or object brought to mind). Because Stopa is adept at alluding to a number of figures in the history of abstraction without quoting anyone directly, there are quite a few artists we might place on this list. Perhaps most evident, though, are Henri Matisse, Morris Louis, and Frank Stella—all of whom bear associations with the decorative and have received rigorous art historical analysis during and beyond their lifetimes. A brief look at how recognizable motifs from their works appear in Stopa's paintings will allow us to then clarify how they operate as signs.

Stopa's *Interior Pleasures* (2019) brings to mind Matisse's early works like *The Dessert: Harmony in Red* (1908) and *The Red Studio* (1911) where the artist stacked patterns in flattened rooms, leading art historian Yve-Alain Bois to metaphors of circulation and expansion to describe the overwhelming presence of dynamism in Matisse's work.¹⁰ Next, in Stopa's *A New Harmony* (2021) and *Journey in Satchidananda* (2023) we find a rainbow of upturned drips within a variously bowed triangle that holds up the upper half of the composition, recalling Morris Louis's *Unfurleds*, like *Alpha Kappa* (1960), made by throwing raw canvas over a wooden horse and pouring rivulets of colored acrylic toward the edge of the canvas. Because the acrylic soaked fully into the unprimed canvas, Morris's advisor, the critic Clement Greenberg, took these works to exemplify the high modernist value on total flatness and the disembodied opticality it implied. Finally, in the circle inlaid with a reverse quatrefoil of blue, cherry blossom pink, pastel yellow, and magenta pointed ovals in *Last Garden City* (2024)—and a great number of Stopa's works since 2021—we find reference to Frank Stella's most popular paintings, the fluorescent and pastel Protractor Series (1967–71). The elder artist's massive canvases merge the illusions of depth and projection as their bands simultaneously appear to advance and retreat, an effect made more palpable by the thickness of their stretcher bars. These optical contradictions placed Stella's Protractors at the crux of heated 1960s debates about the extension of painting into the materiality and space of sculpture.¹¹

In each of these cases, the signifier in Stopa's work is the easy-to-recognize work of another abstract painter. The signified, however, is not Frank Stella, any particular Protractor canvas, or a 1960s aesthetic. It is, rather, the force these artworks exerted in their moment on issues that mattered a great deal to abstraction, including space, pattern, sensation, process, and an artwork's relationship to its maker/viewer. As Stopa put it to Jarrett Earnest in

10. Yve-Alain Bois, "On Matisse: The Blinding," trans. Greg Sims, *October* 68 (Spring 1994): 60–121.

11. The polemic is encapsulated in the words of high-modernist critic Michael Fried, who recalled that "in a sense Carl Andre and I were fighting for [Stella's] soul, and Andre and I represented very different things . . . these were issues to fight over . . . when the same body of work was seen in different ways . . . when you entered the debate in an active way and you fought for what you saw as the truth." Michael Fried, "Theories of Art After Minimalism and Pop," in Hal Foster, ed., *Discussions in Contemporary Culture*, no. 1 (Seattle: Bay Press, 1987), 79.



Jason Stopa
Interior Pleasures, 2019
Oil and acrylic on canvas
28 x 23 inches
Collection of Monica King





2023, he is approaching “abstraction as a historical project that is now up for a lot of reexamination.”¹² And as he put it to me, “there’s no new, only what exists,” and these “signifiers, while not fully liquidated, are no longer ideological.”¹³

In Stopa’s hands, then, art history offers up formal breakthroughs that retain potency on a conceptual rather than ideological level and that are ripe for reshuffling. A crucial distinction is that Stopa is not emphasizing such a patrimony to argue that his works’ importance rests with previous art, but rather that Stopa’s work interrogates the way that these previous paintings, as reconfigured in his own, (continue to) work through dilemmas of a twenty-first century in which resources are mined for their parts rather than as wholes. In this vein, Stopa’s method takes cues from the tradition of appropriation at its height in the 1980s and 90s, in which artists like Sherrie Levine made copies of famous artworks “after” their creators like Walker Evans or Joan Miró. Notably, Stopa does not copy an image fully as these artists often did; for example, the yellow and orange leaf forms in the top register of *The Poetics of Ecology* (2023) reference the stained glass of the Matisse (or Rosary) Chapel in Vence, France without reproducing it directly. With his own technique of allusion, Stopa aligns with historical precedent in critiquing art history’s long-lauded values authenticity and authorship—one which opened the door for future artists like Stopa to warp and weave the process of semiosis across forms and genres.

Over the course of the twentieth century and particularly with the rise of montage and the readymade, artisanal skill became disassociated from art, and authorship came to incorporate the hands of others. As a result, artistic skills found their application in the demonstration of conceptual activity, rather than in the execution of mimesis.¹⁴ This is the definition of *deskilling*, a process that undergirds Stopa’s current work. Yet unlike his predecessors from the 1980s and 90s, Stopa is not utilizing technologies of reproduction, nor is he “copying” other, earlier, artists wholesale. To follow a formulation put forth by Immanuel Kant, Stopa deploys likeness not as *nachahmen*, which is merely a form of reproduction, but as *nachfolgen*, which is transformative and creative.¹⁵ He is painting motifs that call to

12. Jarrett Earnest, “Jason Stopa Interviewed,” *BOMB*, June 21, 2023, accessed March 15, 2025, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/2023/06/21/jason-stopa-interviewed/>.

13. Stopa in conversation with the author, December 11, 2024.

14. John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (London: Verso, 2007), 3.

15. Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form*, 16.



Jason Stopa
The Poetics of Ecology, 2023
Oil on canvas
80 x 71 inches

Courtesy of Diane Rosenstein Gallery
Collection of David Hoberman, Los Angeles

mind (signify) powerful moments in the history of painting, but he is doing so without the precision of copying, and he is assimilating them into his own consistent language of color and composition.

Acknowledging this distinction between reproduction and transformation allows us to return to the joy, gesture, light, dynamism, play, sense of idyll, and even narrative aspect—all traditional values of painting—of Stopa's work. Put simply, Stopa is a painter seeking a path forward for abstract painting, and the canvases in *Modern Language* show us that he is working earnestly to demonstrate that the medium of painting remains viable and uniquely positioned to point out a way of being in the world, both within painting and outside of it. He does so not in spite of conceptualism and the readymade, but with the insights of these approaches fully absorbed in the work.

Elizabeth Buhe, 2025

Elizabeth Buhe is a critic and art historian based in New York who has taught at the Whitney Museum of American Art and at Fordham University, and is a contributing critic for the *Brooklyn Rail* and *Studio International*. Her writing has earned support from the Fulbright Program, the Luce Foundation, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Getty Research Institute, The Courtauld, and the Terra Foundation for American Art, among others. Buhe earned a Ph.D. from the Institute of Fine Arts – New York University, and is currently completing a book titled *Beside Painting* on abstract painting and perception.







Jason Stopa
A New Harmony, 2021
Oil on canvas
60 x 48 inches
Collection of the Wellin Museum



Jason Stopa
Daybreak, San Marco Courtyard, 2021
Oil on canvas
72 x 60 inches
Collection of Sasha and Charlie Sealy





Jason Stopa
Origin Of, 2024
Oil on canvas
60 x 50 inches
Collection of Dimin, NY, NY



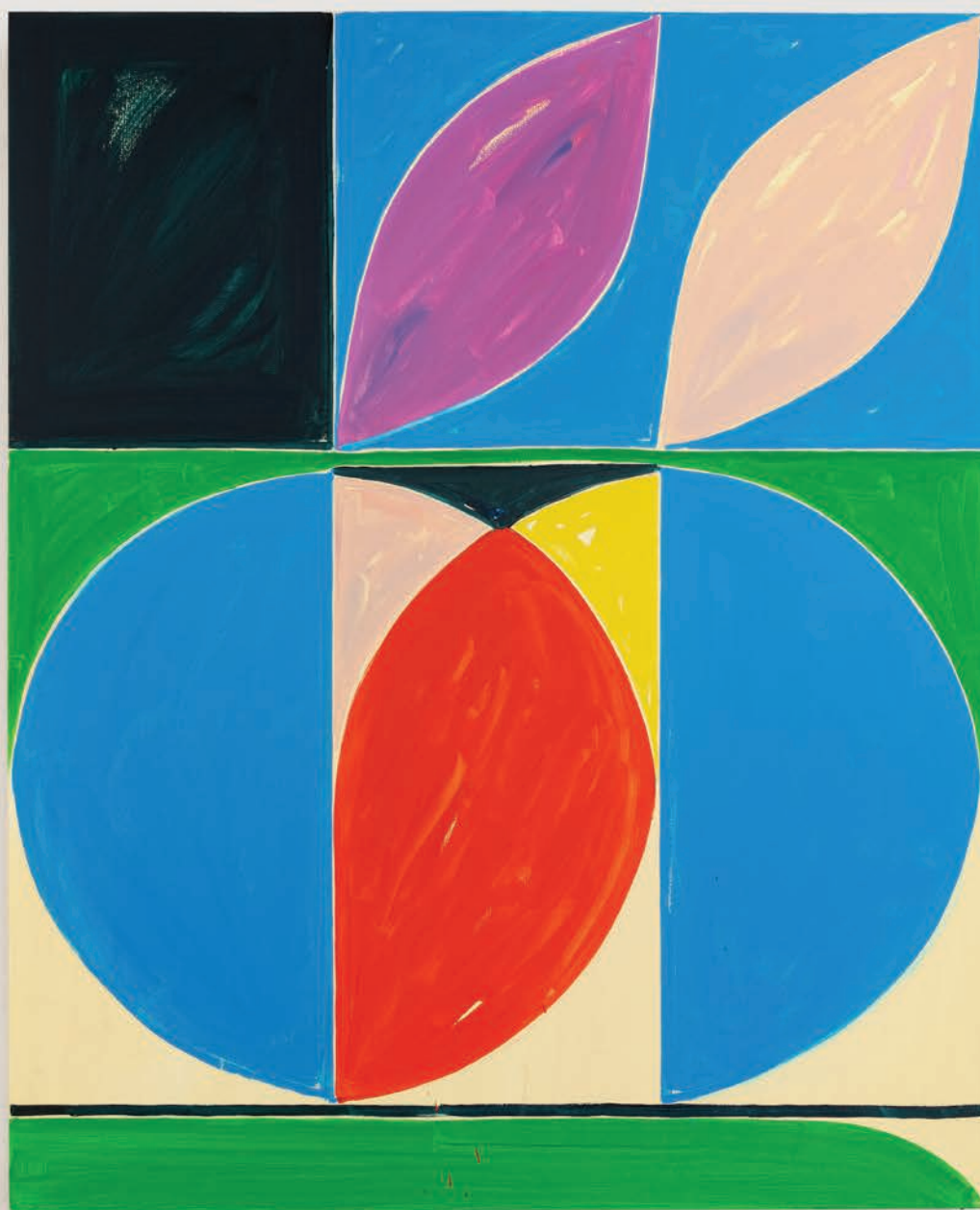




Jason Stopa
Journey in Satchidananda, 2023
Oil on canvas
72 x 60 inches
Courtesy of the artist and
Diane Rosenstein Gallery



Jason Stopa
Last Garden City, 2023
Oil on canvas
28 x 23 inches
Collection of Alecia Harris



Jason Stopa
The Language of Ornament, 2024
Oil on canvas
66 x 54 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Morgan Lehman Gallery



Jason Stopa
Roman Garden Arch, 2020
Oil on canvas
28 x 23 inches
Collection of Peter Fischer









Checklist of the Exhibition



The Poetics of Ecology, 2023
Oil on canvas
80 x 71 inches
Courtesy of Diane Rosenstein Gallery
Collection of David Hoberman,
Los Angeles



A New Harmony, 2021
Oil on canvas
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Oil on canvas
28 x 23 inches
Collection of Alecia Harris



Future Ornament, 2024
Oil on canvas
30 x 25 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Morgan
Lehman Gallery



The Garden (Allegory of Time), 2021
Oil on canvas
72 x 60 inches
Collection of Sasha and
Charlie Sealy

A Partially Open Window, 2025
Acrylic on Arches watercolor paper (framed)
57.5 x 17.125 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Morgan Lehman Gallery
No image



Jason Stopa
Future Ornament, 2024
Oil on canvas
30 x 25 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Morgan Lehman Gallery



Introduction by Elizabeth Buhe; Paintings by Jason Stopa; Photography by Adam Reich.

Paintings © Jason Stopa, 2019–2025. All works courtesy of the artist, Diane Rosenstein Gallery, LA, Morgan Lehman Gallery, NY, Sevil Dolmaci Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey, Steven Harvey Fine Art, NY, Thomas Park Gallery, Seoul, Korea.

