

# Non-Objective Painting in Cape Cod Galleries

by Jan Lhormer

"Of all the arts, abstract painting is the most difficult. It demands that you know how to draw well, that you have a heightened sensitivity for composition and for colours, and that you be a true poet. This last is essential."

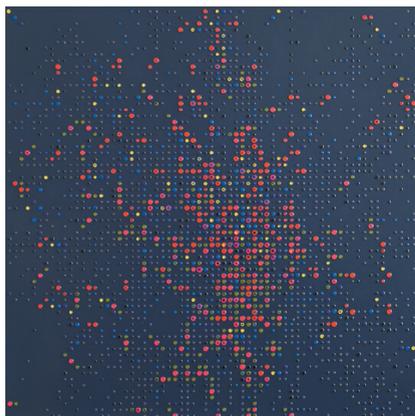
— WASSILY KANDINSKY



Moichael Carroll, *Untitled 2*



Anne Sergeant Walker, *"Blessing,"* mixed media



Reese Inman, *"Remix I,"* 2008, acrylic on panel

One theory proposes that the roots of non-objective painting lie in ancient cultures that considered it taboo to reproduce human beings or the sacred landscape. Consequently, artwork was focused on sophisticated decorative crafts as well as calligraphy. Today, defining abstraction is clouded by irony in that all painting involves the abstract concept of representing three dimensional space on a two dimensional surface. Even the most detailed realist must employ poetic choices of shapes and color in order to be truly successful. Yet somehow there is a difference in the processes, inspirations and motivations of objective and non-objective artists.

Pioneers of abstraction in the history of Western Art were European painters Wassily Kandinsky, Kasimir Malevich, and Piet Mondrian. In the early 20th century, they sought to find a non-objective, spiritual approach, or "art for art's sake," focusing on carefully calculated systems of geometric forms. More intuitive and emotional methods, such as Surrealism, Fauvism, and Expressionism, followed the trend away from realistic imagery. Abstract Expressionist painting was developed in New York City, making the United States a center for ground-breaking art. Many of these painters

flocked to Provincetown in the summers, establishing Cape Cod as a haven for artists in the early 1950s. Most notably, the Hans Hofmann School of Art in Provincetown attracted artists and students from all over the world. Hofmann's teachings were rooted in landscape and still life drawing, yet abandoned familiar subject matter to heighten expressive properties and tensions within paint and color forms. Also classified with abstract art are figurative abstractions and paintings which represent that which is not visual, such as emotion, sound, or spiritual experience. Figurative abstractions are based in reality, yet detail is eliminated from known objects leaving only the essence or some degree of recognizable form.

Today, while nearby urban areas such as Boston and New York showcase installation and video art, paint is the primary medium on Cape Cod. Non-objective work that was in fashion four to six decades ago has been replaced by a return towards realism, primarily landscapes. Nevertheless, pockets of diverse abstractions grace the walls of several galleries from Falmouth to Provincetown.

**The Schoolhouse Gallery** in Provincetown has perhaps one of the largest collections of artists creating non-objective, contemporary painting on the Cape, as well as avant garde photography. **Michael Carroll**, owner, is himself an accomplished painter. Most compelling of his work is a piece called "Teapot Painting," where the sophisticated graphic quality also succeeds as painterly image. Reminiscent of artist Paul Klee, Carroll designs complex musical rhythms of lines and color shapes, with interwoven organic forms, delightful color sense, and playful references to pop imagery strengthening his engaging vision. Carroll's characteristic list-making identifies starting points for his works on gessoed wood panels: "pattern, repetition, interpersonal situations, other art, bodies, places, and language." His intuitive process begins by manipulating elements of "marks, colors, scales, temperatures and tones until they reveal some physical qualities of meaning." His intent is to discover intersecting possibilities within the image rather than restrict the outcome to any message or represented morality. Acrobatic contorting forms translate situations which he names as the following: "haste, daydreaming, spaciousness, contraction, possibility, temperature, hardness or softness, and motion." Carroll's paintings convey a refreshing sense of humor with rigorous intellect.

**Bert Yarborough** is one of twelve artists exhibiting at **ArtStrand Gallery**, located directly behind the Schoolhouse Gallery in Provincetown. Yarborough's current work incorporates figurative imagery into painting that had been primarily abstract for two decades. Having spent time living and studying in Nigeria, a primal, mythic influence infuses his subject matter and intense palette. "I have the desire to make the figure anew . . . to treat the figure like any mark or gesture . . . and to continually search to make the figure the repository for everything we think and feel," he has said. In "Heavenly Bodies," a large two-panel diptych, Yarborough's forceful brush strokes and rich color combine compositions of a mask-like head juxtaposed by moon and sun each encased in bold blocks of paint. He works with the fervor of artist Joan Snyder, harnessing the raw power of nature. There is a psychological quality to the painted heads that is reminiscent of Munch, with an implied scream. His pictorial language feels at once ancient and quite contemporary, employing geometric divisions of the canvas to contain cave-dweller-like stories. Acrylic and oil paint are built up in passionate gestures describing earth, sky, or people, which metaphorically confront our mortality. Yarborough also works with inks on paper which allows for an airy surface and more spontaneous feel. Recurring images of a bird may symbolize something fleeting or ethereal, underlining the artist's interest in divine questions. By integrating figurative elements into radiant sculptural colorfields, Yarborough's newest works address the human condition with intense urgency.

Bert Yarborough, "First Sun"



Bert Yarborough, "Heavenly Bodies," oil & acrylic on canvas over wood, 72" x 96"

**Reese Inman** exhibits her technology-inspired paintings **Kobalt Gallery** in Provincetown's East-End gallery district. Inman's acrylic canvasses are based on interpreting self-designed computer program data with extraordinary precision. She harmonizes a seductive color sense in various arrangements of dots on a flat surface which are uniquely fresh, and represent the vivid saturation of the new millenium world and the manic lights of the high tech arena. Dots are dripped from squeeze paint bottles, layered in changing thicknesses to add an organic quality. "My works are metaphors for this blend of the human and the machine, combining the hands-off exactitude of computer programming with the hands-on discipline of traditional art making, merging technological precision with the inflections and irregularities of the human hand," explains the artist. Most recently she integrates data from text, music and images adding rich references to her visual vocabulary. This allows for more deliberate compositions than the previous randomly generated algorithms and references a unity among all the arts. Inman's work explores how a single process can create varied and complex results. Connections to Art Historical movements exist with minimalism, grid based works and conceptual art, most notably Sol LeWitt and Agnes Martin.