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## Pat Steir, by chance GALLERIES

By EDITH NEWHALL

As a teenager in southern New Jersey, Pat Steir would skip school to travel to Philadelphia, specifically to the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

"I did it so often - sitting on the floor, spreading my books out on the floor, looking at the artwork, eating apples - that after a while the guards didn't even chase me away," recalled Steir, now 74, in an oral history for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art.

One early influence was Marcel Duchamp, whose iconic *The Large Glass*, which joins two panels of accidentally shattered glass, made Steir aware that an art object could be more than simply "made" or "finished" by an artist. It could also be transformed by its own materials and life in the world outside the studio, as was *The Large Glass* in the late 1920s, when it was broken in transit following an exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum.



*For Philadelphia Three* by Pat Steir, using the artist's dripped paint method, is in her solo show at Locks Gallery

That realization, coupled with Steir's appreciation for Duchamp's use of chance procedures in his art, clearly informed her when she began her series of "waterfall" paintings in the late 1980s, pouring paint onto smooth, gessoed canvases and allowing it to flow into its own fluid downward rivulets. That a chance-based application of paint like hers could reference Chinese landscape painting and such abstract expressionists as Jackson Pollock (and perhaps even the waterfall of Duchamp's last major work, *Etant donnés*, also at the Philadelphia Museum of Art), added to her paintings' mystique.

Of late, Steir's art has taken a more meditative turn.

In the 11 canvases that make up her one-person show at Locks Gallery, each of which is composed of two vertical rectangles of different colors divided by a stripe that recalls a Barnett Newman "zip," Steir's paint pours are more evenly dispersed and contained than before. The transparency of her layers of dripped paint also conjures infinite depths in many of these new works, all from 2013 and 2014. That is especially true in *Blue and Blue*, which pairs two Newmanesque blues separated by a red stripe, and of several paintings in which veils of yellow, green, and gold coalesce and separate, revealing excavations of colors.

It's tempting to try to identify the inspiration behind three paintings whose titles refer to Philadelphia (*For Philadelphia One*, *For Philadelphia Two*, and *For Philadelphia Three*) and to search for aspects of this city - and, of course, Steir's favorite haunt, the Art Museum - in them. I see the Naples yellow of the Waterworks buildings below the museum, the milky white bark of London plane trees on nearby Kelly Drive, and the dark Hooker's green of the Schuylkill wrapped together in these shimmering, resplendent paintings.

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