

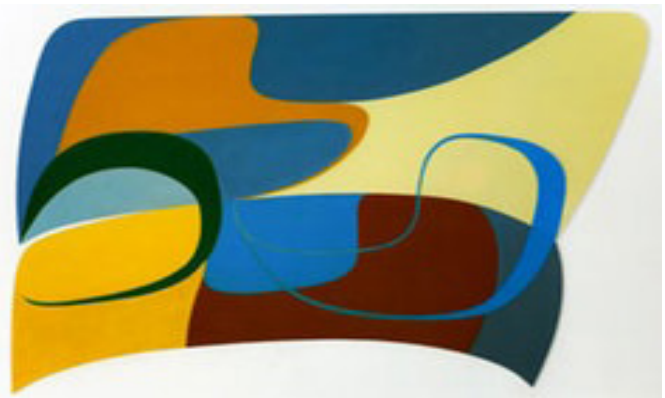
# ARTFORUM

Joanna Pousette-Dart  
Robert Pincus-Witten /ARTFORUM NOV 2008  
Joanna Pousette-Dart

## MOTI HASSON GALLERY

Much as it comes as a surprise, Joanna Pousette-Dart must now be regarded as a veteran abstract painter-the way we thought of her father, Richard Pousette-Dart, who, finally, has been transported to the higher reaches of Abstract Expressionist heaven. Echoing his slow ascendance, Joanna Pousette-Dart, now in her sixties, has been an underestimated painter for more than half her life. Thus, apart from the actual pleasures of making art, she also knows how singularly ungrateful the practice of abstract painting has become. As a vehicle for artistic expression, it is widely considered to be exhausted, a typology that matters solely in its historical manifestations from the early twentieth century through Abstract Expressionism. To be sure, there are exceptions-Brice Marden, Ellsworth Kelly; to name artists of a younger generation would encourage invidious comparisons that prove the rule.

Pousette-Dart has reimagined the rectangular format of abstraction as a large horizontal cinematic field. In response to the curving of sight at its peripheries, shaped canvases-often canoe-like-replace the rigidity of the original, seemingly God-mandated rectangle. At times, Pousette-Dart places such "mustachioed" canvases one atop the other, in double or triple register, like a stack of boats or blazons. These works recall the wide curving and swelling plane of the automobile windshield, with its "plumed" flourish at either extremity. Drooping, lassoing shapes generated by the experience of the expansive visual plane also intersect Pousette-Dart's canvases. These subdivisions remind one of the skeleton of an airplane wing, an armature of aerodynamic swags.



"Untitled (Cañones #2)" (2007-2008). Acrylic on canvas over wood panels. 79 x 121 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Moti Hasson Gallery, New York.



Though there is much that is decorative in her work-the Achilles` Heel of all abstraction (or its Saving Grace, depending on your point of view)-Pousette-Dart is not particularly drawn to decoration; how a picture "works" in terms of its perceptual, neural effects is her bailiwick.

Her father`s painting suggests an apposite key. Richard Pousette-Dart was drawn to the art of the Northwest Pacific Coastal tribes-the Kwakiutl, the Tlingit, and the Haida-whose painted carvings, from enormous totems to small ceremonial objects such as animistic pipes, rattles, and masks we now regard as sublimely exquisite. This fascination appears in his work around 1940, not only in his paintings but also in small, flat-brass sculptures featuring Pacific Northwest Indian motifs. The Native American feel for format and subdivision reverberates in the interlocking shapes of Joanna Pousette-Dart`s new paintings.

Her sense of color is odd-clean and not remotely tonalist. She is not interested-as she once was-in painterly, manipulated, discovered surfaces. Her colors are clear, bright, and flat-with an occasional illusionist swell of a kind that occurs in Ellsworth Kelly`s hard-edged epigraphic abstractions. For all its radiance, her color often seems provisional-on one hand unique, on the other curiously impersonal.

Pousette-Dart tends to avoid the powerful magnet of red, contrasting the yellow-orange arc of the spectrum against dense blues and blue-greens and thereby invoking the American Southwest desert, mesa, and canyon. She places color in a dark/light polarity (as did her father in his final, black and white mandorla paintings), substituting the blues for one and the yellows for the other. Hence, her color tends to cancel out its special appeals, arriving at something offbeat, `50s-ish (this is intended positively), akin to the maize- or turquoise-colored Russel Wright dinnerware or the flat landscapes of the Road Runner cartoons. In that sense Pousette-Dart`s color is cogent and to the point, utterly hers while eluding facile seduction.

In all, this exhibition suggests that our uncertainty of faith in abstract painting may be unwarranted. I might be placing too heavy a burden on her shoulders, but Joanna Pousette-Dart`s mature abstraction does provide at least one kind of respite from the pummeling, jejune expressionism, representationalism, conceptualism, and cynicism that threatens to flood out the art of our moment.

-Robert Pincus- Witten

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