

MULTIPLE  
TEMPORALITIES,  
LAYERED  
HISTORIES:

A SOLO SHOW BY **STEVEN PEARSON**



*Competing Rings and Ice-Cube Trays*, 2018. Graphite on Paper.

# **MULTIPLE TEMPORALITIES, LAYERED HISTORIES: A SOLO SHOW BY STEVEN PEARSON**

November 8 – December 7, 2018

## **Exhibition Related Programming:**

*All events take place in the Rice Gallery*

### **Thursday, November 8**

Opening Reception 5:30-7:30pm

Artist's Talk 6:00pm

### **Thursday, November 15**

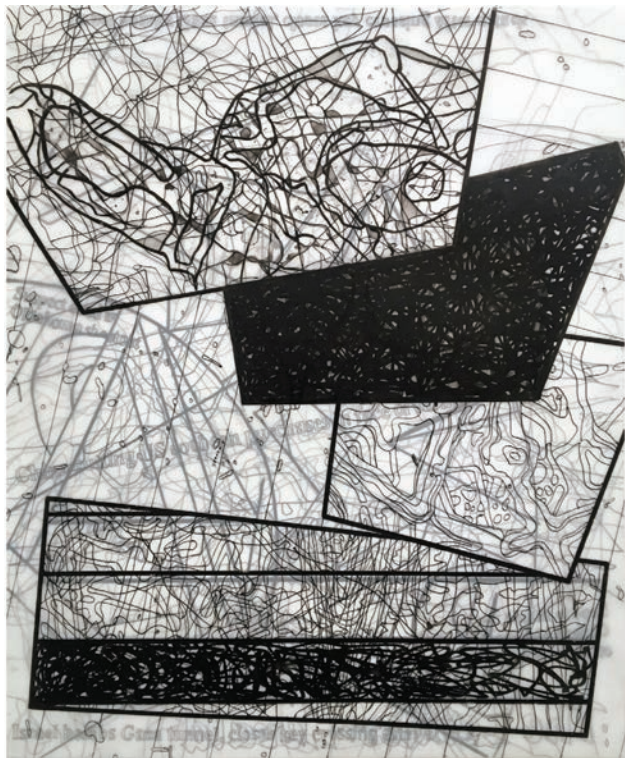
Artist-led tour of the exhibition

11:30-12:00pm

### **Thursday, December 6**

Artist-led tour of the exhibition

11:30-12:00pm



*Geometry, Redactions, and Already Forgotten News, 2018. Micron Marker on Layered Duralar, 14"x9".*

# INTERVIEW WITH STEVEN PEARSON CONDUCTED BY DR. IZABEL GALLIERA, OCTOBER 2018

**Dr. Izabel Galliera (IG):** The title of your current solo show at the Rice Gallery on McDaniel campus is “Multiple Temporalities, Layered Histories.” Can you tell me what inspired this title? Is it intended to be descriptive of the work on display and/or illustrative of your creative process?

**Steven Pearson (SP):** The title is inspired by my creative research that has investigated notions of time connecting past, present and future. This research has linked the ideas of science fiction writer, William Gibson, art historian Terry Smith, and curator Laura Hoptman. The title describes both the work and the process. First, shapes, lines and fragments of paintings that I have created over twenty-two years of my painting career make up my dense compositions. Secondly, the process itself involves tracing my various bodies of work, section by section, onto 16”x20” sheets of tracing paper and then transferring these ‘memory fragments’ using graphite paper to a new substrate, such as paper, panel, pillar, or

canvas. The layering process fractures the transferred information, further obscuring the original source, blending multiple pasts with my contemporary present.

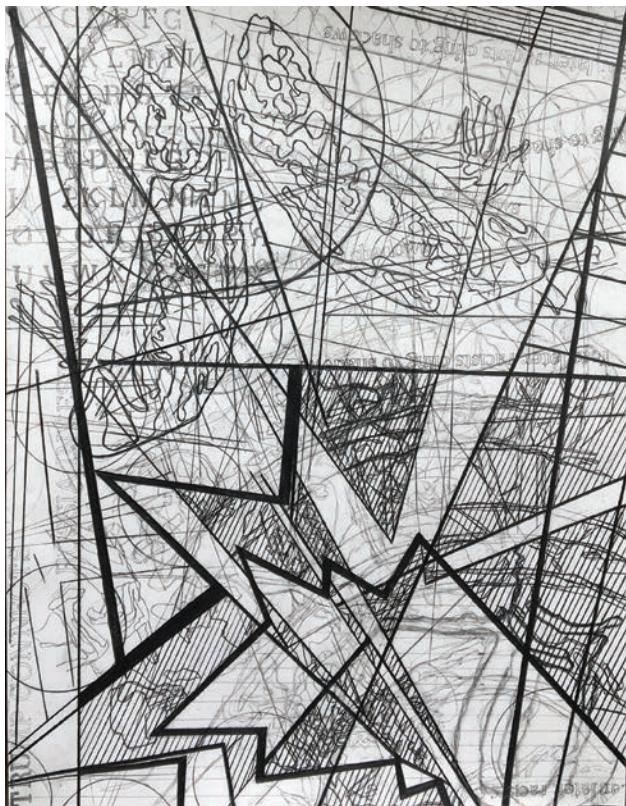
**IG:** As an abstract artist, what do you aim to communicate to the viewer through your work?

**SP:** My newest paintings and drawings represent my attempt to communicate the ways in which I experience my contemporary moment constructed from multiple temporalities excavated from my past. I combine fragments of my representational paintings created between 1995-2003, nonrepresentational renderings produced between 2003-2014, and current quotes from various newspaper articles. I also try to communicate the notion that abstraction itself can convey a sense of narrative through the use of the three physical properties of color (hue, value, and saturation), design principles and elements, mark making, and layering. Abstract artists such as Mark Bradford have been able to convey stories that combine both our past and present moments in ways that cause us to contemplate and consider the information they convey in a slower and more reflective manner. For example, in his 2006 painting *Scorched Earth*, Bradford uses torn posters, billboard paper, and paint that he applies, layers, and scrapes away to represent the stories and people long forgotten from a Tulsa, Oklahoma neighborhood obliterated in race



Steven Pearson, *Censored, Abstractions, and All I see Are Dancing Brooms*, 2015. Acrylic, Spray Paint, Graphite, and Paint Pen on Canvas Mounted on Panel, 24"x30".





*Bowling Pins, Symmetrical Fish, Russia Investigates, Trump Connects,*  
2018. Graphite on Paper.



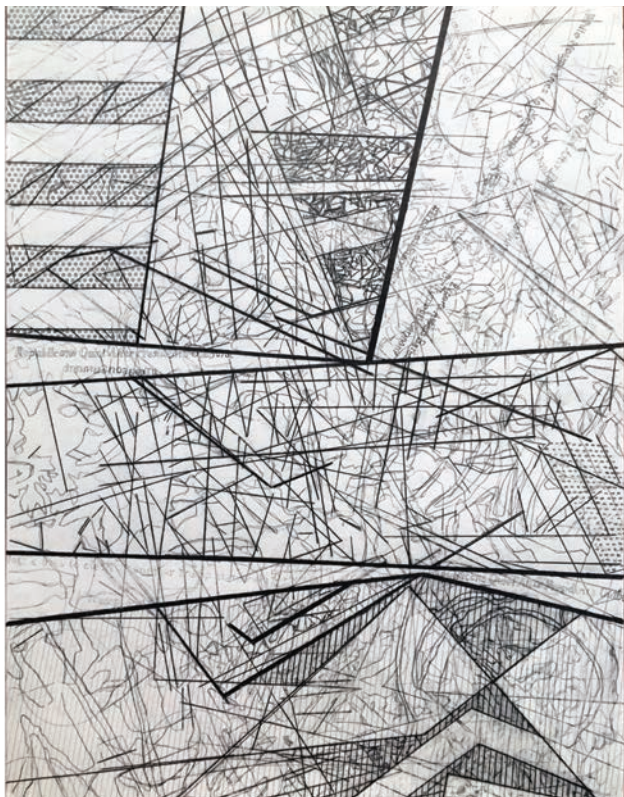
riots of 1921. The resulting composition is dramatic, dominated by an almost-void black shape surrounded by white, red, and blue. Within that black space is an aerial map of the forgotten neighborhood that has been scraped and scratched into the surface. The colors are key in the story. Black represents the people of that neighborhood in Tulsa, forgotten by time, as well as the neighborhood they once thrived in. The red band at the top of the composition reads as the fire that scorched the Greenwood, Tulsa neighborhood. *Scorched Earth* represents an example of a non-objective painting using materiality and formal qualities to represent a moment from a specific historical narrative. I try to convey narrative through layered compositions that are akin to a palimpsest, which is a sheet of parchment washed clean and reused, but over time the 'washed away' ink re-emerges blending the old with the new, causing us to read both texts simultaneously. Another way to think of it is like the mineral, mica, that overtime can develop into 'books'. Each layer contains its own history and combines with others in order to tell a story, or a narrative of its existence. I also rely on grid structures that are reminiscent of comic book pages used to direct the eye as well as control and contain the overloaded compositions.

**IG:** How does this new body of work both relate and depart from your previous work?

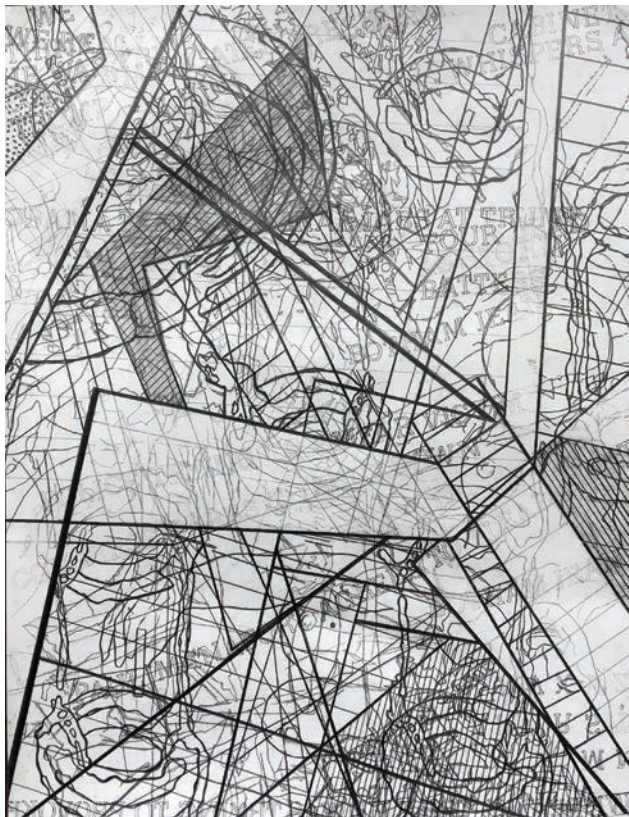
**SP:** I would like to answer this in a couple of ways. In one way it relates to all my previous work simply by the fact that I combine multiple moments of my varied paintings, from narrative figure paintings and still life paintings to abstract and non-objective paintings. More specifically, it relates to my more recent work by the nature of the process. For at least ten years, I have been combining and referencing what I see on a daily basis with traced moments from either the painting I would be currently working on – so self-referencing completed parts of the painting into the same painting - or recently completed paintings. In my newest body of work, I aim to display how I push this process of layering and quotation further. I am trying to allow each layer to remain visible to some extent. This is easier with the drawings, which have been my main focus for the past several months. I anticipate creating paintings in which I would work with transparent and translucent layers of paint in order to translate what I have learned and accomplished in the drawings.

**IG:** What are the ways in which, do you think your non-representational and richly layered drawings and painted sculptures comment on current social or political issues?

**SP:** For a number of years my work has commented on the fact that our ability to receive, assimilate a myriad of information, and access previous artistic styles on a constant basis has been enhanced through smart



*Republicans Quiet, Barb's By Trump, Lines Intersect, And Temporalities Merge*, 2018. Graphite on Paper.



*As Layers Fade, So Goes Botham Jean*, 2018. Graphite and Acrylic on Paper, 25"x30".

phones, and other Wi-Fi connected devices. Science fiction writer, William Gibson used the term “atemporal” to describe a world in which, courtesy of the Internet, all historical periods seem to exist at once. This has been both good and bad as our memory has both evolved and devolved simultaneously. I convey such processes two-dimensionally by allowing all layers of my ‘memory fragments’ to exist on the same level; there to access, but not to recall fully.

As for political issues, I am incorporating headlines and news articles directly in the painted pillars and drawings, which as I think back, it was something I also did as an undergraduate student in the early 1990’s. I include such snippets as a way to both tag the contemporary moment in which I am making the work, capturing key events that caught my attention at a particular time, and as a way to show the fleeting nature of our memories and news cycles. This is evident in the title of the graphite drawing, *As Layers Fade, So Goes Botham Jean*. The titles of the articles get fragmented and broken, making them harder to read and recall. The ways in which I obscure these news fragments mirror the ways in which we receive news that capture our attention and emotions but then quickly we let go of them so that we can turn our attention to the next story. We become saturated with a constant flow of news cycle. I recently showed this drawing at a national

conference in Alabama, and asked the attendees in the room if they remembered who Botham Jean was. No one did until I related the story. Botham Jean was the black man that was shot in his own apartment by an off duty white police woman when she mistakenly entered his apartment thinking it was her own, which was one floor below.

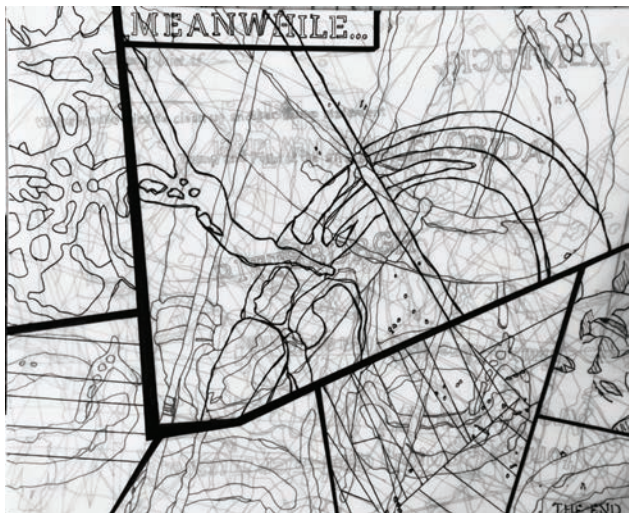
**IG:** Your graphite and pen and ink on duralar drawings combine both organic elements and geometric shapes that result in dense and controlled renderings, Could you explain the process of creating your layered compositions?

**SP:** I start by tracing, or having interns trace sections of my paintings that I completed from 1995 to present. I have been fortunate enough to have two student interns (Lisa Hohenschuh in 2014 and Jacob Zelonkofske in 2018) from MICA willing to work in my studio and help with this process. Tracing the paintings is tedious and time consuming, but necessary for my approach. The tracing paper is translucent, not transparent, and the information that the interns trace gets broken down based on what they are able or not able to see. Since I know the paintings, when I do the tracings myself, I work to be as accurate as I can, lifting the paper and locating each line, shape, mark and drip. Working with student interns helps remove that authorial control. Chance and



Intern Jacob Zelonkofske at work in Pearson's studio, June 2018





*Meanwhile... In Kentucky, Florida, and Pittsburgh, 2018. Micron Marker on Layered Duralar, 14"x9".*

breaking down the image become key in my creative process. I then lay out, stack and loosely tape the tracing paper to the drawing so that I can trace in a controlled manner the information onto graphite paper. Once all the layers are transferred I decipher and organize the collected information, usually by darkening any straight and geometric lines. Then, I sit and stare at the work for long periods of time seeing the space shift until I know what areas I want to accentuate. Once the structure is identified, I start working within and around each unit using line value and line weight as a means to push some information back, and pull other information forward. During this process I often add line work or shapes that weren't part of any of the tracings, but seem necessary to balance the composition, so I add yet another layer to the work.

**IG:** In the painted pillars, you said that you set out to explore “the liminal space between painting and sculpture [...] and the sculptural dimension of painting,” which represents an artistic approach shared by a number of artists, such as Elizabeth Murray. What does it mean for you to challenge the boundaries between painting and sculpture?

**SP:** Painting and drawing share some common spatial conventions important to sculptural works such as scale, relative position, overlapping forms, and through

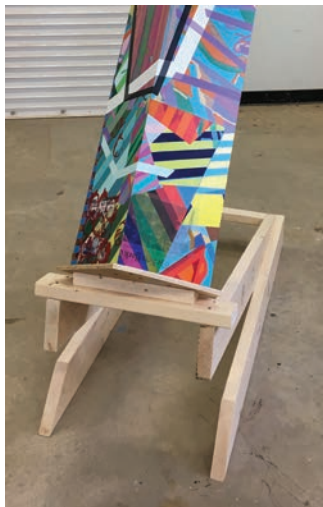
illusions enhanced by color and value contrasts can appear dimensional. But what I refer to is the additive and subtractive process of building a drawing or painting. There is a similarity to the sculptural process of adding and subtracting physical layers to achieve form. My approach is very physical and labor intensive. I add, I subtract, and I repeat until the form of the work as an object is complete. This process has led me to investigate the shape or physical nature of the works substrate, or underlying surface, in different ways over the years, from shaped, sewn, and layered works on paper and wood, to physical forms such as the pillars. It is something I plan to continue in future works as well.

**IG:** I found the design of the stands particularly intriguing. What motivated and inspired your design for the stands for the painted pillars? What do you aim to achieve?

**SP:** The stands originated as a practical solution after I saw a sign placed on top of one of the pillars at an exhibition asking viewers not to place food or drink on the art. I realized I needed to display them in a way that lifted them off the floor but also allowed the painted forms to more aggressively activate the space and engage the viewer, rather than sitting as static forms. The design themselves were inspired by the missile system I worked on when I served in the U.S. Navy from 1986-1992, and Star Wars battle vehicles such as the AT-AT and the AT-ST



*Pillar 1*, 2018. Acrylic, Spray Paint, Marker, Collage on Wood, 12"x12"x12"x-12"x4'.



*Pillar 3*, 2018. Acrylic, Spray Paint, Marker, Collage on Wood, 12"x12"x12"x-12"x6'.

(All Terrain Scout Transport, a.k.a the Chicken Walker).

**IG:** Abstract art emerged in the early 20th century with Malevich and Kandinsky, flourishing in the 1950s in the work of New York based abstract expressionists. Where do you situate your work in both the historical genealogy of abstraction as well as its manifestation in the contemporary context?

That is a great question. I have looked to modern abstract artists such as Malevich, Mondrian, Willem DeKooning, Larry Rivers, Grace Hartigan, Ad Reinhardt, and Donald Judd for inspiration, specifically at their composition and process. I have also looked to postmodern and contemporary artists such as Peter Haley, Sherrie Levine, Phillip Taaffe, and Rivane Neuenschwander for their use of appropriation. For example, Levine used the chessboard pattern found in Dadaist works. Taaffe used found abstraction seen in decorative patternings such as gilded gates and referenced modernist artists like Barnett Newman in the titles of his works, causing us to consider the works in an art historical context. Haley talked about appropriation as a negation of the idea of influence. He felt appropriation was a kind of leveling of implied hierarchies of influence. He was more interested in the idea of "hyperrealization," as conceptualized by Jean Baudrillard that meant the inability of consciousness to distinguish reality from its simulation. In a slightly

different approach, he understood “hyperrealization” to describe a certain kind of relationship that is formed when one artist looks at another work and then makes his or her own work. Appropriation is not a new phenomenon since artists have long absorbed multiple influences, or emulated prior art historical periods. So today, several abstract painters, including myself, have absorbed past influences in order to compose new and challenging works.

In our age of atemporality, artists have the ability to not only access past styles but mix and use them at will. Gibson thought of atemporality as a strategy of resistance, a way of opting out of the industrialization of novelty. Modernism was interested in moving forward at all costs, as evidenced by the rapid change of artistic movements in early to mid-twentieth century art, looking for the next original thing without allowing for ideas to ferment and grow. In our contemporary world, roaming around and absorbing the influences of diverse styles from multiple eras gives us the possibility of finding a more thoughtful path forward. My work is a result of roaming around, remixing and regurgitating past and present influences from art, popular culture, and political headlines to create new and challenging compositions.





*Follow the Dotted Lines, It's as Bad as She Says*, 2018. Graphite on Paper.



*Plush Toys, Ice-Cube Trays, Mannequins, and Veils*, 2015. Acrylic, Spray Paint on Canvas, 36"x36".



## ABOUT THE ARTIST



Steven Pearson is a painter and Professor of Studio Art and Chair of the Art and Art History Department at McDaniel College in Westminster, Maryland, where he has been teaching studio art courses since 2004. He also served as the director of the college's Esther Prangley Rice

Gallery from 2005-2017, an exhibition space for McDaniel students and other emerging contemporary artists from the Mid-Atlantic region and beyond.

Pearson was born in Johnstown, NY. Upon graduation from high school, he served honorably in the United States Navy. Pearson then received his bachelor of science in studio art from the College of Saint Rose in Albany, NY, and his master of fine arts in painting from the Leroy E. Hoffberger School of Painting at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, MD. During his training at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, Pearson's work focused primarily on narrative figuration. After graduation, he painted still lifes, investigating the

formal and conceptual nature of everyday objects. By appropriating formal compositional devices explored by modern and contemporary artists—such as Kazimir Malevich, Ad Reinhardt, Donald Judd, and Jules Olitski—Pearson constructed still lifes using commonplace objects, including cardboard boxes and paper lunch bags. While Pearson was a resident at the Vermont Studio Center in 2003, his work became increasingly abstract, while remaining committed to exploring the still life genre. During a residency at the Ragdale Foundation in Illinois in 2005, Pearson's work further evolved to become, essentially, nonobjective. Throughout the various shifts in Pearson's painting styles, order and structure provide the connecting thread in his development, echoing his early experiences in the Navy.

[www.srpearson.com](http://www.srpearson.com)

BROCHURE DESIGN BY JONATHAN NEPINI