



SOFTER

JEAN ALEXANDER FRATER

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STRIPE, FOLD, PLEAT: NOTES ON THE “SOFT” PAINTINGS OF JEAN ALEXANDER FRATER

By Claudine Isé, Freeark Gallery Director, Riverside Arts Center

In the late 1940s, Lucio Fontana (Argentine/Italian, 1899-1968) began slashing the surfaces of his canvases with a knife—a gesture that was simultaneously physical and metaphysical in nature, aimed at opening up the two-dimensional picture plane onto three-dimensional space. Fontana viewed his paintings not as surfaces for the enactment of pictorial illusion, but as multi-dimensional fields in which space—or rather, a “spatial concept” (*Concetto spaziale*)—is manifested through a seamless unity of color, shape, surface, support, and human perception. Fontana’s *Spazialismo*/Spatialist movement inspired numerous artists who came after him, like Agostino Bonalumi (Italian, 1935–2013), whose sheath-like “extroflexions” explored the plastic potential of painting’s structural supports, and Jef Verheyen (Belgian, 1932-1984), a painter who used an extremely wide bristle brush to efface any signs of brushwork from his luminously glazed color fields, so that they seemed to subtly levitate off the canvas.



Jean Alexander Frater
Green to Grey Fold, 2017
acrylic on canvas
34 x 32 x 2 in

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Jean Alexander Frater is interested in making full-bodied paintings that function as spatial and temporal events rather than illusionistic surfaces. But her process differs from those of her predecessors in a few telling ways. Compare, for example, the central element in Alexander Frater's painting *Green Fold Cut* to the slits in any of Fontana's numerous *Concetti spaziali*. Where Fontana would cut, Alexander Frater folds. Bonalumi's "extroflexions" and Fontana's slashed planes required their canvases to be as smooth and taut as army cots. Alexander Frater's works also need varying degrees of tension to hold their shape, as the smartly tailored painting *Green Stripes Event* makes clear, but her use of pleats and folds (formed by the artist's hands, not a steam iron) suggest a more responsive pliability than Fontana's sharply delineated cuts and Bonalumi's protruding pressure points do, along with a wry acknowledgement that intentional gestures only go so far: gravity and the unexpected will inevitably play roles too.

Jean Alexander Frater
Green Stripes Event, 2017
acrylic on canvas and support
78 x 40 x 14 in





Jean Alexander Frater
Black to Blue Top Curve, 2016
 acrylic on canvas, bent wooden dowel and support
 42 x 30 x 3 in

Alexander Frater's folds break the fictitious barrier between two and three dimensions by expanding the surface plane's volume.

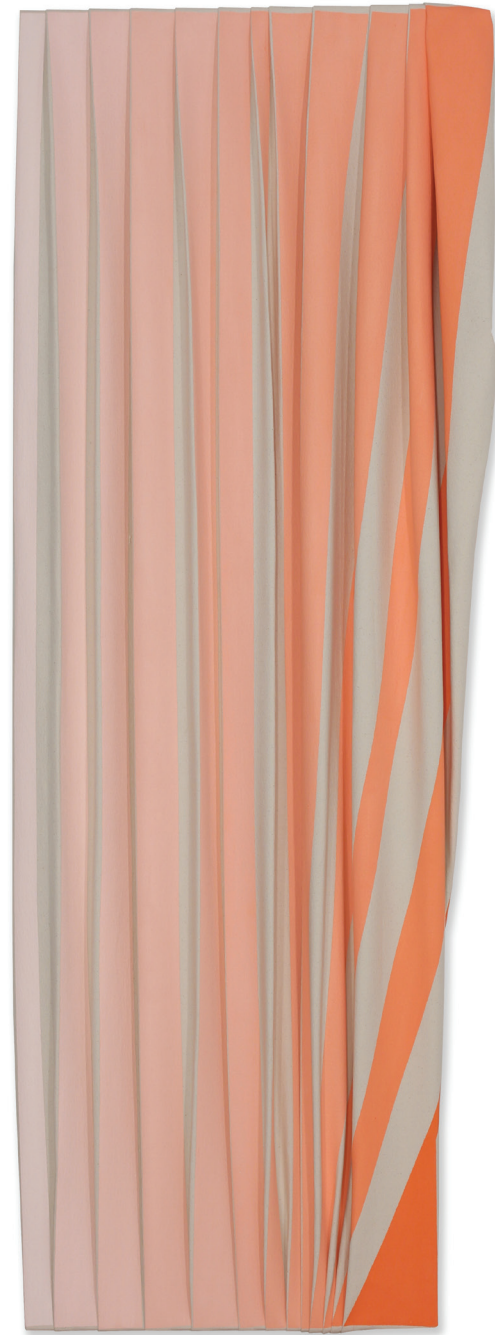
Rather than choosing to go "large" and colonize more visual space by increasing the outer dimensions of her works, Alexander Frater goes "soft", manipulating excess surface volume as both a sculptural and painterly material.

Jean Alexander Frater
Black to Blue Folds and Cuts, 2017
 acrylic on canvas
 16 x 28 x 4 in



Her folds disrupt the smoothness, regularity and rectilinearity of the picture plane, playfully transforming hard-edged stripes into ripples (as in *Pink to Orange Striped Folds* and *Brown to Purple Striped Folds*) and turning the geometrically bounded lavender, blue and green color field painting *Green to Blue Rippled Folds* into a slyly analog form of glitch art. Folds also allow Alexander Frater to draw lines in space (or in her case, to pinch them into existence) without any implements at all—indeed, without using any material other than surface itself.

Jean Alexander Frater
Green Fold Cut, 2016
acrylic on canvas and support
52 x 40 x 2 in



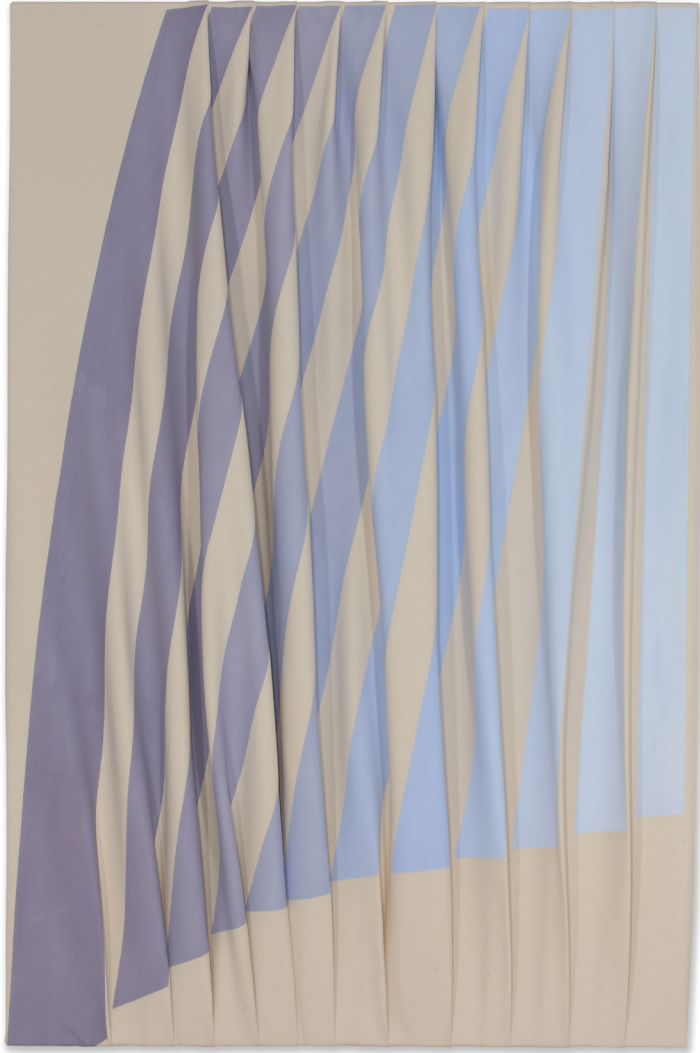
Jean Alexander Frater
Pink to Orange Striped Folds, 2016
acrylic on canvas
58 x 22 x 4 in

As spatial concepts Alexander Frater's paintings are compelling because, by being soft enough to fold in on themselves, they can exceed the limitations of any space they occupy. (Think of sweaters in a drawer).

This idea may in turn invite broader philosophical meditations on acts of folding, and folding in, as expansive and inclusive gestures that reveal spaces within, behind and beyond the canvas much as a cut does, but without the latter's implications of violence and separation. Alexander Frater's paintings may be "soft," but they're no less incisive because of it.



Jean Alexander Frater
Blue to Pink to Blue, 2017
acrylic on canvas
30 x 24 x 4 in



Jean Alexander Frater
Purple to Blue, 2016
 acrylic on canvas
 52 x 34 x 3 in



Jean Alexander Frater
Green to Blue Rippled Folds, 2016
 acrylic on canvas
 52 x 26 x 7 in



Jean Alexander Frater
Brown to Purple Striped Folds, 2017
 acrylic on canvas
 49 x 42 x 3 in



Jean Alexander Frater
Brown Curved Fold, 2017
 acrylic on canvas
 42 x 38 x 4 in

Catalogue design
Jim Allaire

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