



JEAN ALEXANDER FRATER: PAINTING BETWEEN THE MEANS

On the cover:

BLUE SQUARES, SOFT FOLDS

2015, acrylic on canvas, 27" x 21"

This catalog was produced on
the occasion of the exhibition:

JEAN ALEXANDER FRATER

PAINTING BETWEEN THE MEANS

October 3rd - November 14th 2015

Guest Spot @ The REINSTITUTE

1715 N. Calvert Street

Baltimore, MD 21202

www.guestspot.org

FORWARD

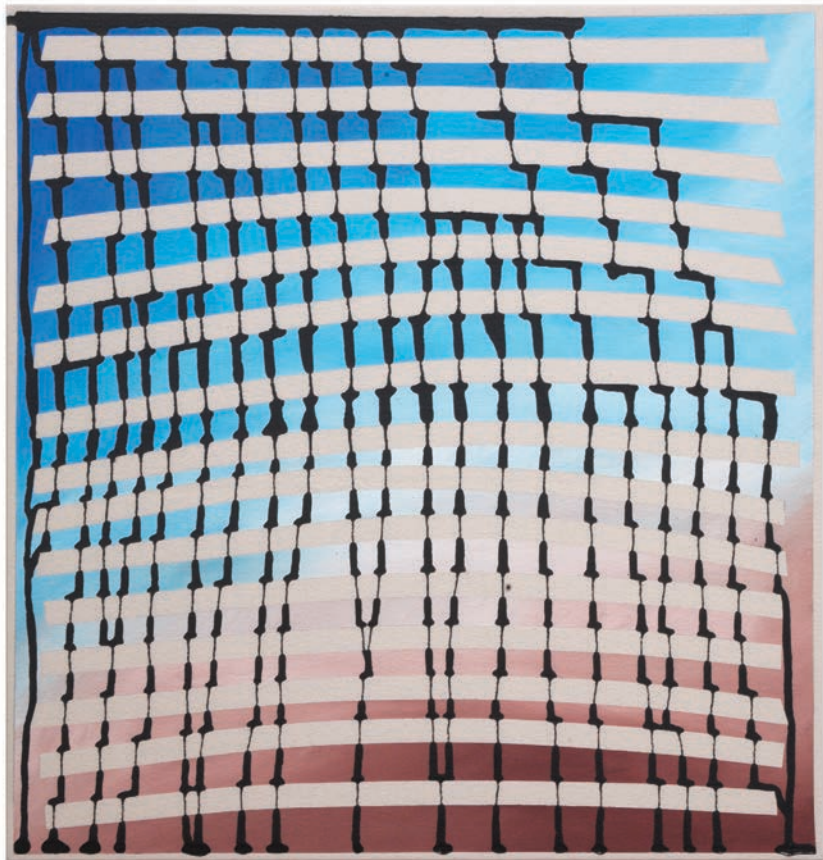
by Rod Malin,

Within the current contextual framework, it's difficult to discuss the relevance of painting. Our means to measure the world and the objects around us derive from a timeline that evades the comprehension of our technologies. While many art practices still align themselves with the act of seeing the world through painting, gravity has taken hold of the gaze. In a culture where we are wide-eyed to our screens, we have forgotten to blink, to look up, to act, and to rise to the occasion. To engage now is a benign political act, and can even be perceived as a spectacle. It's through this lens that Jean Alexander Frater's work presents the tension between surrender and resolution, between the means and the in-betweens. Following the construct and path of gravity is the drip. In this way, the beauty of painting exists between the balance of submission and disobedience.



ORANGE PARALLELOGRAMS

2014, acrylic on canvas, 23" x 31"



BLUE TO BROWN BENT

2015, acrylic on canvas, 25" x 24"

GRAVITAS

Steven L. Bridges, Assistant Curator,

Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum at Michigan State University.

A thin black line develops in its wake. The beaded head of viscous paint is pulled forward, propelled by its own weight and the invisible hand of gravity. But its path is not random. Strangely, patterns begin to emerge: latticework, moiré, flood plains. An internal logic emerges from the application of chance operations. A sense of gravitas gently impresses itself upon my mind. How does a painting enter the world, come undone, only to become again?

Over the past several years, Chicago-based artist Jean Alexander Frater has embarked on an investigation of painting that seeks to understand the nature of the medium and its physical properties. As part of this, the artist also grapples with the relationship of painting to the world in which it exists. The process of painting is not conducted in a vacuum, outside of the laws of physics and everyday realities. The hand of the artist is guided by such forces as much as by the mind or the muscles in the hand and body. I am reminded of all of this, looking at her work; a truth clearly evident that is yet oft overlooked. And here, the weight returns: the body, the canvas, the paint.

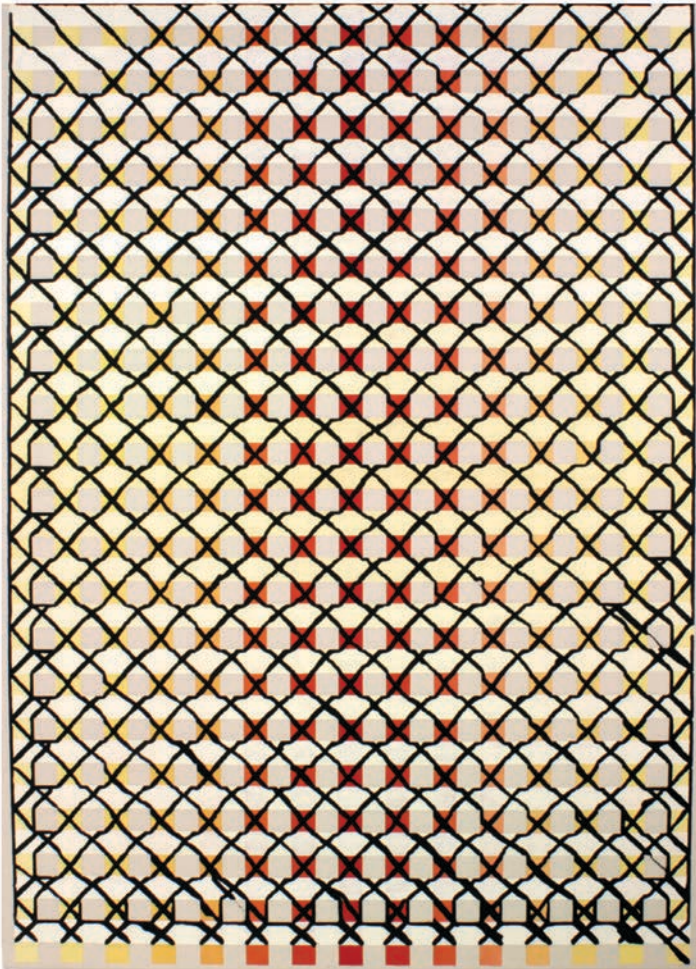
The term *gravitas* has many layers of meaning. Its contemporary colloquial use conjures a sense of dignity or solemnity. But its etymological roots point to other meanings: weight, heaviness; or figuratively, a sense of presence, influence. Of course, then there is its relationship to gravity, the scientific term it gave birth to after Newton's discovery—or should I say, naming. The multivalent nature of the term, then, lends itself well to describing the exhibition of Frater's work at The Guest Spot @ The Reinstitute, in Baltimore. The eleven works on display reveal her ongoing experimentation with the medium, which—taken altogether—express the many shapes and colors of the term *gravitas*.



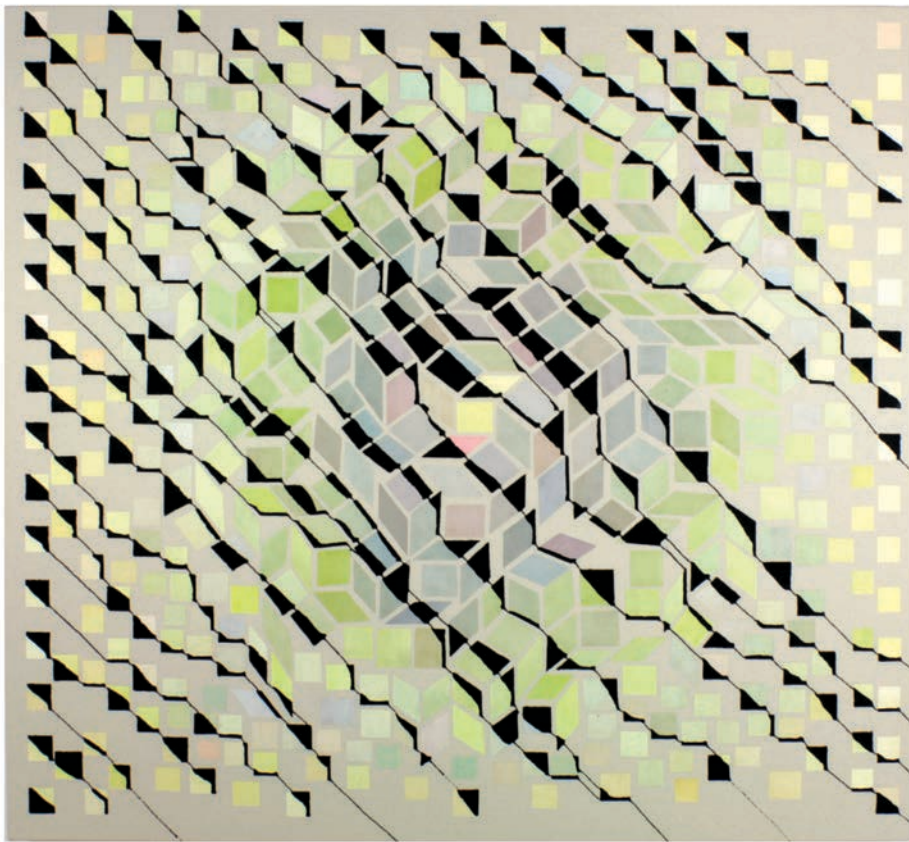
GRADIENT STRIPES FOLD
2015, acrylic on canvas, 27" x 11"

*YELLOW TO
RED GRID*

2014, acrylic on
canvas, 42" x 30"



In *Yellow to Red Grid* (2014), Frater begins by taping out a modernistic grid on the canvas, which she then fills in, creating a chromatic shift from yellow to red and back again as one scans across the picture plane. References to Josef Albers or the work of Agnes Martin emerge, but the process does not end there. The optical feat created by the shifting gradient of colors becomes the underpainting for the next step in her process. Positioning the painting at different angles in relationship to the ground, the artist then adds drops of black paint at regular intervals, allowing the paint to determine its own path as it careens down the surface. Surprisingly, the paths neatly organize themselves, as the black paint avoids crossing the surface of the untreated canvas, instead revealing its preference for the painted grid. The patterns that form, then, appear to reverse the order of the painting: the unpainted canvas emerges and floats above the latticework of black lines, seemingly unhinged from the surface of the canvas, the earlier process transformed by the latter.



YELLOWISH PARALLELOGRAMS

2015, acrylic on canvas, 35" x 32"

This same effect is carried out in different ways and depends on the shapes and organization of the painted forms, which do not always adhere to the grid. *Yellowish Parallelograms* (2015) becomes a cascading watershed of black lines that swim amongst the multicolored shapes. At times the paint pools, neatly, while at other times a sense of entropy lingers. Within this system developed by Frater, there is a great amount of play and different relationships emerge. But the overall constant remains true to form: the hand of gravity is steady and sure; a trustworthy and consistent collaborator.



BLUE SQUARES, SOFT FOLDS

2015, acrylic on canvas, 27" x 21"

More recent works reveal a different type of investigation—a different engagement with the medium—though one that approaches many of the same issues. In *Blue Squares, Soft Folds* (2015), the artist repeats the initial step, taping out a grid and creating subtle gradient shifts across the surface of the canvas—in this case, exploring different hues of blue. But rather than apply drops of black paint, Frater physically takes on the painting, wrestling with its form, testing the tenacity of both the raw canvas and painted surfaces alike. One can't help imagining how the painting fights back... flexible in certain ways, resistant in others. And from this battle of wills another truth emerges: the painting will only allow folds to emerge and remain where the paint is not. The material logic of the painting comes to bear on the process of its own making, a negotiation that again points to certain immutable laws of nature.

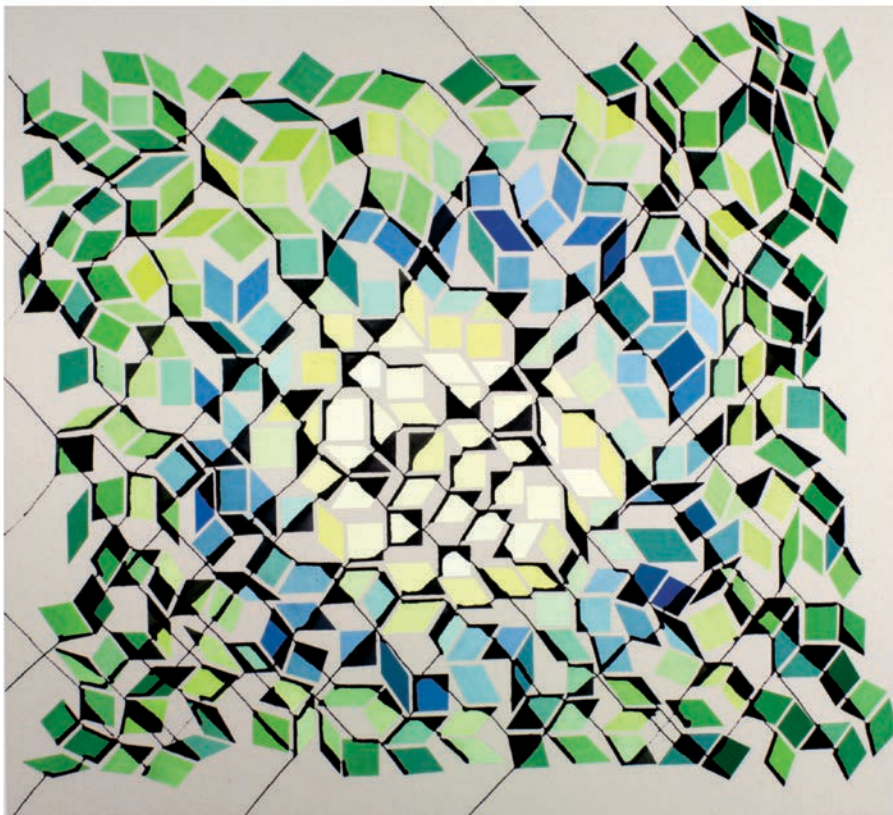


SPIRAL SQUARED TO GROUND

2015, acrylic on canvas, 60" x 54"

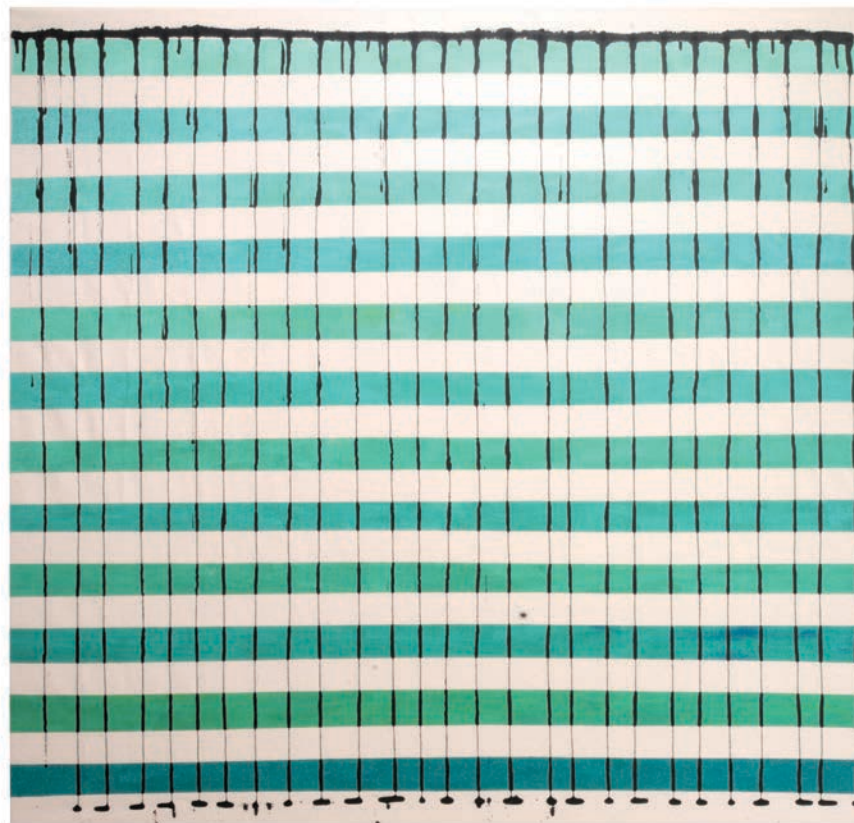
In *Spiral squared to ground* (2015), we encounter the aftermath of yet another struggle. Here, the painting comes off the wall, and appears in a partial state of unravel. Like other works in the show, the materials that combine to create the painting are structural, in this case, shifting the work more towards sculpture. The canvas leftover after having been stretched across the chest of the frame now gathers below the work, propping it up on one side—and provides a surprising sense of equilibrium. In a more literal way, weight is visually translated here. Such works demand that you engage with them as objects; the physical body of the painting asserts itself in meaningful ways.

But what does this all mean in terms of the role of the artist? How do these experiments position Frater in relationship to the work she produces? She is both creator and collaborator. At times she guides the process with determination and ultimate control; at others, responsibility is handed over to the strong-minded will of the materials she employs. Within the context of the exhibition, the different strategies at play reinforce each other while also expanding their quiet but concerted conversation. The more sculptural paintings remind us that the works hanging on the wall are objects, too. Moving from piece to piece, the approach is considered carefully; each work has a particular presence, which results from its unique internal system. And as this show testifies, *Painting Between the Means* is serious work.



GREEN TO YELLOW PARALLELOGRAMS

2015, acrylic on canvas, 35" x 32"



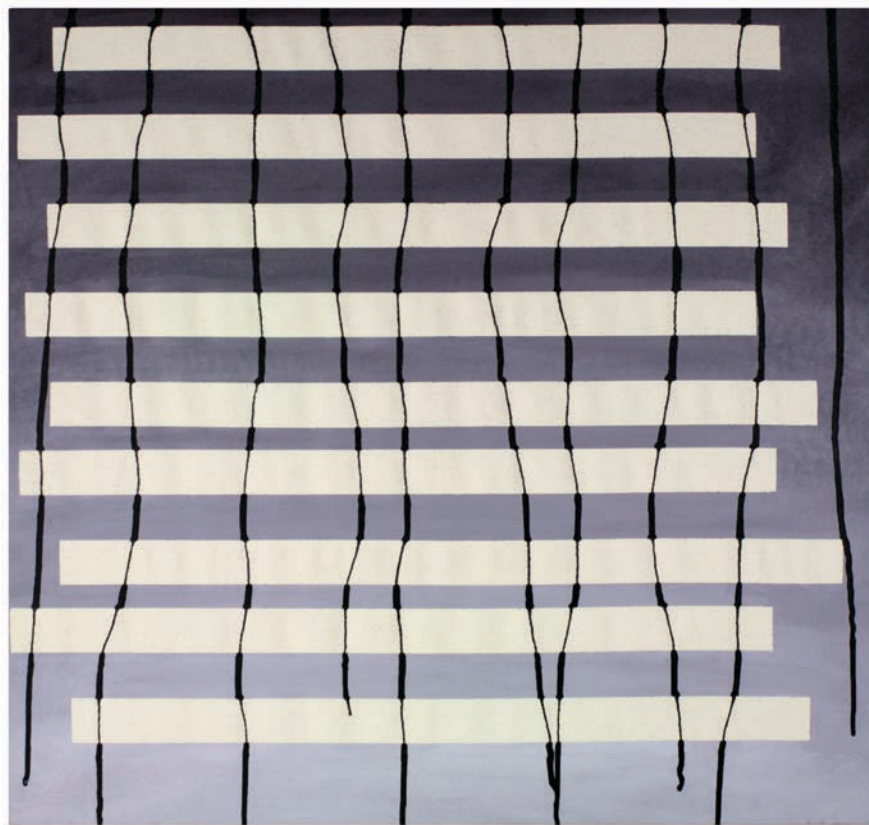
GREEN STRIPES

2014, acrylic on canvas, 48" x 50"



BLACK HOLE

2014, acrylic on canvas, 18" x 14"



PURPLISH BACKGROUND

2014, acrylic on canvas, 30" x 28"

catalog design
Jim Allaire

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