

## REVIEW: *Connecticut*

### HER CROWD: NEW ART BY WOMEN FROM OUR NEIGHBORS' PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

Bruce Museum • Greenwich, CT • [brucemuseum.org](http://brucemuseum.org) • Through December 31, 2017

**Z**eitgeist, it seems, has descended on the art world this season.

Museums and galleries are offering a bonanza of female artist exhibitions, challenging our conventional art historical narratives. A stand out in the mix is *Her Crowd: New Art by Women from Our Neighbors' Private Collections*, an exhibition of contemporary women artists culled from nearby Fairfield and Westchester County private collections including the Tananbaum, Kaufman and Brant collections.

Every three or four years the Bruce showcases works from important local collections, of which there are numerous in the Greenwich area. As they prepared for this year's exhibit, curator Kenneth Silver and resident fellow Mia Laufer began to notice a trend not seen before



Hilary Harkness, *Blue Nude*, 2012–14, oil on linen panel, 7½ x 10¾". Collection of Rick and Monica Segal. © Hilary Harkness. Courtesy: Mary Boone Gallery, New York.

in contemporary collecting: the significant presence of women artists. This notion would have been unheard of a couple of decades ago. Silver selected works for the show instinctually, reflecting his own personal taste and decided to present an array of established and emerging talent.

What is striking is the number of celebrated artists such as Kiki Smith, Jenny Saville, Yayoi Kusama, Tara Donovan, Marilyn Minter and others, exhibited in the presence of equally compelling works by less familiar names.

These prestigious art collectors are not purely relying on the blue-chip gallery roster to make their acquiring decisions. They are making

unorthodox choices, allowing for new comers to enter the scene. As these lesser-known women artists such as Malia Jensen and Alessandra Expósito become more mainstream, their work can begin to shift the disparity of the male-to-female artist ratio that has governed the art world for centuries. Laufer's catalogue essay brilliantly expands on this concept, a point initially raised almost half a century ago by Linda Nochlin's famous article *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?*

A host of complex themes (feminism, motherhood, sexuality, food and beauty) are covered in this ambitious show, compellingly presented in diverse mediums and approaches: figurative and abstract paintings, minimalist, video, two and three-dimensional forms and found objects. The exhibition is cleverly installed so that motifs and connections assert themselves insightfully. Oversized works juxtaposed with smaller, intimately scaled pieces make for an engaging viewing.

—Rachael Palacios

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### STEPHEN WESTFALL IN PERSPECTIVE: A 15-YEAR SURVEY

Cooper & Smith Gallery • Essex, CT • [cooperandsmithgallery.com](http://cooperandsmithgallery.com) • Through January 15, 2017

**S**tephen Westfall is recognized as a geometric abstractionist. He is also an artist who reaches beyond boundaries, consistently testing the possibilities. By imbuing his compositions with intricacies not typically associated with that genre, this well-respected artist offers a sophisticated aesthetic very much his own. This retrospective of 12 paintings is a dazzling case in point.

Westfall's rich colors, clean lines, simple shapes, rhythmic patterns, all radiate with a light-filled energy and inherent simplicity. And in the Cooper & Smith Gallery, a bright, high-ceilinged space, the impact is immediate and compelling.

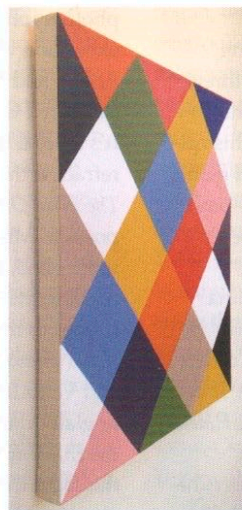
Nothing, however, is as simple as it appears. In painting after painting, Westfall not only engages the viewer in the pure pleasure of seeing, he also engages on a more complex level—using the interplay among the elements in his paintings as a mode for thought and reflection.

From the pared-down simplicity of his earliest

work, *Thunder Basin* (2002), that relies on flattened color and pattern to activate its surface, to more complicated recent images like *Too Much Love* (2008) and *Polyphony* (2016) that focus on pictorial ambiguity, Westfall asks questions and solves problems.

In *Too Much Love*, for example, Westfall considers aspects of spatial illusion. The painting is divided into four primary quadrants in which a system of colored linear diagonal bands point toward the center of each quadrant. By placing an overlay of concentric linear squares upon that surface, Westfall disrupts the order, destabilizing one's perception and challenging the eye to determine the push and pull of shifting space.

In *Polyphony*, his most recent work in the show, Westfall further extends the ambiguity



Stephen Westfall, *Polyphony*, 2016, oil and alkyd, 26 x 24". Courtesy of Lennon, Weinberg, Inc., of New York.

of the dynamics. A square painting made up of a skewed diagonal grid of variously colored squares edged by triangles, becomes an eye-popping composition that fluctuates within itself. As stable as the composition is, one soon becomes aware of the evolving relationships within its infrastructure, as small squares become components of larger squares; large squares become components of rectangles, and on and on.

After many years of exploring his terrain, Westfall's work continues to feel fresh and assertive, clearly in the hands of a disciplined veteran who enjoys mining the ongoing challenges of his territory.

—Judy Birke