Contemporary Abstraction – Chapter 9

“Indeed, abstraction is rarely as free of the world or of content as some of its proponents assert, or as purely decorative as its enemies say.” --Mark Rosenthal

Introduction to Abstraction

All paintings contain abstract elements. Even a painting that carefully depicts recognizable subject matter (a representational painting) is abstract in the sense that what we see when looking at the painting is not the actual subject matter but its rendering in colors and shapes of paint. Nevertheless, paintings that are abstract only in this limited sense are not ones we identify by the term abstract painting. Some paintings are more abstract than others, and this chapter concerns those that are more rather than less abstract.

The paintings we call abstract paintings may be abstract in many ways. Here we cite four:

First, a painting which depicts a recognizable subject is abstract to the degree that the painter emphasizes the general formal qualities of the subject and eliminates minor or individual details. Considered in this way, many paintings share significant qualities of both representation and abstraction, and are not easily labeled abstract or not. In earlier chapters, we looked at examples of paintings that combine representation with a considerable emphasis on abstraction such as Figure 1.2 by Susan Rothenberg and Plate 17 by Mario Martinez.

Figure 1.2
Susun Rothenberg,
Butterfly

Plate 17
Mario Martinez,
Serpent
Landscape II

Figure 9.1
Arthur Dove, Fields of Grain as Seen from Train
In similar fashion, the pioneer US modernist Arthur Dove experimented with an abstraction derived from natural forms in paintings such as *Fields of Grain as Seen from Train* (Figure 9.1). To cite a recent example, Christopher Brown’s *Slip Stream—Stream of Consciousness* (figure 9.2) incorporates recognizable subject matter: the round shapes over striped lines represent the heads of bathers in a body of water. But Brown has eliminated features such as eyes and mouths, reducing the heads to dark silhouettes. Brown’s painting is both abstract and representational. Its abstractness stems from its significant reduction of mimetic detail in favor of a greater emphasis on formal qualities.

In a second manner, abstract paintings are those that are composed of abstract forms which do not derive at all from recognizable subjects. A painting of green squares and blue circles may be just that: a painting of green squares and blue circles. Art historians and artists call this form of abstract painting *nonobjective or nonrepresentational* painting. Some refer to this as “pure” abstraction. Piet Mondrian’s *Lozenge Composition in Red, Gray, Blue, Yellow and Black* (Figure 9.3) is an example of nonobjective painting. The image does not have any recognizable subject matter outside of the painting itself; its subject matter is the colored lozenge shapes and dark lines.

A third manner in which paintings may be abstract involves giving visual form to subject matter that is not inherently visual. Examples include paintings in which the artist intends to visually express emotions, or musical sounds, or intellectual concepts. Abstractions may function as a mapping or diagramming of various processes, such as the cognitive thought process of science. In *Yell* (figure 9.4—[check this link](#) to see other work by Herbert) by Pinkney Herbert, we see an abstraction or visual analogue for sound.
A fourth manner occurs when painters depict “images” which have established meanings as abstract signs and symbols, such as depicting numbers, words, emblems or logos. The circle, triangle, and square used by Pousette-Dart in his triptych, *Time Is the Minds of Space, Space is the Body of Time* (Figure 9.5--this specific image is unavailable, but [check this link](#) to see other work by Pousette-Dart), are geometric symbols that have cosmic significance in many world religions. The reverse painting on glass from the Ottoman Empire illustrated in Figure 9.6 (image not available--see image to the right for an example of Arabic calligraphy in art) shows swirling interlaced calligraphy that spells out holy names of Islam.

**A Short History of Abstraction In Art**

Although many people in the United States associate abstraction with modern art of the Western world, the process of visual abstraction has operated in art since prehistoric times. Among the most recognizable examples of abstraction in early art are the pyramids of ancient Egypt. Even older examples with emphatically abstract qualities are the so-called “Venus” figures—small, carved rock sculptures dating from about 25,000 years ago and found in present-day Austria—with their featureless faces, enlarged bellies, and missing feet and hands.

Numerous cultures around the globe have exhibited a long, sustained history of exploring abstraction in craft objects, artistic images, and architectural decoration. Examples include the symbolic patterns used by many Native American groups to adorn weapons, clothing, blankets, and ritual objects; the geometric, floral, and calligraphic patterns found throughout Islamic art and architecture; the angular planes and expressive distortions of African figurative sculpture; and the shallow treatment of space, highly ordered compositions and stylized forms in Japanese prints. Avant-garde artists in Europe at the turn of the twentieth century were increasingly aware of alternatives to realism visible in art from numerous other cultures, and in many cases modeled their own experiments with abstraction on these precedents.

In Europe and the United States, it was not until the early twentieth century that some painters went so far into abstraction that they dispensed entirely with any recognizable subject matter, making the kind of artworks we label *nonobjective*. In the ninety years since Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky created what is unusually considered the first nonobjective easel painting, numerous styles, movements, and individual explorations have proliferated in abstract painting. In the United States, the first internationally recognized movement involving abstraction arose in New York in the 1940s and 1950s, and most frequently is known by the name *Abstract Expressionism*. However, individual painters in

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9.7  Yayoi Kusama, *Airmail Stickers*
the United States including Dove (figure 9.1), made early forays into abstraction at virtually
the same time as the first European abstractionists. Moreover, abstraction has long been
significant in genres outside the “high” arts of painting and sculpture, including quilting,
weaving, and other “craft” mediums. Native Americans, as mentioned above, have ancient
traditions of abstraction in art and craft.

The vitality of the New York art scene following World War II is attributed in part to a surge
of American-born artists (including Jackson Pollock) who moved there from through the
nation, as well as the influx of many European artists (including Mondrian) who emigrated
to the United States during the period of political turmoil and war in Europe. Gifted
painters arrived from other parts of the world as well, adding artistic ideas from their
societies to the mixture. Yayoi Kusama, for example, arrived in New York from Japan in
1958 at age twenty-nine, with her interest in making artworks with obsessive, all-over
patterns already well established in her practice (Figure 9.7). The rapid development of
abstract painting was further powered by ideas from other sources—such as the affinity
between abstraction and American jazz that influenced a number of artists at mid-twentieth
century.

At the risk of overgeneralizing, we observe (as have many others) that many abstract
paintings made by artists associated with Modernism fall into two broad categories. The
first type is more deliberate and measured, often hard-edged and neatly finished, and
tends to extrapolate forms and patterns from geometry or mathematics. This type of
abstract painting often relies on the concept of a grid to provide a clear underlying
compositional structure. The nonobjective paintings of Mondrian (Figure 9.3) are
archetypal examples of this type of “geometric” abstraction. The geometric direction is not
always perfectly ordered. Kusama’s rows of collaged airmail stickers in Figure 9.7 are
enlivened and given a hand-crafted, irrational quality by the way the artist overlapped an
glued them in slightly irregular, rippling rows.

These are images of more recent work by
Kusama.
An alternative broad approach to abstraction is more spontaneous and intuitive, and is characterized by looser, more gestural applications of paint. This overall approach, which art historians often label *organic abstraction*, involves the personal expression of the artist’s sensibility and exploration of visual form. (Although the term “organic” implies that the forms involved are derived from natural forms, this is not necessarily the case.) In this approach to abstraction, colors are often intense, edges tend to be blurred, surfaces can be highly textured, and the overall composition has a fluid, open-ended quality. In plate 26 Fabian Marcaccio, from Argentina, provides us with a contemporary example of applying paint in a gestural manner.

Because of the spontaneity involved, in creating this kind of gestural abstraction, many views consider the results to be highly expressive, a “free” flowing from the individual artist’s inner being. The paintings of the Abstract Expressionists belong in this camp. We should note that in some cases the apparent spontaneity may belie detailed planning and careful execution.

**Contrast**

As a key to understanding how abstract paintings are often created on a formal level, we introduce the concept of contrast. In painting, *contrast* is a relationship of opposing qualities. For example, a painting consisting simply of circles and triangles of many different sizes and colors would be a contrast of shapes and hues. To make a contrast more compelling an artist often selects one quality for emphasis, while the contrasting quality plays the role of providing variation, relief, or drama—think of a painting of dozens of green circles and one red triangle.

Although contrast can involve subject matter (such as a painting of one smiling face among a crowd of frowning expressions), most often contrast involves formal qualities, the use of materials, and/or techniques. Developing contrasts is a strategy that is integral to the organization of most abstract paintings’ compositions. Why? Because contrast is key to the development of a dynamic relationship between parts and and the whole. Contrast keeps the viewer’s eye moving.

While the concept of contrast may, at first glance, appear to work against compositional unity, this is not necessarily the case. In fact, a rule of thumb subscribed to by many artists is that an artwork is not complete unless a contrast is asserted and then brought to a unified resolution. Much as the concept of asymmetry continues to demand balance, the
concept of contrast ultimately must be contained within an overall equilibrium of competing forces.

In many paintings, contrasting elements occur on multiple levels, often serving as a recurring motif. In preceding chapters we have considered important contrasts: Chapter 6 explored the contrast of the articulation of the picture plane (flatness) with the articulation of space (depth); Chapter 7 explored the contrast of light and dark as a strategy for defining forms and establishing expressive meaning. In this chapter, we introduce a more systematic way to think about the articulation of formal contrast, keying our discussion to the development of abstract imagery.

The Articulation of Formal Contrast
While contrast is discussed most frequently in terms of a dichotomy (two qualities that seem to be at opposite ends of a scale from each other), contrast can just as certainly involve qualities that range fluidly along a spectrum. In exploring the qualities listed below, you should think of each as constituting relative directions on a continuum, not as fixed polar opposites.

At a basic level, visual elements can be related in contrasting ways, such as:

\textit{a contrast of colors—}\n\hspace{1em}chromatic / achromatic\n\hspace{1em}saturated colors / neutral colors\n\hspace{1em}pairs of complementary colors\n\hspace{1em}dark / light\n\hspace{1em}warm / cool\n\hspace{1em}transparent / opaque

\textit{a contrast of shapes, planes and volumes—}\n\hspace{1em}geometric / organic\n\hspace{1em}rounded / angular\n\hspace{1em}flat / curved\n\hspace{1em}large / small\n\hspace{1em}many / few\n\hspace{1em}foreshortened / not foreshortened

\textit{a contrast of texture and surface treatment—}\n\hspace{1em}rough / smooth\n\hspace{1em}thick / thin\n\hspace{1em}glossy / matte

\textit{a contrast of linear qualities—}\n\hspace{1em}straight / rounded\n\hspace{1em}thick / thin\n\hspace{1em}continuous / broken (implied)

At the level of compositional organization (design strategies), contrast may involve such possibilities as:

\textit{a contrast of spatial dimensions—}\n\hspace{1em}flatness / depth\n\hspace{1em}near / far
**compositional climax** (Here the contrast involves the complexity of elements coalescing in one area—the compositional climax—relative to the reduced complexity in all other areas of the composition.)

**movement / stasis** (Implications of dynamic movement contrast with areas of rest in a composition)

**structural contrast** (This can involve any contrast of the major compositional structure, such as vertical/horizontal.)

A contrast can involve multiple differences: for example, in Brown’s *Slip Stream—Stream of Consciousness* (Figure 9.2), the bathers’ heads stand in contrast to the surface of the water (a dark/light contrast) and in contrast to the ripples on the water (A contrast of round shapes and lines). Contrast is established by the relative quantity and quality of juxtapositions: for example, in Leslie Wayne’s *Ruckus* (Figure 9.8), the puckered ribbons of paint seem all the more textured and three-dimensional because they are presented, within the format of the artwork, in contrast to other areas that are relatively flat and smooth. A contrast can involve slight variations: in Plat 28 (see pg. 15 of this document), by Sabina Ott, we see a subtle contrast of red colors—some of which are dark and saturated; others are less saturated pale pinks.

**Topics of Current Abstraction**

Where once abstraction was a startling innovation in painting in the West, today it has nearly a century of history, and thousands of artists have painted abstract paintings. Much of the language of abstraction in painting has become a convention, making it difficult for an artist today to engage in abstraction with the same almost innocent, pioneering spirit that linked together many of the first generation of abstractionists in Europe or the Abstract Expressionists in this country. Many of the strategies that make a painting more rather than less abstract have remained relatively stable over the past ninety years, although today’s abstractionists often use these strategies in a coded manner. That is, they apply to abstraction the kind of *semiotic* analysis discussed in Chapter 8.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will explore some of the issues that are at the forefront of abstract painting today in the United States, as artists use (and attempt to modify) the historical language of abstraction in order to address current concerns. Along the way, we will offer painting exercises to give you practice in making your own abstract paintings and investing them with meaning.

We introduce four fertile topics that artists are presently exploring in abstract painting. Although all are significant topics, this is not an exhaustive listing. Other topics we do not discuss—such as figurative abstraction—are equally significant. First, we discuss the topic of nonobjective painting, recognizing that some painters are continuing to make paintings which do not have their basis in mimesis or even a generalized representation of reality. We consider some of the purposes motivating today’s nonobjective painters. The remaining three topics concern various meanings of paintings that dissolve boundaries between abstraction and representation. In contrast to the strict formalism that dominated art critical discourse during later Modernism, today the gap separating abstraction and representation seems to have narrowed if not closed entirely. (See Chapter 8, pg. 173ff, for a review of the issues involved in the concept of formalism.) Indeed, many artists today don’t recognize or don’t care to debate, a separation between abstraction and
representation. Contemporary abstractionists—and those who think and comment about their work—reemphasize the link forged by the pioneer abstractionists between the canvas and ideas from other realms. Concurrent with the reestablishment of a link between art and life, there is a corresponding de-emphasis on limiting discussion of content to the formal strategies that are in play.

**Topic #1: Nonobjective Painting**

Some artists today continue to make nonobjective paintings, with a belief that there are vital formal issues that remain to be explored. These artists may be interested in creating special optical impressions, or experimenting with effects of texture or shape, or incorporating patterns derived from mathematical work in fractal geometry or digital images generated on a computer.

On the other hand, a nonobjective painting could have content that alludes beyond the painting’s borders. In the case of a painting by Sean Scully (Figure 9.10 – picture is unavailable but the picture below is a Scully painting that is similar in character.), “formal traits are endowed with the capacity for becoming metaphors about the world.” Scully emphasizes the use of geometric elements: rectangular shapes and stripes arranged in parallel designs. But his paintings are not hard-edged geometric abstractions. The artist himself would point to the “blurred” edges of his bands of color as a formal trait that endows his work with humanistic cognitive meaning. In considering a similar quality of indeterminacy about where a border begins or ends in the work of other artists, Scully contends, “there is a point where the edge seems to tremble: at a point of contact one senses the tragedy of life can be felt along that edge.”

*Sean Scully, Bigland*
Many recent nonobjective paintings feature the exploration of new or nontraditional media and supports, unusual painting techniques, and an emphasis on the materiality of the paint itself. This general strategy is consistent with a long-standing emphasis by many abstractionists on the abstract painting as an object unto itself, as well as its status as an object that takes its place alongside other objects in the world. In creating *Rukus* (Figure 9.8, figure unavailable, the painting above is similar in character), for example, Wayne employed a technique of scoring and partially peeling back the thick outer layer of oil paint to expose the underlying ground. The materiality of the paint as paint, rather than as the means for the creation of an illusion, is graphically evident.

We complete this discussion with a look at three artists whose work explores qualities of both painting and sculpture. Soon Bong Lee’s mixed media painting *A Man and a Mouse* (Figure 9.11 – picture unavailable) incorporates intimate-sized objects that have been mounted in cubbyholes cut into its hard, outer surface. While the objects selected, such as a bent tin can and a small sculpted head, symbolize past events to the artist, their arrangement in a distinct pattern emphasizes the abstract nature of the composition. In Plate 26, Marcaccio has applied paint to an “expanded form” of his own design, which hangs off the stretcher and off the wall.

Jessica Stockholder’s *Catcher’s Hollow* (Plate 27) is a creation that blurs the boundaries between painting and sculpture. Writing about her art, curator Adrian Serle explained that her work is built out of surfaces, cavities, holes,
walls, and the floor. Isn’t this like painting, isn’t this what painting does….?...Jessica Stockholder brings a lot of things into the gallery and builds something we can take away with us, something like the memory of a painting.”

**Topic #2: Abstracting Nature**
Over the past century, human understanding of the natural world has undergone profound changes. The publication of Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity in 1905, for example, offered a startling new paradigm for physical reality, a theoretical model that defined a direct relationship between energy and matter now charted in terms of the speed of light. Advances in such diverse fields as computer engineering, space exploration, paleontology, and eco-biology have contributed to profound alterations in how we understand the world around us. These changes have impacted the way artists envision the universe and our place in it. The cumulative effects of such changes has reduced the relevance of many conventions of painting, calling into question strategies like linear perspective and a viewpoint that emphasizes the solitary individual surveying physical reality from a fixed position with the unaided human eye.

What reasons would compel members of the current generation of abstract painters to become engaged anew with themes or topics rooted in the natural world? Some artists continue to want to explore the dynamic relationship between direct visual observation and the possibilities for formal abstraction. Other artists are compelled by our culture’s changing relationship with nature. Among the latter, some use art to express concerns over our planet’s endangered biosphere; others see nature as a touchstone for the rediscovery of shared universal meaning; and others seek in nature an avenue for escape or transcendence from an overly regulated and processed culture.

Consider Wolf Waterfall (Figure 9.14 – picture unavailable), a painting by Pat Steir measuring over 14 feet in height. A broad streak of oil paint cascades vertically down its center. On one level, the streak of paint reads as a purely abstract brushstroke (recalling the painterly marks of earlier abstractionists who worked in gestural styles). At the same time, we recognize that this brushstroke stands for the waterfall named in the painting’s title. By eliminating detail, Steir’s artwork embodies the waterfallishness of waterfalls as a category rather than representing the appearance of just one waterfall. Simultaneously, the painterliness of Steir’s technique emphasizes her artwork’s status as a painted image.

Pat Steir, *Small LA Waterfall III*
This is not the same picture that was in Figure 9.14, but is a similar work with the same characteristics
Almost any disruption of the conventions of realism can enhance the abstract qualities of a painting—including such strategies as a drastic change in scale, unexpected viewpoint, or inconsistent treatment of space. Terry Winters disrupts conventional realism by basing much of his imagery on abstract treatments of biological and mineral forms blown up to eye-opening size. His painting *Soil Cap* (Figure 9.15 – image unavailable), for example, presents a schematic view of cell-like forms that seem to be buzzing with life; one form in the upper left corner is even beginning to sprout branches that will congeal as a new cell cluster. At the stage of the process depicted in the painting, the growth resembles branches and thorns familiar to us as botanical forms.

In Winters’s art, organic subject matter, sensuous paint handling, and the rich tradition of painting itself are fused seamlessly together. On one level *Soil Cap* is about biology (at the level of cell formation); on another level biology is about us (how our own bodies look at the cellular level); and finally, the painting is about painting, echoing in its thickened forms both the geometry and linear gestures of earlier abstract painter. (Compare, for instance, the forms in Winters’s painting with the grid structure in Mondrian’s painting, Figure 9.3.)
Topic #3: Abstracting the Spiritual

Scholars believe that the earliest art of our human ancestors typically had spiritual overtones, that people made objects and images we now call “art” for use in rituals and ceremonies of worship. We know that over the millennia of recorded history many artworks have served religious purposes—to express ideas about the divine, to foster pathways to mystical experience, to function as moral education and visual preaching, and to provide objects used in religious rituals. While much of the religious art in the West (such as Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling) has been representational, art that incorporates or emphasizes abstract qualities as a means to express spirituality has also been extremely significant in cultures around the world. (Examples known to most readers are the pyramids of ancient Egypt and the pyramids of the Mayas in Mexico.)

Throughout the development of abstract painting in the past one hundred years, many artists have sought to embody, express, or inculcate a spiritual dimension through their work. They have not attempted to communicate a religious story; rather, they have believed than an abstract painting made with a spiritual intention can stimulate a generalized spiritual response from viewers. Pousette-Dart, for example, believed that a viewer could look at one of his paintings, such as the triptych we reproduce (figure 9.5 – image unavailable) and have a mystical experience of the supernatural or the immaterial universe.
In contrast, many new abstractionists reject any faith in the transcendental potential of abstract painting. Influenced by the theories we discussed in Chapter 8, some of these artists believe that at best a painting can only provide a coded simulation of spirituality. For example, in his painting shown in Figure 8.12, Ross Bleckner depicts light in a quasi-ironic manner: He is appropriating light in a kind of impersonation of spirituality, without faith in sacred enlightenment.

Ross Bleckner, Dome
This is not the same picture that was in Figure 8.12, but is a similar work with the similar characteristics

Nevertheless, there are abstract artists today who continue to make artworks that exhibit a reverence for the sacred or transcendent in nature and humanity. This urge to confront the cosmic is wonderfully exemplified by a sequence of five large-scale wall paintings installed by Dorothea Rockburne in the Andrew Emmerich Gallery, New York, in 1994. While we could have discussed these abstractions within our previous topic of nature, they aim to take us into an exalted realm where “grafting astrophysics to Genesis,” these paintings explore the universe as a “work-in-progress.” In First Day (Figure 9.17 – image unavailable), one of the sequence, Rockburne utilized the surfaces of two parallel walls to create an image that appears to symbolize the manifold separations that theoretical science and religion alike attribute to that initial moment of creation: the separation of firmament from void, energy from mass, light from darkness.

Dorothea Rockburne, Northern Sky and Southern Sky
This is not the same picture that was in Figure 9.17, but is a similar work with similar characteristics
**Topic #4: Abstracting as Commentary**

As we have already suggested, today it is hard to explore abstraction without some self-consciousness. It is no longer a given that abstraction is central to advanced art. Moreover, today’s practitioners are building on almost a century of previous artists’ work. The language of abstraction has become conventionalized—coded with meanings that exert extraordinary influence on viewers’ interpretations. For example, a gestural brushstroke is now widely understood as a sign for inner emotion; a painter might make emphatic gestural marks knowing viewers will read them as emotional expression even if there were no actual feelings generating their creation. Likewise, the use of hard edges, a grid, or other geometric forms might be employed as signs of order and rationality.

Some painters have chosen to create artworks which analyze and critique the strategies as well as the meanings invested in the historical vocabulary of abstract art. Their appropriation of past techniques and forms of abstraction is often ironic and subversive. These painters’ goals may range from an exploration of how cognitive meaning itself is yet another element (like color or shape) that can be manipulated by the artists, to a search for the limits of originality as a benchmark of human creativity, to a critique of the hero worship accorded to some of the twentieth century’s most famous abstract painters. While these artists may appear to be making “purely” abstract paintings, their actual concerns are political and social. They employ an abstract visual language to subtly explore issues of gender, race, economic class, advertising and consumer culture, technology, or other topics. They are attempting to reinvest abstraction with the power to serve as a metaphor for contemporary society or a tool to promote social change.

Consider, for example, the use today of stripes, which are a significant element in the historical vocabulary of abstract painting. In the hands of many abstract Minimalist painters of the 1960s, stripes were considered the ultimate marker of impersonal nonobjectivity—their rigid geometry setting them far apart from the irregularities and emotions of the everyday world. In contrast, many artists today no longer believe a painting can be so detached from the outside world or from the artist’s subjectivity. As we already saw, Scully blurs the edges of his stripe paintings in part to reintroduce the notion of individual variation within a geometric structure (Figure 9.10). In her diptych, (Figure 9.18), Karin Davie appropriates the parallel wavy lines employed by Op artists to create an illusion of movement. Davie endows the stripes with feminist content, using the optical effects to suggest a woman’s buttocks undulating in motion. Gazing at the painting, we find ourselves staring at an abstracted version of female anatomy. By transforming a 1960’s concern with visual perception (the hey-day of Op art) into a 1990s expose of voyeurism, Davie implicitly critiques the earlier era’s naïve separation of art and society.

Sabina Ott paraodies the macho image of the heroic male abstract painter by “feminizing” abstraction in her encaustic and oil painting, *Disappearance and*
Return: #17 (Plate 28). At first glance, this may look like a highly abstract painting whose content is exclusively a formal concern with the encaustic technique, sensuous texture, and subtle gradations of rich color. However, a closer look reveals that Ott’s painting hovers at the edges of representation with clusters of half-formed roses dispersed across the monochromatic field. Moreover, the bright pink color has numerous connotations outside the realm of art, including blood, passion, and romance. The lacy images of roses and bright pink definitely stake a female claim to the language of abstract painting. Ott’s painting functions as a humorous comment on the pretentiousness of some past male abstract painter, who claimed moral superiority for nonobjective painting because, in their view, the formal rigor of such paintings set them apart from the vagaries of the everyday world. Ott proclaims a powerful female presence and redefinition of abstract painting’s purpose and meaning.

In the West, the appropriation of past abstractionists’ styles and motifs may make sense only to art world insiders who get the art historical references; outsiders might find the same paintings obscure and even irritatingly inbred. The most effective appropriationists, including in our view the artists mentioned here, do more than simply quote a borrowed historical vocabulary; they rejuvenate abstraction by creating paintings that are as visually seductive as they are subversive.

This was not included in this textbook chapter, but I found it interesting and encourage you to look at it.
Museum Link: http://www.sfmoma.org/anderson/index.html

This handout contains parts of Chapter 9 from:
Painting as a Language
Material, Technique, Form, Content
By Jean Robertson and Craig McDaniel
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