



Between lovely lines

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To take notes on graph paper is to resist the temptation to doodle. But Power Boothe has succumbed; he succumbed nearly 40 years ago. Since 1971, Boothe has been exploring the interplay between structure and chaos in his grid-based abstract paintings.

The concept of grid-based abstract paintings seems, at first, to be inherently contradictory. Abstract art brings to mind paint splatters, solid colors and unconstrained emotion. Grids are regular in their consistency, a neat framework meant to control and guard against disorder. In his paintings, Boothe does not focus on the opposition between the two so much as how each works with the other. The dichotomies seem irreconcilable in theory, but there is little tension on the canvas — colors and lines merge organically above pencil-sketched squares.

The first two pieces of the exhibit, “Transient” and “Long Tale,” introduce the techniques and motifs that emerge over and over again in Boothe’s pieces. From far away they look like clean lines and solid colors, but up close they become impressions without certainty. The lines smudge and bleed into bright areas of color, creating ombre effects that suggest melting boundaries. White space is concentrated in the middle of the composition, but concentrated is a strong word — the patches of white loosely form a meandering path not unlike the mazes in elementary school workbooks.



Boothe’s work is not just playful in its maze-like layouts, but also in the shape of the lines and color choices. Most pieces — “Recursion,” “Findings,” “Ellipses #12,” for example — combine muted, soothing shades of pastel with the boldness of intense primary colors. In paint, Boothe traces straight lines that

follow the grid before unexpectedly swaying into s-curves and rounded corners. Sometimes they hesitate and continue into dots and dashes. The lines also run into geometrically-inspired areas of colors. When intentional smears make a line occupy a space beyond its usual narrow stretch, is it still a line?

Each abstract painting is like a game of connect the dots, played with different rules. Sometimes the dots are connected, and other times not, as in “Heraclitean Fire,” where the randomness of lines speaks to the illogical nature of passion and anger. “Quiet Fury #5” sends a similar message, but the anger is simultaneously suppressed by the calming cobalt background, into which lines seem to sink. Blue takes on a different meaning in “Fracture,” however, serving to enhance a sense of disruption and removal. Even as the change in hues constructs the disconnectedness between parts, the color blue ironically unites the piece. “Surfacing” is also blue and white, but the story it tells is one of fabrication in progress, not deconstruction. Captured mid-action, the lines will not fully surface, and the question of whether they will assemble into a larger, more complete picture remains unanswered.

Boothe’s art often defies the clear-cut, tending towards being intentionally messy, overlapping and blending together. “Beginnings” is a creative take on cave paintings, rich with graceful transitions in multicolored lines that stand out on a beige, cave-like background. In “Entangle,” different designs rest on top of one another, making harmonious patterns from pieces that shouldn’t fit together. The little islands of vibrant color that stand out in a sea of white seem to be at the brink of change, and the piece itself appears to be unsure, deciding between whether to reflect the process of destruction or discovery.

Interspersed throughout the gallery, sculptures by Elisa Lendvay echo and expand on themes of discovery and reveal. A pun on the word “archangel,” “Archangle” places common household items in an unconventional setting. Metal lids, crushed aluminum cans and pie tins are strung together like a strange skewer splashed with color. Lendvay incorporates materials unassociated in daily life into one structure and makes it seem natural, the artifact of an alternative world. Through this curious collaboration, Lendvay juxtaposes barrenness and exposure with cover — “Nest,” “Curve/Rednet” — and practical use with elaborate and fanciful design — “Deadwood,” “Ruffle.”

Abstract art gets a bad rep. It’s “artsy” without substance, some people say, or perhaps muddled with too much substance to have a concrete focus. Too confusing, too foreign. But when I walked into the Fred Giampietro Gallery and first saw the works of Power Boothe and Elisa Lendvay, I felt like I had returned to my childhood home. Once again I was sitting at my desk with crayons, piles of maze worksheets and board games in front of me and pie tins laid out on the kitchen countertop, ready to be repurposed. Once again, there was space to color outside the lines.

