

Nola Zirin and the march of abstraction

TWO COATS OF PAINT

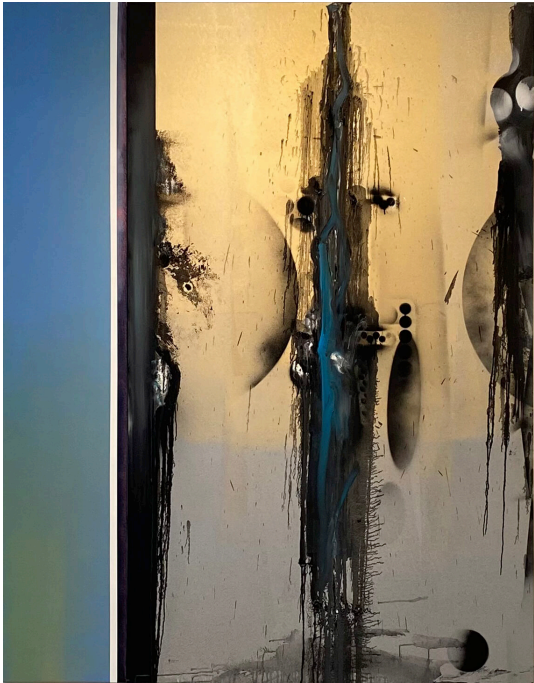
August 23, 2023 9:55 am



Nola Zirin, Syncopation, 2019

Contributed by Michael Brennan / It has sometimes been assumed that abstraction is unlimited in its possibilities. While that's still broadly true, abstraction also has been exhaustively explored over the course of a century or more. All painting is organized around some kind of form. Abstraction is burdened with establishing form in the absence of figuration, the readiest and most natural source. There are only a few ways to define form without a figure – for instance, through geometry or gesture. It's a limited playbook. Much of the success of Nola Zirin's new paintings, on view at Mosaic Artspace in Long Island City, comes down to her bold expansion of the index of abstraction. Many are striking in their recombination of form and unusual mix of materials.

Titles such as *For Ron Carter and Syncopation*, among others, allude to Zirin's affinity for music, specifically jazz. I'd rather not make timeworn comparisons between music and abstract painting, but music does remain a legitimate source of inspiration for many artists, particularly abstract painters, going all the way back to Kandinsky, if not earlier. *Syncopation* aptly describes Zirin's oppositional articulation of forms. She's a maestro of hybrid composition.

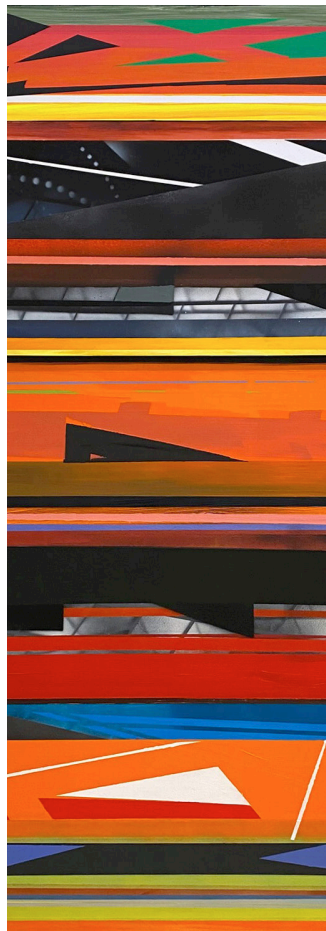


Nola Zirin, For Ron Carter, 2023



Ron Carter, 2009

I particularly like the stacking and compression of *Kachina Night Dance*, which has something in common with the cyber-futurism of the late Al Held's Luminous Constructs.



Nola Zirin, Kachina Night Dance, 2023



Al Held, Pan North XI, 1987

Keep Moving On is a more explicitly postmodern hybrid, not unlike Richard Kalina's paintings from the early 1990s, in which Pollock-esque gestural dripping is wedged between densely colored vertical bands. In Zirin's case, however, this device functions more as hot fusion than cool quotation, with added flocking.

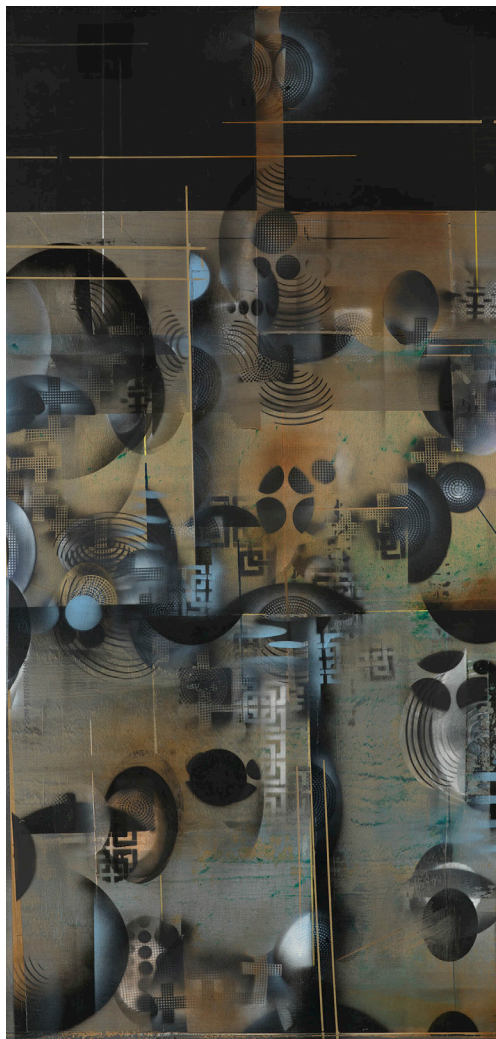


Nola Zirin, Keep Moving On, 2022

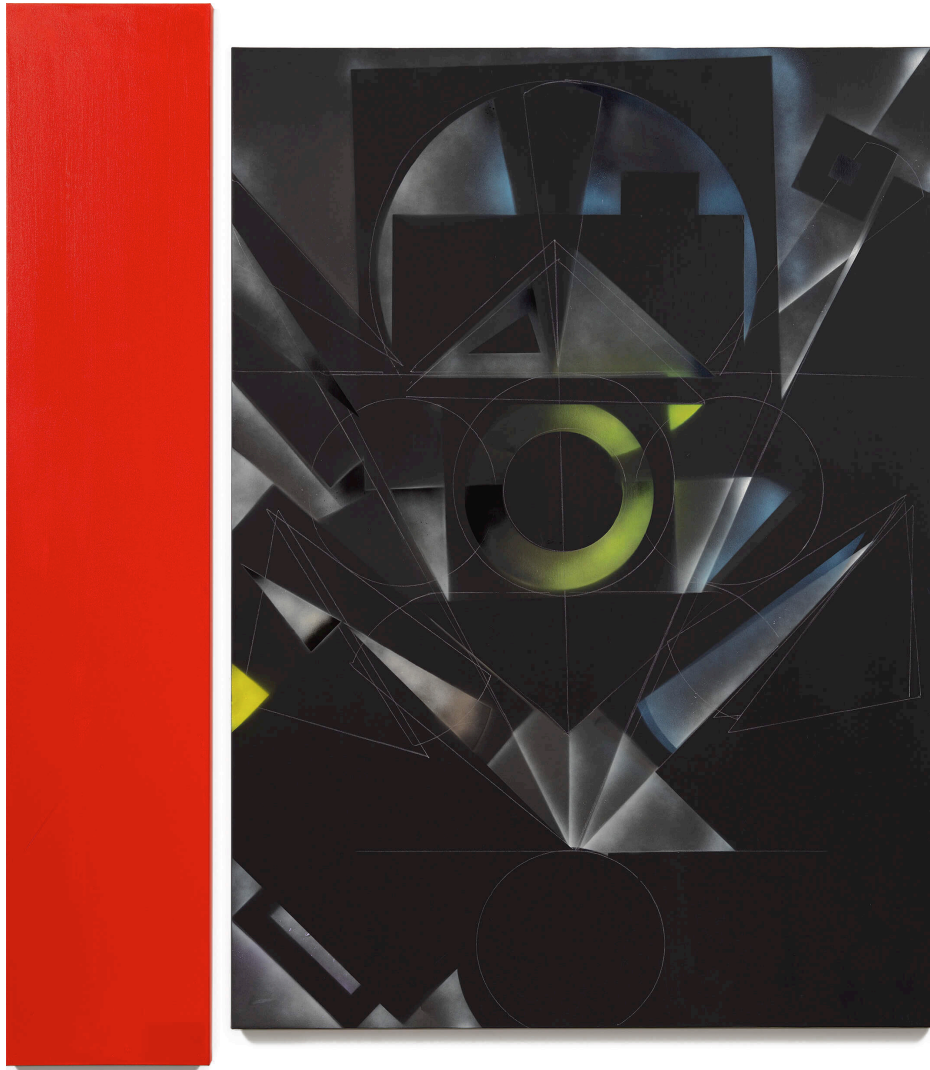


Richard Kalina, Example, 1991

There's rich variety in the dozen or so paintings at Mosaic Artspace. Zirin makes extensive use of silhouette, stenciling and spraying, sometimes to intriguingly cryptic effect.



Nola Zirin, Black Holes, 2009



Nola Zirin, Futurist, 2019

Abstraction can be a dead end if it's driven too far into the hermetic zone. Zirin possesses – in addition to consummate painterly skill – great determination and talent for keeping her work open, driven by the belief that unlikely new hybrids are still possible and a new abstraction therefore attainable by reassembling the old language. The paintings now on view are postmodern in that they are syntactical and conceptual. Yet there's a very long runway leading to, running through, and flowing from her work. Zirin remains a happy warrior, fully aware of abstraction's heritage and sharply alert to its potential.

“Nola Zirin: Play It as It Lays,” Mosaic Artspace, 49-28 31st Place, Long Island City, NY. Through September 2023.

About the author:

Michael Brennan is a Brooklyn based painter who writes on art.