

J e n n i e

C

r

J o n e s



by Fred Moten

*Constant Structure.* Imagine we are walking in an open book. In this substructural inconstancy, what seems like an exercise in parting is really overlap and recess and incline, a topography of approach that is an invitation to pay attention to our approach, to write the movement of our viewing in the moment, to be gentle and imaginative in our observance, to apply and then violently to soften our eyes as an artist applies then softens brightness and shadow, held in emulsion, to share a cusp in tending to an unknown partner, towards them as we carefully step the crowded surface of our event, which is an experiment for the preservation of differences. May we take off our shoes? Should we take off our shoes? Striding this mosaic of fluid, thickened planes, loosened as we keep turning (in the) cube in this continual return to exodus, our continual being a stranger, in that manner, with those manners, lightly, measured, mistaken, somehow, the sharpness of these angles lets us gently ply the angles of our incidence, roundabout, oblique, like almost trying to get behind or past the volume of the room when there's a warmth, there, where they come from.

They. Now, what are they, these surfaces, or garments or tapestries or sculptural affirmances, where texture and pigment defy the notion either of mix or of some prior separation? It's not that they are not paintings; it's that in that they are paintings, painting is not what it is. Certain cranky intelligences—running all the while from what they're trying to stomp all over—would say that they are jazz, or jazzy, in this regard of tentative regarding. The fullness and depth of the surface, the ethical expanse, this intensity of touching because no one ever occupies their own space, darns that dream of subjects holding objects in an open hand. The open-handed sow all that away, aside, seeding, releasing into turbulence, which close looking listens to as texture. Attune to the sound and the room is not a volume but a surface, somehow. Constant structure, unit structure, in a practice of diffusion. Or, almost that we follow light with our fingers' eye, tracing in how we retrace it's steps, how light came in the room.

Jennie C. Jones says, "My surfaces are the extent of my reach." Stay here. The surfaces are not flat if you move with enough deliberation, step to and from them as if within them, them and they all transitory in transit, transness, indicating all against reduction. Allover ain't the same as all up in some shit, a black (and red sea'd) h a p t i c a l operation on optics, devotional observance in excess of, in ceding's refusal to accede to, observation. A mosaic of exuding, the ongoing making of an atmosphere in rubbing, leaves pouring from the wall in tinted, slightly tented fabric. The sea is a book whose pages wash over you as a long, fringed, surface.

Try to imagine how to get a depth-feeling with words on the page. What is a depth-feeling? Maybe it's a variant on, or a vagrant all up in, Renee Gladman's "picture-feeling?" Maybe it's a feeling of three-dimensionality. A feeling of it, which is not an illusion; not perspective, not an optic trick, but an actual sense of traversable place, somewhere to tarry, as if the words were part of an atmosphere, as if in the air of the gallery. Think of open blocks, or boats, of text ferrying the knot between poem and essay. Can they be staggered, torqued, quadrilateral but turned through the difference of their margins? The dream would be a way that some of the blocks might converge, like the converging grids of an eye test, to get the feeling of a constant(ly changing) structure. Having deserved some writing as if writing were walking, lightly working back and forth to turn the air over in the room, to put the walls and their jewelry in motion, our stride, as we stay here, is cursive. And what about this totally cool semantic

phenomenon in which the word "constant" in the phrase "constant structure" can only ever seem to imply change? Change is its semantic substrate so that "constant structure" is another way of phrasing what Amiri Baraka keeps aberrantly calling "the changing same." This phenomenon of sustained delta, in which constancy implies and bears change, because if the structure is to be constant it must change, indexes or indicates or echoes that imperative against its anamolithic grain, carrying changes out from the enclosure of subject, object and decision. Meticulously, we share a concern for meticulousness, whose presence welcomes us in v i o l e n t , g e n t l e d e v i a t i o n .





*End Measure (Mauve)*  
2019/20 (detail)

Acoustic panel, acrylic on canvas  
48 x 36 x 3 inches

We want what Jacques Derrida calls "structure without a center," a progression in which chords of the same quality but with different root notes are played consecutively, giving what they say is a free and shifting tonal center, which seems to mean that if the center shifts, then it is not. Then, it is a fugitive center, an eccentricity, which brings to mind a changing, shifting structure, a moving structure, a structure that can be felt—non-sensuously—in being seen, or even heard, to be more + less than cool reason ever comprehends. A structure of wind, or breath, or even of a range of absent wings and tongues who, nevertheless, make their impression. An open, mobile togetherness, a tumultuous gathering, a murmuration, like the recoil or the recall of some birds reciting aesthetic informality without an art form or an artist.

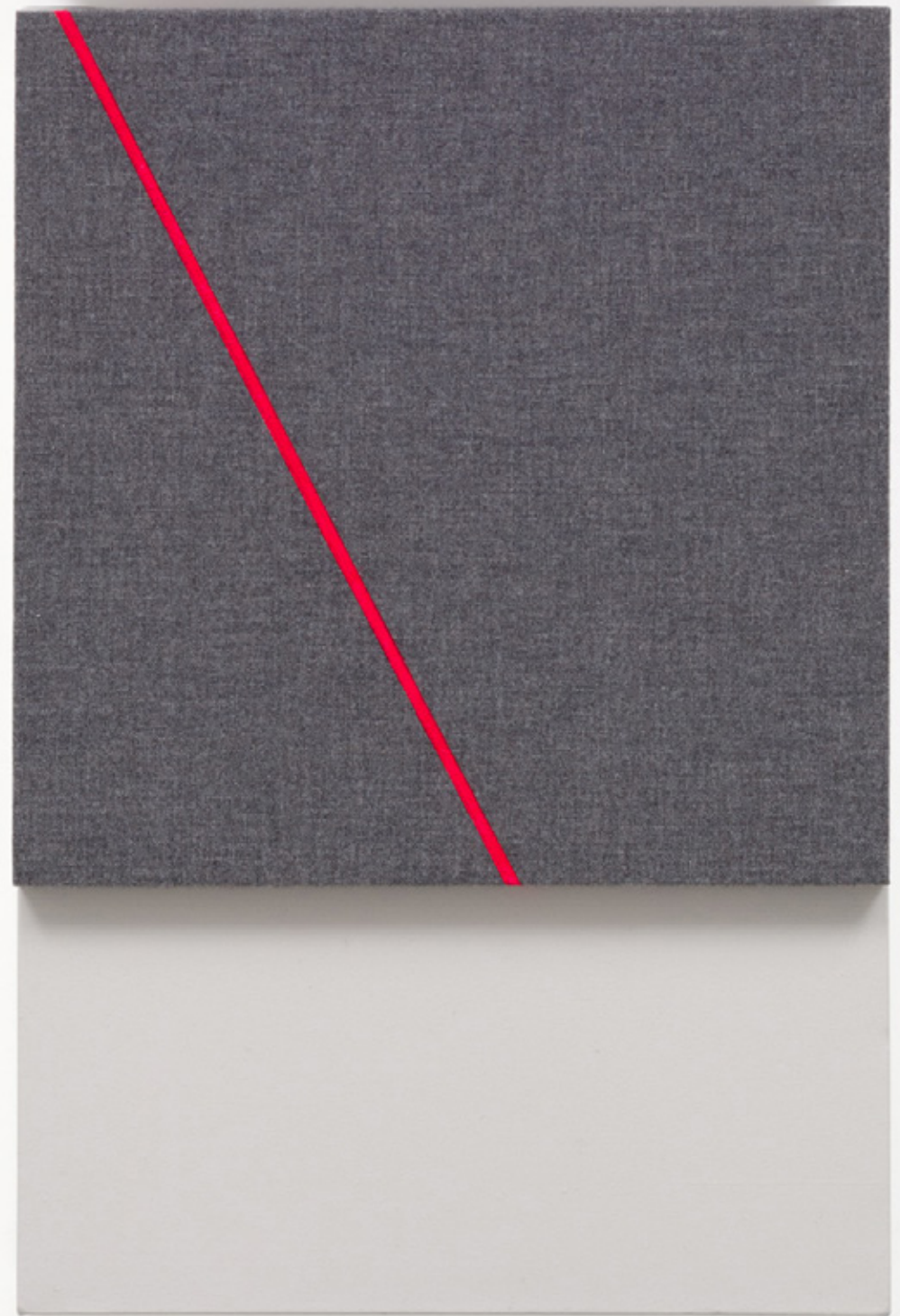
10

11



12

13



*Decrescendo at Edge*  
2020

Acoustic panel, acrylic on canvas  
2 parts: 24 × 62 inches overall







If  
we  
jot  
down  
some  
notes  
that  
we  
can  
edit  
into  
a  
series  
of  
permeable,  
rough-hewn  
parallelograms,  
then  
maybe  
we  
can  
see  
how  
they  
don't  
quite  
fit  
together  
in  
some  
kind  
of  
edgy  
but  
also  
edgeless  
serration,  
wrapping  
around  
pages  
like  
a  
finger

might  
trace  
in  
the  
book's  
practice  
of  
Riemannian  
surfacing,  
getting  
at  
the  
topographical  
implications  
of  
our  
geometry,  
the  
neighborhood  
our  
lonely  
points  
refer  
to  
in  
their  
bending,  
which  
gets  
to  
another  
family  
analog  
of  
constant  
structure,  
the  
topological  
and  
the  
topographical  
themselves,  
in

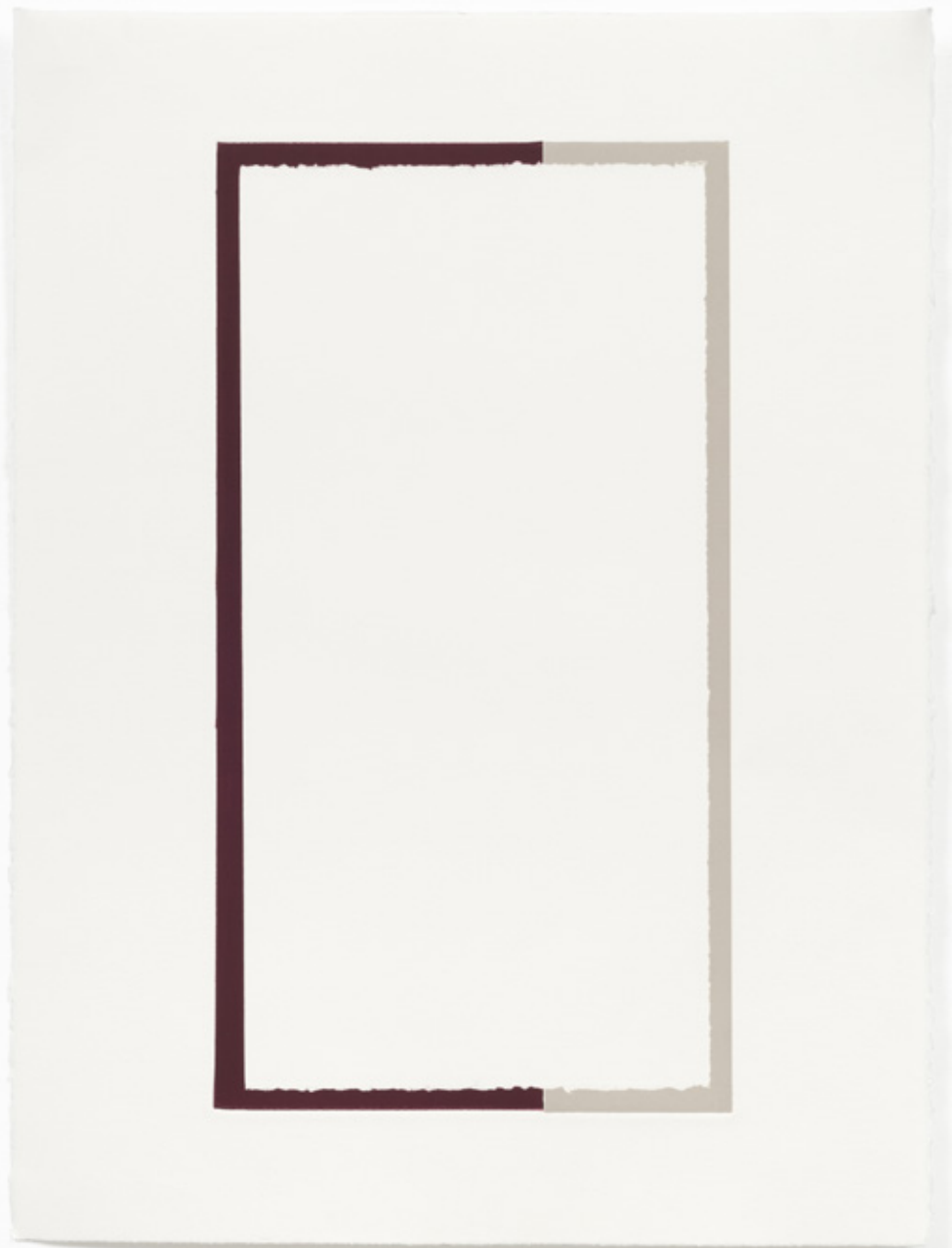
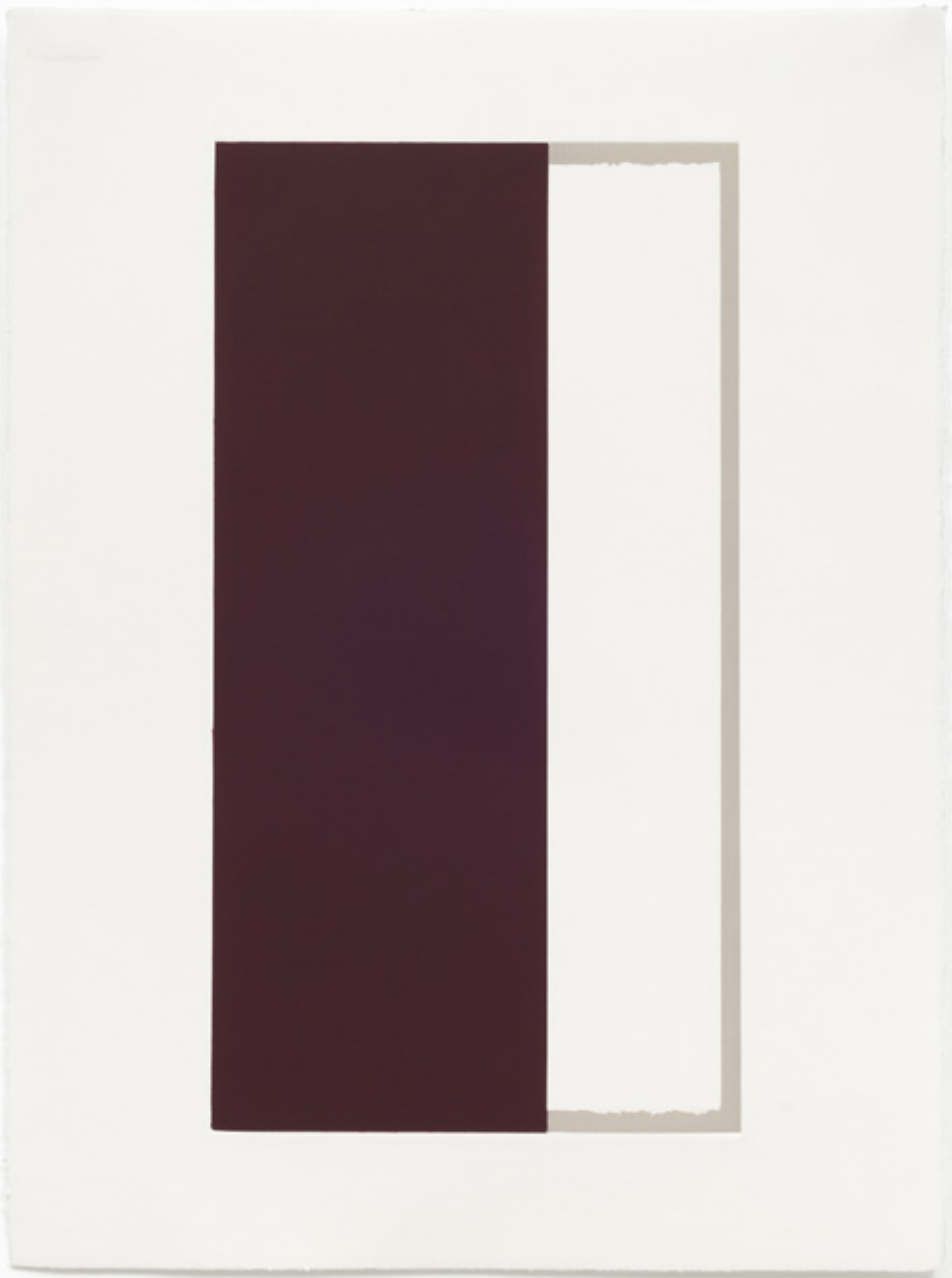
their  
destructive  
enactment  
of  
pointless  
selflessness,  
which  
is  
all  
about  
how  
shape  
is,  
and  
shapes  
are,  
maintained  
under  
conditions  
of  
folding,  
bending,  
crumpling  
(but  
not  
tearing).  
These  
are  
the  
differences  
in  
the  
inseparability  
we  
make,  
or  
structure,  
constantly.  
It  
must  
be  
abstract,  
too.



*Open Score #1-4*  
2019

Ink on paper (monotype)  
30 x 22 inches each  
Printed at 10 Grand Press





24



25

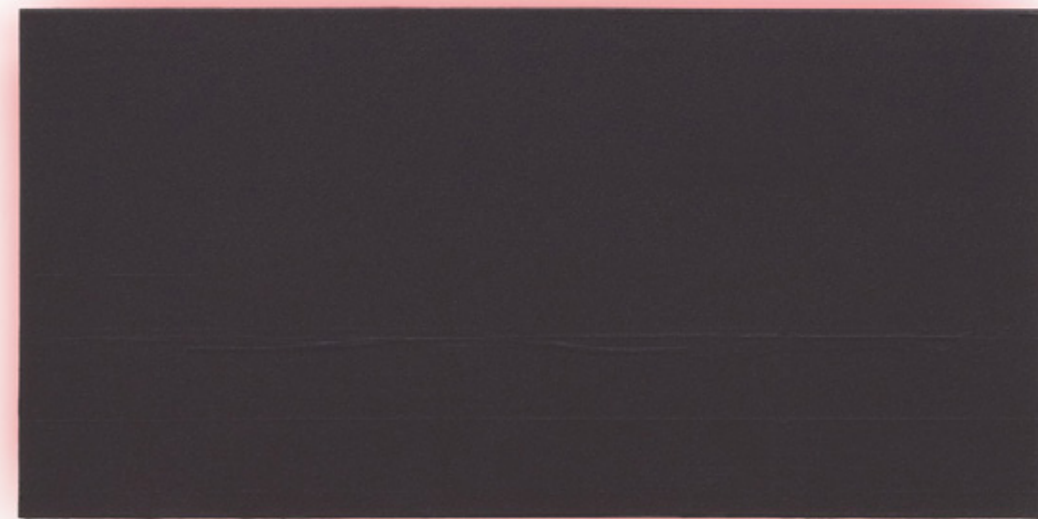


*Corner Phrase / Soft Measure*  
2020

Acrylic on canvas  
2 parts: 12 × 36 inches; 48 × 36 inches



The feeling of depth is in the refusal of any separation of practice from product. No product will have emerged from this "infinite rehearsal," which is what Wilson Harris might say this is, right now, in the minor chords we send, as if our notes were once a preface to what we have been practicing all along, not a letter to Jones, or about Jones, but with some writing with her, all tangled up in her laborious weaving, a continuous warp and weft of aerate blocks, both thread and patch, remurmurative, post-woven quilting, bent gee and haw in remorseless groundworking, more tiling, more tilling, improvisational ground provision, various ground nuts and uprooted roots in the preparation of tables, the continual cultivation of nothing in a general, in black refusal of the cult of genius, which sometimes black geniuses try desperately to renew in our fucked-up situation. How many consecutive chords can we play? We would need some kind of constraint, like maybe seeing a layout of what hasn't been laid out, some remnant of the merely conceived, just a shadow of its indication. Because we want to see what it will be like to submit to no design, to be undevoted to our line breaks, to have them only ever come from having been broken, cut, cut off, or having been surprised by the real in the neighborhood, like when we come upon what comes up on us from behind, while we be walking straight ahead, eyes wide open, over the rent-partying cliff of some threshold, having walked right through the bend in Betty Carter's river, through the scent of the heather, in the shimmering, in the wreck, all up in the water, remember, with all them birds, because, in our shared attention to edges and margins, we are certain in nonfull nonsimplicity, tuning, turning.



*Deep Structure with Ledger Line*  
2020

Acoustic diffuser; Acrylic on canvas  
2 parts: 24 × 36; 12 × 24 inches





*Phrasing to the Floor*  
2020 (detail)

Acrylic on canvas  
3 parts: 24 × 36 inches each

The book is just the three-dimensional representation of our infinitely richer and more unruly two-dimensional conversation. The book is just a volume, like a room. The surfaces aren't flat; they're not planes. They're plain. Their nonlocality spreads out from them against a kind of rising, beyond the conditions of individuation. They are the extent of our reach. They extend our reach beyond grasping. What was abstraction supposed to give? Maybe something like what the imaginary numbers give in our working on and towards and through complexity. Abstraction is an obstruction, so we try gently to go somewhere else, as continuous form's insistent informality. And something comes for us in this ongoing. Because it must give pleasure, too, until we're surface, feeling depth. Until something intimate occurs in residue, surreptitiously, without any name involved at all, just singing with, in the sense that Herbie's accompaniment of Miles was rigorously erotic criticism, when the personal is realized as a field of differences from which something like work, or works, or the work seems to come and go. We just believe in the differences and their preservation and their generativity in and as more differences, until it's neither about the artist nor her work but their mutual disappearance in a surface we make, something like an event, something like a performance, but more like a general strike of crowded, entropic, disordered and disordering surface, an active, anarchic two-dimensionality we had to depth-feel our way back to, something going on through grounding, in aggressive brushing and caressive sponging, where the turned earth and general cluster we've been trying to study converge in the proximity of our history and our moment and our correspondence. It's neither personal nor the negation of the personal. It's not business, either, which is to say it's not about work or the work or the works or their negation. There's just this incessant working going on, which has its corollary in something that might be called impersonation, where sound and sounding are, as it were, drawn out. The parting of red is crowded in this continual working of line and row, and flow and floe, and choir and quire. The open book. The rivery sea. The red sheaves. *Constant Structure*.



*Open Constellation (Oxide Red)*  
2020 (detail)

See page 36

34

35



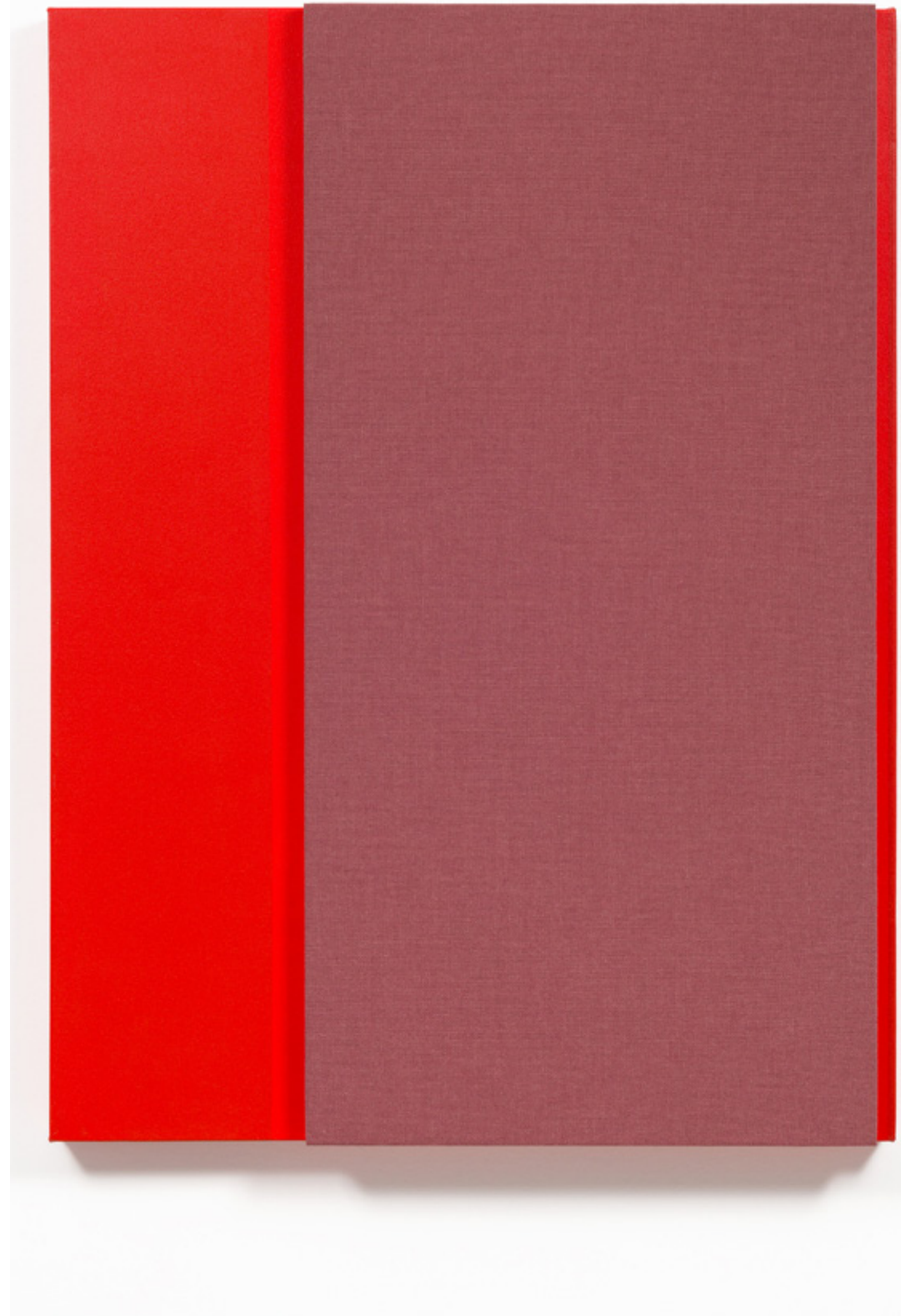
*Open Constellation (Oxide Red)*  
2020

Acrylic on canvas; Acoustic panel,  
acrylic on canvas  
3 parts: 12 × 12 inches;  
36 × 48 inches (2 parts)



*Unit Structures #1*  
2019/20

Acoustic panel, acrylic on canvas  
48 × 36 × 3 inches

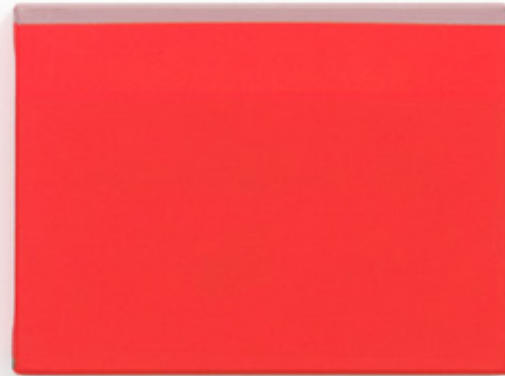
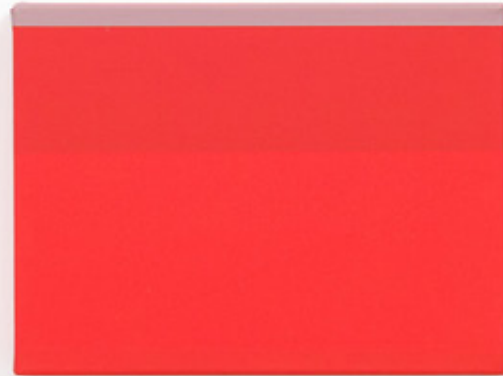




*Fractured Crescendo, Rest*  
2019

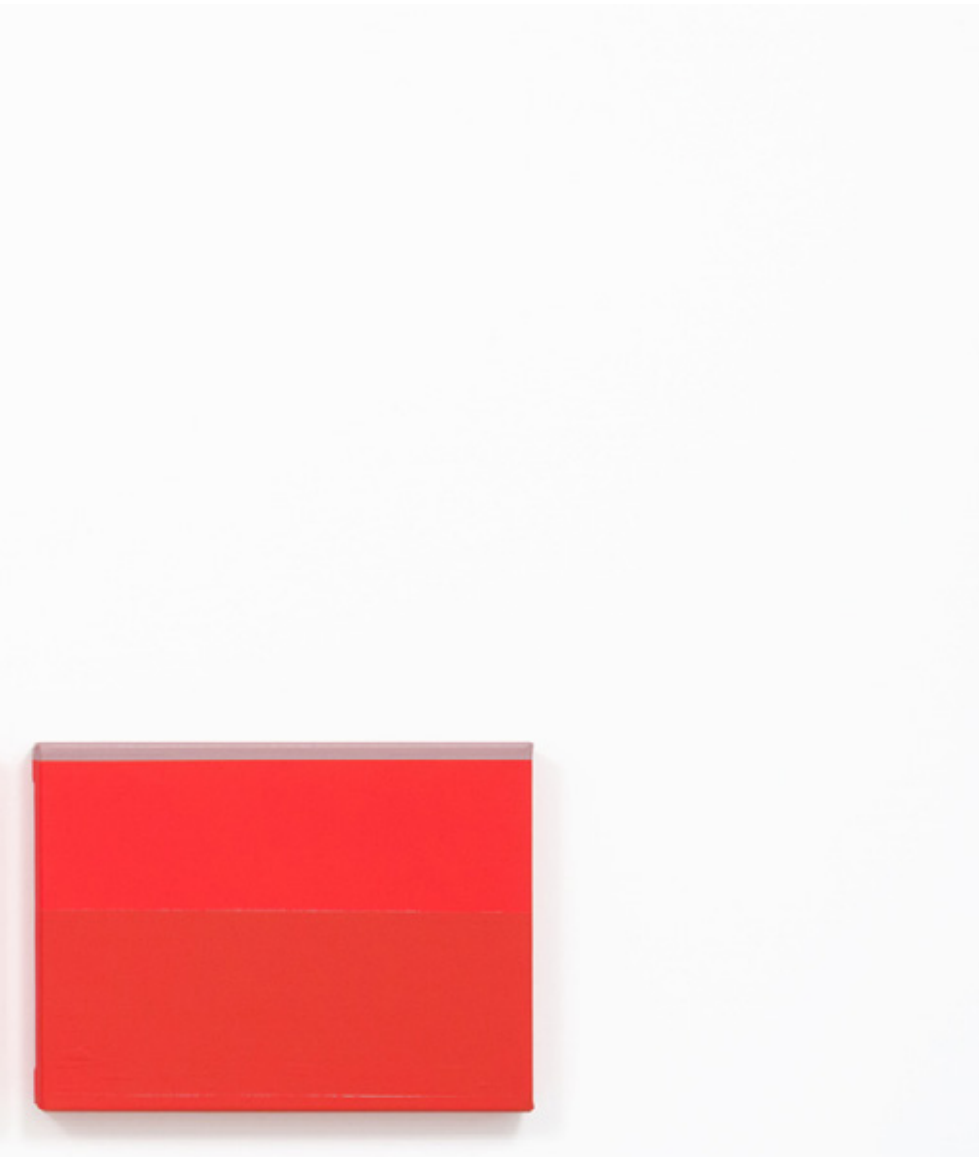
Acoustic panel, acrylic on canvas  
2 parts: 49½ × 36 × 3 inches overall





*Constant Structure*  
2020

Acrylic on canvas  
4 parts: 12 × 36 inches;  
12 × 16 inches (3 parts)





The artistic practice of Jennie C. Jones amplifies silences and gaps with very little noise. Noted for combining visual and sonic arts, Jones evokes musical echoes in her artworks with or without actual sound. Her visual vocabulary is paired down; she uses a tight range of color that varies in value more than hue, as well as innovative materials and deliberate placement to produce characteristic minimalist gestures. She has mastered the vocabulary of grids, lines, planes, texture and color, while introducing a critical slant that highlights the exclusion of African-American artists from that rarified discourse. Jones draws upon the popular music that she grew up with, reconceiving what it might mean for a painter to convey the tenets of jazz in abstraction—not from a place of appropriation but from that of affinity. Jones's very achievement accentuates the uncommonness of her position within a lineage of rigorous, conceptual abstraction. Such is the ambition in the current exhibition *Jennie C. Jones: Constant Structure*, where Jones builds visually restrained panels from sound-proofing textiles around a specific musical concept to intensify the weighted silence in the room while making present the resonances of black avant-garde music. Each decision, each dimension or juxtaposition speaks to an overall encounter that Jones has thought through with care and precision. In this return to the acoustic paintings that established her reputation, Jones finds an expanded terrain within which to stake a claim.

At The Arts Club of Chicago, Jones has arranged modular paintings and monotypes in series and multi-panels to play upon the organizing principle of "constant structure," consecutive chord progressions with different root notes that link together disparate tones into a cohesive aural experience. Like these musical intervals, Jones's paintings and prints hit moments of dissonance and harmony through variation on a theme. They subtly move into the room and across corners, spread onto the floor, or climb the walls. Without any sound-making apparatus, Jones introjects the concept of musical notation through placement and motif. Notably, a vibrant line of fluorescent red reappears across paintings—at an angle in one, on the border of another, taking up the surface of yet one more, reflecting on the wall or peeking out from behind an edge.

Harkening back to early theories of abstraction like those of Wassily Kandinsky, Arthur Dove or later Alma Thomas, Jones physicalizes the experience of music through visual clues, asking viewers to imagine sound as if it were the product of synesthesia—the slippage of stimuli intended for one sense on to another. She further indicates this intended reading through strategic titling of the paintings. Musical

terminology, evoking dynamics and treatment of time like crescendo, rest, or phrase indicate possibilities for generating or experiencing the work. And yet, Jones insists that she is not schooled in this realm. Her borrowing from musical expression and syntax remains free-form and suggestive, rather than limiting or rigid.

With its sophisticated understatement and conceptual weight, the aesthetic and lineage of *Jennie C. Jones: Constant Structure* could not be more fitting for The Arts Club of Chicago. We are therefore cognizant of the institution's participation in the very history of exclusion that Jones has foregrounded throughout her career. She has consistently positioned herself as at once in dialogue with the trajectory of African-American abstraction and more mainstream histories of modernism. She is perhaps singular in her claim on the legacy of 1960s and '70s minimalism with an eye toward black identity. Celebrated for critical texts that address related elisions, poet and scholar Fred Moten offers an experimental format that works in tandem with Jones's visual inventions. The collected paragraphs read like a personal rumination or private correspondence, while also claiming theoretical ground for Jones. Moten focuses our attention on instances of insight—haptic encounter, saturation of color, inherent change, multivalent meaning, or the proximity of language, music, and image. He grapples with Jones's conceptualization of constant structure/inconstancy, helping us to mentally "hear" the chords progress. We are grateful to both artist and writer for the opportunity to witness this unfolding collaboration. Jones's immersive installation at The Arts Club of Chicago asks for attentive listening to past absences, while making tangible her formidable presence.

Janine Mileaf

This brochure is produced on the occasion of

*Jennie C. Jones: Constant Structure*

The Arts Club of Chicago

March 19–May 22, 2020

Curator: Janine Mileaf  
Curatorial Assistant: H. Daly Arnett  
Photography: Pierre Le Hors  
Typeface and design: Ronnie Fueglistner  
Color separation: DZA Druckerei zu Altenburg GmbH  
Printing and binding: DZA Druckerei zu Altenburg GmbH

All works courtesy of the artist and Patron Gallery.

*Open Score #1–6*: printed at 10 Grand Press, Brooklyn and Santa Fe.

© 2020, The Arts Club of Chicago

© Essay by Frederick Moten and The Arts Club of Chicago

All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-1-891925-02-3

Jennie C. Jones conveys her deepest thanks to Janine Mileaf and everyone at The Arts Club of Chicago. She is further indebted to Fred Moten, Master Printer Marina Ancona at 10 Grand Press, and Patron Gallery.

C o n s t a n t

S t r u c t u r e