



11 Emerging Artists Redefining Abstract Painting

Alina Cohen

Jan 6, 2020 1:00pm

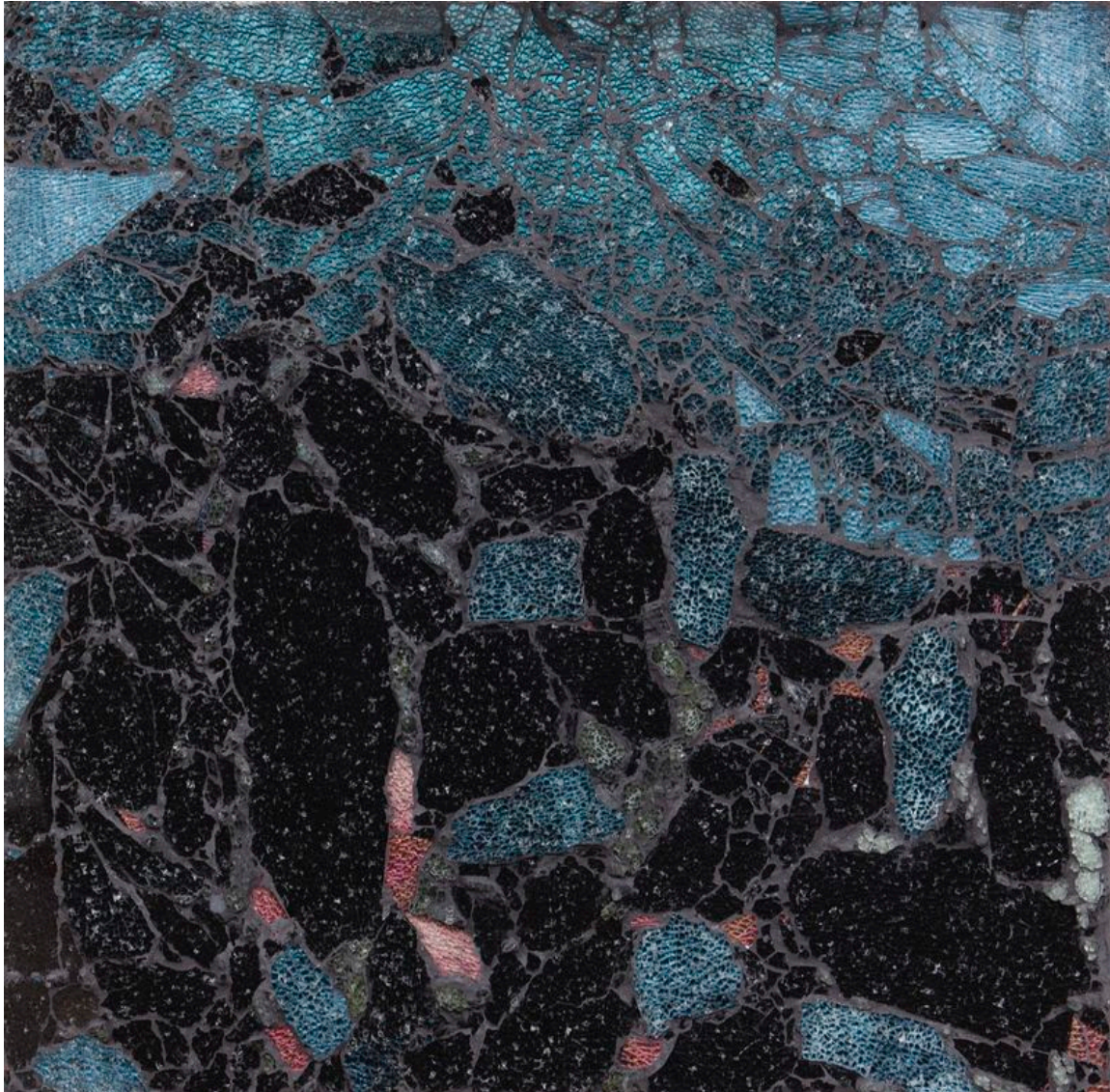
The divide between abstraction and figuration is a false, but helpful, dichotomy. Painters who are primarily concerned with the interactions between color, line, and form also make marks and shapes that may suggest body parts, landscapes, and objects traditionally relegated to still lifes. Even monochrome paintings can conjure familiar settings: A gray canvas might evoke a rock face, while a blue one may suggest the sea.

This principle can go the other way, as well. “I would consider myself a figurative painter fundamentally,” artist [Louise Giovanelli](#) told me, “but I certainly have a loose idea of figuration—anything that suggests a form, even if this suggestion is faint.”

A new generation of painters, all 40 years old or younger, are rethinking what we might call, for lack of a better term, abstraction. For them, labels aren’t important. They’re more interested in the infinite ways paint can be applied to develop suggestive, beguiling, and transcendent compositions. They explore what it means to make a painting in the digital age and use contemporary research to generate new patterns and designs. Despite the diversity of these artists’ practices, a near-mystical devotion to the act of making and a desire to communicate via symbols and hues unites them all.

Alteronce Gumby

B. 1985, Harrisburg, PA. Lives and works in New York.



For Alteronce Gumby, abstraction feels liberating. During London’s Frieze Week in 2019, he debuted a twinkling series of paintings at Sunday Art Fair—a departure from the monochromes he’s made in recent years. The new works feature colorful shards of glass—in teal, cornflower blue, and peach—embedded in black backgrounds. As viewers walked from one side of the installation to the other, the compositions changed colors before their eyes.

Gumby was coy about discussing his process: “I think every good artist has their tricks, and just like magic tricks, they should remain secret,” he said. The new works revel in their own fantastical deceptions of color and form, while simultaneously suggesting the cosmos and something broken here on Earth. Gumby said that the best abstract painters “are using some form of logic or making reference to nature,” while leaving ample “room for ambiguity and for the viewer to use their own imaginations and experiences to finish the work.”

He recalled childhood reveries of a stick transforming into a spaceship, baseball bat, or rifle. Abstraction allows for similarly imaginative leaps. “There’s no fixed narrative,” Gumby said. “I can change the story or who I am at any moment, and that’s okay.”