



*Michelle Grabner: New Paintings and Sculpture* is her sixth solo exhibition at the Green Gallery, Milwaukee, WI.

The pattern sources of Grabner's new painting and small cast-bronze reliefs are culled from decorative ecru crochet textiles. The exhibition also includes a selection of masonry artifacts, ornaments from the Pabst Mansion's demolished Carriage House in Milwaukee that Grabner gilded with silver leaf.

The domestic textiles Grabner uses as sources for her paintings are already too banal, too decorative and too exhausted to be celebrations of domestic labor and beauty. The same is true with the gilded masonry artifacts where cast volutes and scrolls are stock vocabularies comprising the Flemish Renaissance Revival style of the former Pabst Carriage house. Grabner is once again doubling-down on corny ornamentation and commonplace motifs. The result is a humorous and uneasy liaison between modern abstraction and decorative patterning. Grabner's rearticulation of eminently pretty textile patterns and her attempts at decorating already highly ornate architectural fragments embellishes the rhetoric shaping the conventional values of invention and originality, albeit it an arch sense of humor.

Grabner and Margaret Andera's co-curated exhibition, *50 Paintings*, is on view at the Milwaukee Art Museum concurrently with this show. We are excited to take this opportunity to view Grabner's newest paintings in context with her curatorial investigation of painting today.

On the occasion of Michelle's exhibition, Green Gallery Press is releasing a new book of poetry by Chuck Stebelton. *One Hundred Patterns and Three Heuristics* responds and corresponds to Grabner's late 2021 exhibition by the same title, inspired by the artist's perpetual interest in patterns of collective continuance within fields of wondrous difference. In *One Hundred Patterns and Three Heuristics* we see an exacting use of quotation, repetition, and difference in the pattern field where language harmonizes with itself: Echo, regard this // House finch, / rosefinch, fringilline.

Landscape, habitat, flora, fauna, art. Each of these things can be fragmented to a perilously small presence as priority and bandwidth are granted to so-called "information" at the expense of intimacy and direct observation. Here poetry is a preserve of presence and humor, human emotion and attention to language. 112 pages, available at The Green Gallery.

A recent critical analysis of Grabner's work was published in *Artforum* October 2023

by Jan Avgikos

*There's plenty of humor in Michelle Grabner's art. Whether in the cheerful gingham patterns she collects and parlays into paintings, the everyday objects she deposits in her sculptures, the rigorous yet buoyant formalism, or the tricky maneuvers she orchestrates between the real and the representational, it was all on display. The artist touted her exhibition here as a retrospective, with the caveat that all the work on display was made in 2023. Indeed, everything old is new again—an important ethos that goes to the conceptual heart of her intentionality.*

*More than three decades of practice are distilled into sixteen untitled pieces that articulate Grabner's enduring interest in vernacular patterns drawn from domestic life, which she channels into formats that originate in high modernism—grids, Color Field paintings, and assemblage. She pairs throwaway found objects with materials that signify great value, contrasting the mass-produced with the made by hand. The apparent collapsing of hierarchies (craft/art, high/low), staged over and over again, evokes a philosophical position once advanced by historian Alois Riegl, who argued that the creative urge manifests itself in both great art and the humblest artifact, and that all systems of pattern making, existing in continuous circulation and change, are unoriginal—invented by no one but used by everyone.*

*Textiles are important markers in Grabner's art, particularly found crochets, which here comprised more than half the works in the show. One method of production for her ongoing series of "Indexical" paintings, 1992–, involves mis-stretching a piece of crochet over a gessoed canvas, then spray-painting it (via an often an elaborate process) before removing it, producing a negative or ghost image of the design. Grabner's compositions dazzle with intricate geometries—fractal arrays of flowers, starbursts, swirls, spirals—all of which emerge from deep histories of ornamentation that go back into antiquity and loop forward to grandmothers' afghans. The finished paintings—presented individually and in series—are pale, muted. Her pastel colors fuse with the evanescent whiteness of the works' grounds, softening the clarity of the stenciling. The results are mesmerizingly out of focus, atmospheric. The blur triggers a nanosecond of dizziness and delirium, with the potential to induce a kind of experiential synesthesia—indeed, one can "feel" the artist's seeing.*

*The leftover crochets, now the by-products of the painting process, are recycled again as templates for a selection of wall-mounted, cast-bronze sculptures. Four were included in the show, each replicating a folded bundle of the delicate, weblike cloths, their lacy patterns highlighted with white paint, which glows against the works' polychromed patinas. Loaded with commemorative value, they solicit a meditation on how we embrace the past and bring it forward, which Grabner identifies as the ethical ground of her practice. She valorizes order, predictability, regularity, security—core concerns that suffused every aspect of this presentation.*

*The type of gingham-printed lid that ornaments certain commercial jam jars is one of her studio staples. It is emblematic of vernacular patterning and is infinitely polysemic. Gingham was also the basis for a large tondo painting here, sixty inches in diameter, of a tight checkerboard motif rendered on burlap in white, red, and pink. The rough warp and weft of the fabric confounds the artist's precision, but Grabner exploits this failing by highlighting the irregularities with complementary green paint, a comical addition that makes the work's surface seem as though it is fraying right before our eyes.*

*Another humorous note was struck by an eight-foot-tall slab of walnut held upright by a pair of giant bright-blue metal bookends—facsimiles of the type found in office-supply stores. The sculpture is ornamented on both sides with playful arrangements of sundry elements, such as jam-jar and garbage-can lids, as well as circular forms wrought in silver, marble, and bronze. Like bubbles rising to the surface of the ocean, or celestial orbs constellating in the sky, they flirt with weightlessness, the sensation of which is enhanced by the flow of the wood grain. Elsewhere, a pair of long horizontal wooden plaques proposed a similar reverie with assortments of bronze-cast lids (or those taken directly off jars of Smucker's) plus a couple of bronze sandwich cookies and silver disks. The roundels seem to ramble and roll along, slightly out of alignment while comfortably in place—like everything in Grabner's art. That temperament was one of the big takeaways from this "retrospective." Her work is critically engaged, yes, but it allows us the pleasures of meaningful distraction—and hence, the opportunity to see the world anew.*