

## Nan Montgomery | *Diametric Abstractions*

January 10th - February 22nd, 2025

Sebastian Gladstone is proud to present *Diametric Abstractions*, Nan Montgomery's first exhibition with the gallery. The show brings together a body of eight canvases painted from 2005-2017. These works encapsulate Montgomery's practice as a hard edge abstractionist as it developed over this later stage of her career. Nan Montgomery (b. 1935) has constructed bold geometric paintings since the 1950s, subverting the systems of hard edge abstraction in measures both subtle and apparent. Drawing on motifs from Color Field painting, Abstract Expressionism, and Minimalism for over 65 years, Montgomery resolves oppositions and uses color intuitively as a form of communication and a method to achieve unity. In like manner, historic and personal events have informed Montgomery's recent work. While this exhibition stands in dialogue with her varied predecessors and influences, it captures Montgomery as an artist who diverges from these very traditions.

Growing up in the town of Walpole, New Hampshire, Montgomery spent her childhood drawing, later studying printmaking at the Boston Museum School, and eventually transferring to Yale for a Painting BFA. There, she studied with German American artist, designer, and educator Josef Albers, renowned for his iconic *Homage to the Square* series that delved into monochromatism and visual perception. The artist community of Washington, DC also shaped her formal direction. She studied with abstract sculptor Anne Truitt at the Corcoran, a notable artist whose towering monochromatic columns are emblematic of Minimalism. Painter Gene Davis was another important professor for Montgomery at the Corcoran, an artist best known for his role in the Washington Color School of the 1950s-1970s. Painter Leon Berkowitz's feedback at the school likewise held notable impact, guiding her painterly direction throughout her career.

Crosses, circles, squares, and triangles hold symbolic meaning for Montgomery that connect her origins with geometric abstraction. *Intersection IV* (2017) presents an orange cross overlaid with red and black lines on a white canvas. This configuration hints at the cardinal directions of north, east, south, and west, the work evoking an abstracted, multihued compass. Within the geometric form of the cross, the artist conjures Earth's directions, winds, and relationship to the sun. Here, the artist recalls the New England landscape and woods of her youth. The movement of the sun, and its influence on light, shadow, and color materializes.

In this exhibition, vertical bisection is a major structural component for Montgomery, where she divides each canvas into two or more color swathes. The artist recalls early encounters with Barnett Newman's *Zips* series—a revolutionary structural formation in the 1950s—where a narrow strip divides the canvas into two fields. Yet Montgomery diverges from Newman's spare, even compositions. In some works, like *Trajectory* (2005), her bifurcations edge dangerously close to a canvas' edge, and in others, abstract and familiar shapes appear in her expanses. The visual devices of canonical abstraction like this meticulous division of space have remained constant through Montgomery's career, yet in newer works the artist often disrupts their aesthetic tenets, producing paintings that defy the canon. In *Trajectory II* (2007), for example, an orange and pink bar clings to the edge of a picture plane depicting a blue, sky-like arc above a piece of white moon. For the artist, these schematics mirror the binaries present in her own day to day, like female vs. male, or the natural vs. the built world, or light vs. dark.

Montgomery is a master of contrast. Opposing color compositions recur throughout the exhibition. Here, her canvases are often reminiscent of bright landscapes or moody night scenes. Most striking is the artist's idiosyncratic play between background and foreground, where divergent colors vibrate in a spiritual harmony. In *Twain* (2010), two orange long stemmed daylilies bisect a deep black canvas. In *Trajectory* (2005), a sweeping ribbon-like arc appears against a lilac blue reminiscent of a joyous, clear day. Montgomery's recent paintings suggest a new attention to time, and the light and dark of the days as they pass.

The works in *Diametric Abstractions* cast light on Montgomery's lyrical sensibility. In the undulating lines of *Polyphony* (2014), three coursing ribbons surge from the bottom of a canvas to its top. Like a grass trembling in the wind, Montgomery cannot control the twists and the arcs, a desperate growth out of the standard for straight lines and controlled curves. In the soft purple work *Twice Told* (2008), Southern cattail grows akimbo, its leaves like scrawl marks on Montgomery's meticulously split canvas sky. Her painted forms are hard edged, yet somehow still soft.

— Simone Krug