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In abstract painting, a discussion of lines, color, edges

By Edith Newhall
For The Inquirer

Since her last show at Locks Gallery, in 2006, Pat Steir's abstract paintings have become even more allusive to the work of Barnett Newman, and she's also paying homage to Ellsworth Kelly. This is not to say that she is in any way appropriating the minimal abstraction of these 20th-century masters. Instead, you might say that Steir, who has had a very recognizable style of her own for more than two decades, is having a conversation in paint on canvas with Newman and Kelly. To simplify matters, she's divided all her new canvases in half, an organizing principle deployed by both artists at various times.



Pat Steir's "Yellow and Blue" exhibits her splattering effect, with a nod to fellow artists Barnett Newman and Ellsworth Kelly.

Steir has been referencing Newman and his "zips" - those vertical stripes of color that divided his monochromatic canvases - for some time now, though she keeps the edges of her stripes soft, splashy and blurry. Kelly's more recent influence on Steir seems to have encouraged her to pursue a starker contrast between her combination of grays and blacks and bright reds and yellows - canvases that can bring Mondrian to mind as well.

In Spectrum Painting, Red and Blue, and Yellow and Blue, three paintings composed entirely of colors, Steir puts vivid reds, oranges, yellows, blues and greens through her own blizzardy paint application - as organic a handling of paint as Kelly's is chaste (Newman was a little less tidy than Kelly is). In color, the splattering effect she has achieved so memorably in white on black and silver - and which can, in fact, bring to mind a snowstorm - suggests a meditation on the blurred line between colors, compositions, and artists' signature styles.

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