

An abstract painting featuring a large, textured yellow-orange shape in the upper left, a white shape in the center, and a red shape in the lower right. The background is a mix of light and dark tones with visible brushstrokes.

PATRICIA SPERGEL

## Patricia Spergel

*Allusions:  
Paintings & Monotypes*

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Essay by Tom Wachunas

**THE PAINTING CENTER**

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## Looking at Looking

*“There is a sense of anticipation in the works. Forms surface and submerge, press against one another as if for support or come together as if magnetically, sexually attracted. In these works, idiosyncratic markings disrupt and energize the expansiveness of the surfaces and the solidity of the shapes, imbuing the paintings with a quirky sense of humor...”* - Patricia Spergel

We are living in a world increasingly stooped by the weight of accumulated visual data that both demands and divides our attention. The sheer ubiquity of images can be so overwhelming as to leave us floundering in rivers of superficiality. Saturated by the common and familiar, we can become desensitized to the truly extraordinary or mesmerizing. As our imaginations might slip into a state of complacent dormancy, we're numbed. We might notice things, but not really see them. And in our rush to do so, we often look too fast.

I've always respected non-objective abstract painting for its probative descriptions of what is not immediately evident, yet still essential in embracing the visible world. In its most expressive manifestations, it is a genre uniquely suited to rendering – and often reconciling - life's most vexing dichotomies: chaos and order, harmony and dissonance, disciplined rationality and intuition. Comprehending it first requires our willingness as viewers to click on our pause buttons, as it were, and take the time necessary to fully engage protracted moments of discovery and revelation.

The particular type of abstraction practiced by painter Patricia Spergel is, then, an ardent commitment to slowing down long enough to let paint be paint as her imagery emerges through time. But it's not an illustrative imagery of a static world. What we see aren't completed scenes or finished objects that magically appeared intact on the

surface of the canvas. Look long, look slow. There's a history, an evolution. An evidence trail. These oil paintings are exuberant records of Spergel's intuitive decisions in response to how her utterly luscious colors might blend or conflict, to the variable detailing and scale of shapes vying for our attention, to shifting figure/ground dynamics, to the lightness or heaviness of touch and line. There are the rhythmic motions of pulling or pushing the brush across a swath of thick or thinned-out paint, now quickly, now slowly...of scraping, dragging, washing, of covering up, exposing, and covering up again.

Neither monumental nor intimidating in scale (no larger than about 3' on a side), the paintings are nevertheless big enough to immerse us in a marvelous equipoise of real work and real play. Here is a thoughtful and intimate confluence of drama and humor, of silences and transfixing noises.

Spergel's painterly vernacular is certainly in some ways a codified articulation of private experiences, including her sensations and memories of people, places, and things. It's important to keep in mind that for as much as an abstract painter is in dialogue with process, method and materials, the painting itself can and should be an invitation for us to enter a conversation, to have an experience in real time. In that sense, looking at a painting should be an RSVP moment. In our own act or method of looking, we can create for ourselves a memorable experience in its own right.

The late, great painter, Richard Diebenkorn, once observed, “It is not a matter of painting life. It's a matter of giving life to a painting.” And it's a matter that Patricia Spergel has clearly taken to heart.

Tom Wachunas, 2018

*Bolted*, 2017  
Oil on canvas  
30 x 32 inches



*Diving*, 2018  
Oil on canvas  
16 x 20 inches







*Little Creatures*, 2018  
Oil on canvas  
15 x 18 inches

*Purple Hat*, 2018  
Oil on canvas  
18 x 24 inches



*Ivy Drip*, 2017  
Oil on canvas  
30 x 32 inches





*Boundary*, 2013-17  
Oil on canvas  
36 x 40 inches



*Danube Morning*, 2017  
Oil on canvas  
20 x 24 inches



*Ghost Country 1*, 2017  
Oil based monotype  
Image size: 10 x 13 inches



## Patricia Spergel

Patricia Spergel was born in 1960 in Philadelphia and graduated from Cornell University in 1983 with a B.A. in French linguistics and a B.F.A. in printmaking. After living and working in both San Francisco and Philadelphia, she moved to New York in 1988 and received her M.F.A. in painting from the School of Visual Arts in 1990. After graduation, Ms. Spergel had a studio for eleven years in the meatpacking district in NYC and then moved her studio to the Westchester Arts Council building in White Plains, NY in 2001. While focusing on painting in her studio, she has also done extensive work with monotypes at the Center for Contemporary Printmaking in Norwalk, CT. In 2004, the artist was invited by her alma mater to do a one person exhibition at the Tjaden Gallery at Cornell University. She has also been included in numerous group shows nationally and internationally. Spergel was included in the Northeast edition of New American Paintings in 2011 and was a highlighted artist in July 2014 on the 365artists365days blog. She had a two person show in January 2017 at The Painting Center with Sarah Lutz titled *A Conversation Afloat*, and she had a one-person exhibition at Kent State University at Stark in September 2017 titled: *Patricia Spergel: Peeking Through*. The artist has also curated several group exhibitions, most recently *Parallel Practices* at Western Connecticut State University in Danbury, CT and *Cultivate Your Own Garden* at The Painting Center. Spergel lives and works in Westchester County, NY.

[www.patriciaspergel.com](http://www.patriciaspergel.com)  
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Studio View, July 2018

