

The background is a complex, abstract composition of overlapping geometric shapes and lines. The colors are vibrant and varied, including shades of yellow, orange, red, green, blue, purple, and brown. The shapes are mostly polygons and triangles, some of which are filled with fine, parallel lines, giving the overall appearance a textured, layered effect. The lines and shapes intersect to create a sense of depth and movement.

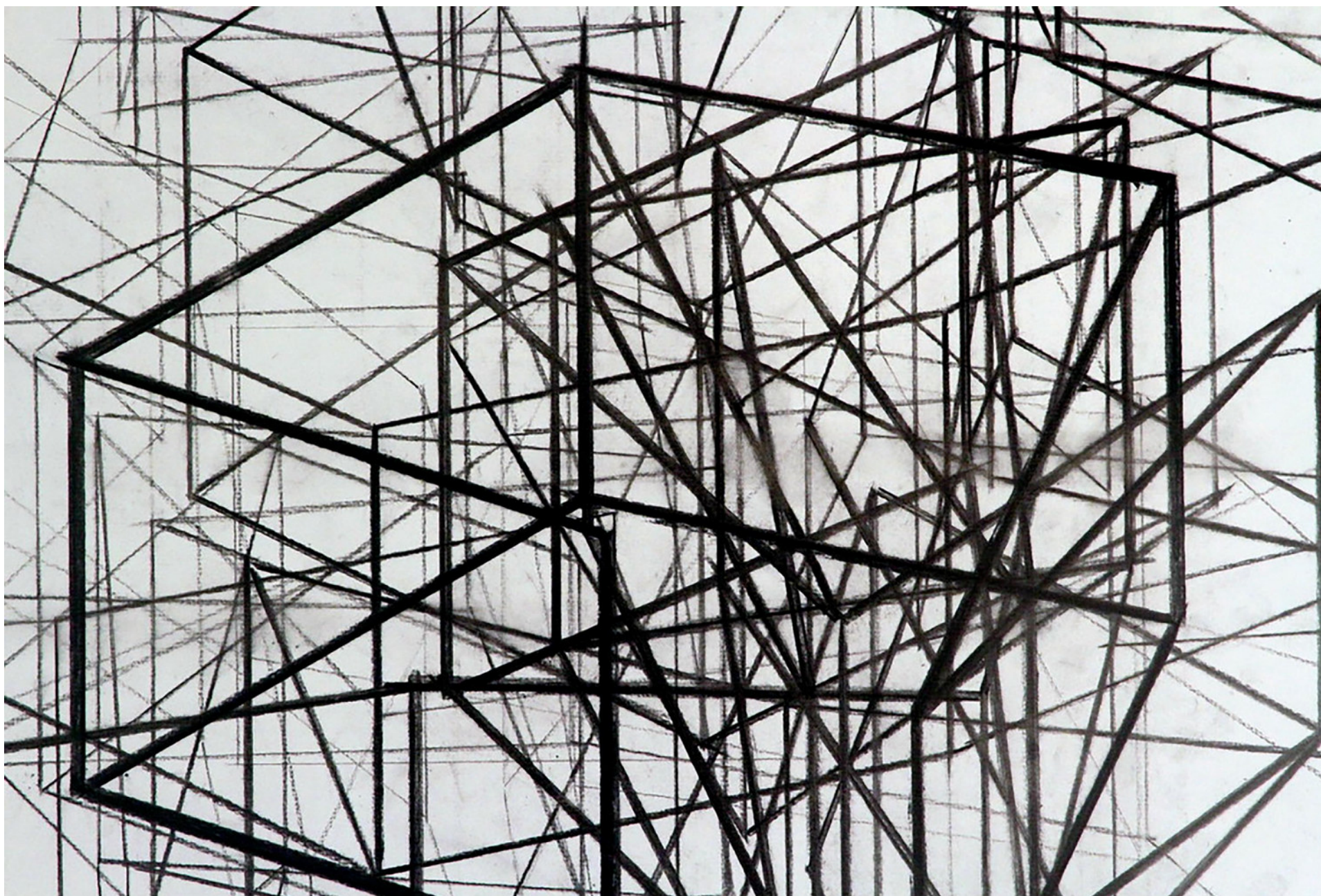
Jeff Perrott

Construction *New* Construction

2019 | 2022



Jeff Perrott  
Construction *New* Construction  
2019 | 2022



[Detail view] *Construction Study #4*, 2020, Charcoal on paper, 22" x 28"

To Alex -  
we get to construct a life together.

**Exhibitions:**

*Construction*

October 26 - November 27, 2019

*New Construction*

September 9 - October 22, 2022



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## Content:

- 6 *Something Else*, Steve Locke and Jeff Perrott in conversation
- 16 *Construction* 2019
- 32 *New Construction* 2022
- 46 Biography
- 50 Acknowledgments

[Detail view] *Construction (Cosmic)*, 2022, Acrylic on linen, 82" x 62"





# Something Else

## Steve Locke and Jeff Perrott in conversation

**SL:** Jeff, I never get tired of looking at your paintings. I am always struck by the use of color in your paintings. It is not just that the quality of the color is pleasing to the eye, but to my thinking, the paintings seem structured by color and I mean this in an almost architectural way. Sure there is a more angular sort of activity in these new works, but in all of the work it seems that color is used as a way to create a scaffolding for the activity of the paintings. Am I nuts? Is this something you think about?

**JP:** Yes. I'm happy you started with *looking* and *enjoyment*—because I think both are crucial to the conceptual unfolding of the work, and intimately tied to it. It's in this sense that, yes, that the paintings are structured by the language of color—and that the color is conditioned of course by the geometry, scale, the contingent process, etc. *Scaffolding* is a great word to describe how the main elements of the painting work together.

I often create what I think of as overdetermined color situations in the paintings—like the cadmium yellow ground in *Construction (Sun Machine)*<sup>17</sup>. As you move from piece to piece, your eyes adjust—there's a different unfolding that happens in each, and you may become aware of the constructive quality of your perception, as it deals with difference. No color situation is natural or neutral or given, but is constructed.

**SL:** One of the things about the work is that it looks so simple but when I try to think about doing one myself it seems impossible. I would not even know where to start. Do the paintings start out with a plan or are they complete intuitive responses that build on each other? I am not asking that as if it's a binary choice—I guess my real question is how much does the work surprise you when it is completed? Do you have an image of what it is going to be before you start painting?

**JP:** I think of the process as a negotiation between a plan—which includes chance—and my intuitive responses to the situations it offers. The plan *does* constrain the outcome—yet it always surprises me—which, paradoxically enough, is actually a *result* of that plan.

Part of the plan is the color situation. But there are three other things that go into it. First, with the *Construction* project—and this is new—I'm strictly using hard-edged axonometric geometry, or 'parallel perspective', which develops quasi-architectural forms. Second, I'm wrapping the compositions, or continuing forms from one edge of the painting to the opposite edge, taking the picture plane as a continuous field. And third, I'm using the random walk process—the direction of each successive shift or joint connecting the geometric planes is determined by chance. So, there's a plan, which includes contingency—I know and I don't know where things are going. It's a mix of chance, pre-given structure, and intuition—a negotiation among all three. They always exceed the process and the ideas, but are also constrained by the process at the same time.

**SL:** I think the poetics of deciding are interesting here. Like once you make a decision you can't go back on it. It's about a kind of commitment to a course of action that (I fear) is lost in American life right now. The paintings are decisive and don't collapse into a kind of wishy washy gestural abstraction that has infused so much of contemporary painting. But they also have such a sense of embodiment that they repel that kind of "zombie formalism"<sup>1</sup> that assailed so much of the 2000s.

**JP:** Zombie formalism makes me laugh and cry, because, what could be more 'zombie' than the use of chance in abstraction? There's definitely a danger zone there, any time you're working with indeterminacy. How decisive can *chance* be? But I don't see chance as an end in itself, or about abdicating choice, or about some kind of ineffable 'freedom'—but exactly as a decision to engage with contingency in a very concrete way, in order to invent. The interplay of chance and the very specific, concrete choices I'm making—the geometry, color, scale, etc—is what invents, surprises, creates something new. I'm so uninterested in the cynical irony that seemed to bracket a lot of that zombie abstraction. I'm trying to invent and open up a space of thought. Also, I think the works may seem more decisive because of the strict geometry, the hard edges, the taping, and the specific and weird architectural space that it seems to develop. Another part of the sense of *Construction* is that reference to building, constructing space.

**SL:** Do you think this decisiveness in your work is a response to something in particular?

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<sup>1</sup> **Zombie Formalism** is a term coined by art critic Walter Robinson in his 2014 *Artspace* article 'Flipping and the Rise of Zombie Formalism' (April 3, 2014 - [https://www.artspace.com/magazine/contributors/see\\_here/the\\_rise\\_of\\_zombie\\_formalism-52184](https://www.artspace.com/magazine/contributors/see_here/the_rise_of_zombie_formalism-52184)). Robinson deftly noted the explosion in speculative collector-to-collector secondary sales of abstract painting—netting 6- and 7-figure profits—coincided neatly with the complete evacuation of content from the speculated-upon paintings, making them ideal vessels for market value untethered to, and unbothered by, questions of meaning and engagement.

**JP:** I'm not sure I'm responding to something specific, but more of a *zeitgeist*—something that maybe gets captured in that zombie formalist ethos: 'there's nothing new, all we have is repetition of history, cynicism, and irony.' It's something to do with the loss of commitment you describe, and the advance of the kind of 'anything goes' art/politics we're experiencing now, untethered from rationality or a connection to the real. The antidote, I think, starts with a connection to the *real* of experience, and points to a thoughtful, creative unfolding. *Can we construct something new?*

That may seem contradictory for work committed to procedures of indeterminacy. I think indeterminacy *can* construct the new. I'm trying to go beyond a kind of [John] Cagean ontological indeterminacy, which operates on the level 'is it art/is it not art?' and subsumes all specifics. I'm interested in the specifics—where was *4'33"*<sup>2</sup> staged, who 'played', who showed up, what kind of piano—what if it was set on a subway platform, or in the Black Forest? The specific choices all determine a definite field in which an indeterminate something can happen, *but not anything*. It could be different, but not *anything* different. The choices, the constraints, are important. It's in the tension between indeterminacy and the constraints, that the *something else*, the invention, happens.

**SL:** This is what is so important to me in the work. There has been a lot of contemporary abstract painting that looks like it is informed and/or rigorous but in truth is just a reaffirmation of existing modes and methods that have at this point become cliché. What I experience in your work is something akin to what Eva Hesse talks about when she says, "The formal principles are understandable and understood."<sup>3</sup> Everything is on view in the paintings: I can describe everything I am seeing in the work—I understand what paint is and what canvas is and all that stuff—and yet I have no idea how you did this. It's not just artistic whim or "expressionism." It is a kind of mastery that is related to artistic intention. The paint does that because you made it do that. At core the paradox of your paintings is that everything is present in its most recognizable and direct form and I still have no idea what I am looking at or how it is done. You can explain it, but the experience of it goes beyond words.

<sup>2</sup> John Cage's *4'33"* was first performed at Town Hall, New York, in 1955, by David Tudor. The work consists of a performer sitting at a piano without 'playing' for 4 minutes and 33 seconds. For Cage, the chance sounds of the audience, and other noise that occurs during the allotted time for the piece (normally considered to be extraneous to a musical work), in fact construct the work.

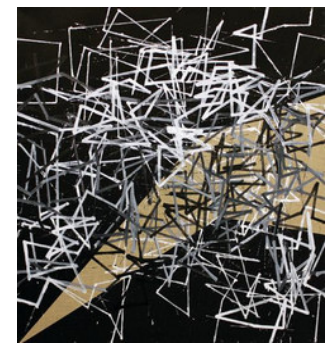
<sup>3</sup> From the artist statement for the exhibition *Eva Hesse: Chain Polymers* at the Fischbach Gallery, New York, NY, November 15–December 5, 1968. The full statement reads: "I would like my work to be non-work. This means that it would find its way beyond my preconceptions. It is my concern to go beyond what I know and what I can know. The formal principles are understandable and understood. It is the unknown quantity from which and where I want to go. It is something, it is nothing."

**JP:** I can point to a method and process and decision-making within that process, a *scaffolding* for an experience, but the experience exceeds all that. The method only explains a process, not the outcome. I can't bottle the experience and put an exact meaning on its label. You're going to have to unscrew the top and drink it. It goes beyond words, yes, but not beyond *knowing*. Can the knowing happen as *experiencing*, in a wordless way? Can't it be just as rigorous and unyielding in its commitment to the specifics of that definite and uncertain unfolding? Can it point beyond the known to possible worlds, to *something else*?

It's a paradox, and this is the tricky part, because if I'm serious about the *something else*—and I am—then it's also important for me to be as explicit as possible. Abstraction that ends up merely 'open' to interpretation or about a vague 'feeling' participates in deeply problematic teleological claims of Modernism. My hope is that the explicit choices in the work form an inferential framework that help make explicit in experiencing the *something else* beyond immediate discursive explication.

**SL:** Let's get back to the work. You were doing these large, undulating curvilinear random walks previous to this work. How did that change come about, though? Was that just the decision to abandon? I don't want to say abandoned drawing, because that's not what I mean; but abandon the sort of the gesture, or find a different kind of gesture?

**JP:** It started at the group show *Black and White*, at LaMontagne Gallery in 2014. The Gallery invited artists who lean heavily on color to work exclusively with black and white. It was an opportunity to do something I had been thinking about—simplifying the random walk connectors to look more like the diagrams you see in scientific textbooks.



The geometry had a different feel, more agitated. Architectonic moments started to show themselves. Suddenly there was deep space, you're looking into something, as opposed to looking at the surface of the object, which was primary in the curvilinear works. That led to a

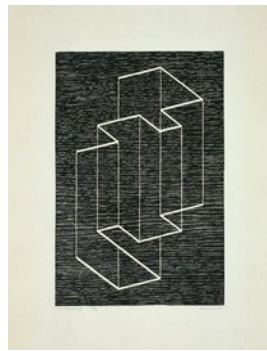
<sup>4</sup> *RW 151 (Burden of Good)*, Jeff Perrott, 2014, oil on linen, 42" x 39".

two-year period of drawing and painting that resulted in the clean, hard edged axonometric volumes, the taping process, the sense of something machine-made.

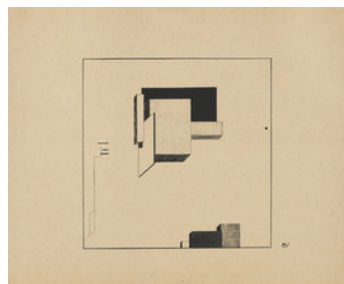
I recognized the geometry as connected to representations of architectural space in traditional Chinese painting,<sup>6</sup> and to Bauhaus exploded isometric drawings,<sup>7</sup> and to Russian constructivist use of it—especially El Lissitzky, in his *Proun* works<sup>8</sup> and his notion of *Pangeometry*.<sup>5</sup> What he referred to as ‘parallel perspective’ he thought of as a way of thinking about and constructing space that could challenge illusionistic, point-perspective space, which centers an individual viewer and view. He didn’t use this language, but he indicated that parallel perspective could decenter and diffuse that subject.



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**SL:** It’s like the space in a David Hockney painting,<sup>9</sup> where you might be the vanishing point. Like the vanishing point might be where the viewer is, and then the painting opens up and closes in these different kinds of ways. I thought of Hockney, specifically because of that geometric structure, but also cause of the radical use of the color. But it’s not about illusion, right? There’s something else going on: you’re positing something about what’s possible and what’s not

<sup>5</sup> El Lissitzky, A. and *Pangeometry*, in Europa Almanach, 1925. Republished at thedetachedgaze.com

<sup>6</sup> *Garden of the Inept Administrator*, Wen Zhengming, 1551, Album of eight leaves; ink on paper, 10 3/8" x 10 3/4". Courtesy of Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Douglas Dillon, 1979.

<sup>7</sup> *Multiplex B*, Josef Albers, 1947, Woodcut, 11 15/16" x 7 7/8". Courtesy of bpk Bildagentur / Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart, Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany / Stefan Altenburger / Art © 2022 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

<sup>8</sup> *Proun 1C from Proun*, El Lissitzky, 1920, Lithograph, 13 17/16" x 17 5/8". Courtesy of Museum of Modern Art. © Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art

possible. *This is what’s available, but now it’s not available.* And that, to me, is a lot more interesting and a lot more exciting. When we first started talking by email, I wrote about getting caught up in looking at the paintings and thinking ‘what? I can’t go that way.’ But there’s an avenue that goes *that way* within the context of the painting. So maybe what I thought wasn’t possible is possible, right?



9

**JP:** Exactly, it’s not about illusion at all—it’s about possibility: the representation of space, and how this geometry positions a viewer, and what it does to the idea and experience of a subject, which presents possibilities of experience that go beyond the familiar.

**SL:** It’s a way of forcing the viewer to be active in making the meaning of the work. So just sitting back here and looking at a picture, the picture is somehow implicating you in its structure.

**JP:** You’re complicit in its structure, yes. Another sense of *Construction*, as a title and orienting name for this project, is that you construct the work from the moment of first perception, through recognition of specific functioning—like the geometry and color—that asks you to make decisions, to take on the possibilities presented and be creative, imaginative. At the same time there’s this openness of possibility, there’s also, as we talked about earlier, a definiteness in the way this functioning unfolds, that guides the imaginative construction.

**SL:** Well, I’m in favor of that sort of definiteness—I’m with Carmen Herrera: ‘here’s the edge, it’s not over here, it’s not over there, it’s right here, this is the edge.’ And being very definite about that. In part, the tape allows you to do that. It’s less about ego—because it’s less about the hand and ‘my mark’, and all that sort of stuff. So it really becomes about these forms. And that feels very new to me.

**JP:** If you look back at the development of the curvilinear *random walk* paintings, they went from very expressive and immediate—all about the presence of my hand—to these very slow and deliberate shapes, where the hand got progressively suppressed; so in a sense I was moving in this

<sup>9</sup> *Nichols Canyon*, David Hockney, 1980, Acrylic on canvas, 84" x 60". Courtesy of Phillips Auctioneers.

direction. My hand virtually disappeared in the first works in the *Construction* project—and then, it re-emerged, but a mark-making bracketed by the geometry, the taping procedure, and the process. I took a lot more out of my hands, and, yes, that puts in question the self, the ego, and the subject, and it certainly foregrounds the shapes. There's less opportunity to get caught up in a mark, and more demand to be caught up in what's concretely there.

**SL:** When I look at the paintings, for example *Construction (Into Air)*,<sup>10</sup> I think 'I know those colors, I know the palette, I can name all that.' And yet the painting is still beyond what I can talk about. That to me is the goal: you make this thing and everything is nameable, everything is knowable, everything is understandable.



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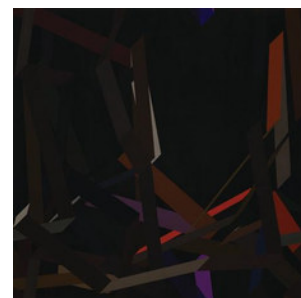
And the painting still takes you beyond its materiality and the identity of the viewer. I look at your paintings and I know that they're you—because I know you. But also, when I look at your paintings, I'm caught up in the experience I'm having. I'm not thinking, 'Oh, I'm looking at a Jeff Perrott right now'—instead I'm thinking, 'are those the same reds? I think those two reds are the same. No, they're not the same red. How did you do that?' And that's a different kind of experience. We were joking earlier about zombie formalism, and how all that sort of stuff came back, that sort of reinvigorated abstract expressionist tropes that look good behind your sofa. But I never got that feeling from your paintings. Your paintings are constantly demanding that you look at them. Because you're constantly positing something.

**JP:** I think I'm positing new spatial possibilities, and painting's ability to model them through the experience, in the articulations of looking, experiencing, imagining, thinking. Everything's available in the unfolding experience. But it also has to do with a way of positing something, that includes the contingent way of composing, which is constantly presenting another possibility for you to contend with.

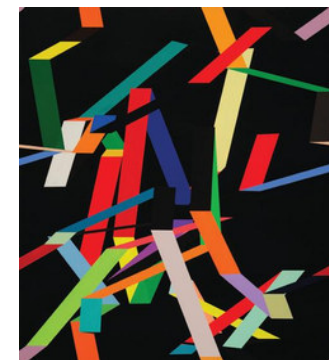
**SL:** And you don't know what's going to happen—you're going in just as blind as I am. And that's the other thing that sort of subtracts the zombie part out of it. There's a coy preciousness in those paintings—I know they're just pretty enough to be in a hotel lobby, but really rigorous enough to demand attention.

<sup>10</sup> *Construction (Into Air)*, Jeff Perrott, 2019, Acrylic on linen, 39" x 42".

There's a weird logic to that, a balance between the two. And that's what I think about in some of the darker paintings, the black paintings like *Construction (Collapse)*,<sup>11</sup> and, particularly, *Construction (Black Lit)*.<sup>12</sup>



11



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There's so many elements going on in *Black Lit*, that I'm thinking, 'this should not work'—and yet it really sets up. I get the feeling of driving at night where there's no street lights, when you suddenly see a neon 'no vacancy' sign at a hotel. It's that kind of sudden shift of light that only really happens in the urban environment. I think Mary Rutherford gets to that, using actual neon in the paintings. But you're just using paint. And it really shouldn't work. It's every color that you're told in color theory class, 'don't put all that together.'

**JP:** Well, that's what I mean by the additive approach: challenging the reductive hierarchies implied by what we're told in color theory class in order to invent a new color experience that increases the articulations in a painting. That invention always gets keyed by putting the color in a particular situation, which may mean narrowing the color space, as in *Collapse*, or expanding it, as in *Black Lit*. Again, the constraint versus the freedom, for me that's the tension that keys the invention.



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**SL:** I think about it differently. With *Construction (Luminous)*,<sup>13</sup> I can understand the relationships, the primary, secondary, tertiary color relationships that are from all that mixed color. With *Construction (Black Lit)* though, I got nothing, except the convincing movement of the space and the arrangement of those reds going up and to the right. There's a weird structure I'm given that somehow makes the color obey.

<sup>11</sup> *Construction (Collapse)*, Jeff Perrott, 2019, Acrylic on canvas, 30 1/2" x 33".

<sup>12</sup> *Construction (Black Lit)*, Jeff Perrott, 2019, Acrylic on canvas, 42" x 39". Private collection.

<sup>13</sup> *Construction (Luminous)*, Jeff Perrott, 2019, Acrylic on canvas, 30 1/2" x 33".

To me that painting is one of the best examples of Josef Albers and color relativity.<sup>14</sup> There are many things in that painting that should be coming forward, but don't.

This moment, for example, in *Black Lit*, this [1], to this [2], to this [3] should not work: there's no way that those three colors should be having the sort of spatial relationship that they're having. But the way they change in temperature and intensity as they move up, and the way that orange starts to become part of that red arch that goes through the entire picture—there's a dynamism in the color here. The companion painting *Construction (Collapse)* has a similar sort of feeling to it, but there's something so radical about *Construction (Black Lit)* that talks very specifically about the attempt to invent a different kind of possibility.



But there's something entirely different going on in the new work—tell me about the white lines in this one [looking at *Construction (Subject)*].<sup>15</sup>

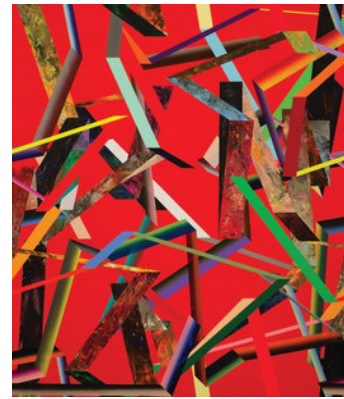


**JP:** The idea of this new body of work is to complicate and problematize the first group of *Construction* work, especially the clarity of the figure-ground relationship in that work. Following from the intertwined random walks in *Construction (Three Body)*<sup>16</sup> and *Construction (Sun Machine)*,<sup>17</sup> I experimented with axonometric planes and these linear, tensile structures in varying scales, both as multiple

<sup>14</sup> See Josef Albers, *Interaction of Color*, Yale Univ Press, 1963, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> *Construction (Subject)*, Jeff Perrott, 2022, Acrylic on linen, 82" x 62".

simultaneous random walks and as parasitic structures that attach themselves to other shapes.



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The new forms start to make more explicit spatial volumes that are implicit in the first body of work. Also, the different opaque, tensile, transparent and 'fall of light' treatments get more clearly articulated and yet pushed together more aggressively. The space is teeming and claustrophobic—there's much more for the eye to contend with. And, obviously, in a few of these I'm pushing the scale up as well, which offers a different relation to the body.

**SL:** In these paintings, I feel like everything is contained by the rectangle. I don't think that there's a world outside of the edges of the painting. Is that still something that's important to you?

**JP:** Yes, the surface is still treated as a continuous field, so that every form that penetrates the edge continues at the opposite edge—the painting could theoretically be tiled infinitely. At the same time, the fact that it's treated as a continuous surface doesn't change the gestalt of the picture plane—it can't, because that *gestalt* is part of the normative language of the way we see abstract painting. But the continuity from edge to edge is recognizable, it's there to see, and I think can open another consideration *about* the edge, about that *gestalt*, about how the edge functions in painting and how it can possibly function differently than expected.

**SL:** We don't get to the end, like there's no end.

**JP:** Exactly. Feels kind of like the state we're all in right now...

**SL:** You go off one side, and you're back where you started.

<sup>16</sup> *Construction (Three Body)*, Jeff Perrott, 2019, Acrylic on linen, 60" x 54". Private collection.

<sup>17</sup> *Construction (Sun Machine)*, Jeff Perrott, 2019, Acrylic on linen, 54" x 60".

**JP:** So the idea that I started with long ago was to try to make a non-hierarchical painting.

**SL:** Yeah, good luck with that.

**JP:** (Laughs) Yeah, sure, but to do something that would disrupt the received, reductive way of seeing—which goes back to some of the discussion of Modernism that we had in our email exchange. Where Modernism went really wrong was in the need to dominate the picture plane and contain and subordinate the possibilities of color and shape, for example, within the acceptable hierarchies and essences as described by, say, Greenberg, and in doing so to purge all history and content from form—which, I think, formally under-girded the colonial theft much Modernism was built on, while justifying its ‘enlightenment’ violence. That persisted, I would argue, through minimalism. I remember in the early 90s looking at minimalism, and I thought, ‘Okay, well, there’s something that’s sort of seems to be non-hierarchical, that’s committed to egalitarianism,’ but it’s actually not—it just flattens and homogenizes all difference in a totalizing way.

To me, what’s truly non-hierarchical doesn’t suppress difference but embraces it and equality in full—it’s additive, as opposed to reductive, it continues as opposed to stopping, it’s promiscuous instead of redemptive. At the same time, paradoxically, constraints are necessary, because pure difference, in itself—‘anything goes’—is just a different form of *flattening*. In my view what’s truly ‘non-hierarchical’ simultaneously recognizes and celebrates radical difference and radical equality. I honestly don’t know what that looks like—but the work in some modest way is trying to find out.

For me this goes back to something we were discussing before, about dealing with the language at hand, the received language of abstraction, and also acknowledging that those hierarchies are the legacy that’s given. That’s why my path has been to attempt a kind of *Trojan Horse* critique, to try to embed a critique of those modernist norms in an experience that participates in them. At any rate, to thread the needle between rehearsing the same tired hierarchies, on the one hand, and capitulating to some false egalitarian vision, on the other.

**SL:** It’s so amazing—it’s either spiritual or fascism, one or the other. It seems like, after all this time, we could find another way. The idea that ‘oh, it’s just a beautiful meditation on color and light, and we’re all one.’ Or it’s Frank Stella with the black line. I’m highly critical of the whole Modernist project, really, but I also love that stuff at the same time. Because I get pleasure out of it—who, let’s be honest, doesn’t like to be dominated every once in a while? That’s just part of what it

means to be human. Well, it’s great to take charge sometimes too.

**JP:** It’s a very stable way of seeing the world, right? I mean, you know where you are, and you know where you are with respect to the hierarchy. So there is something attractive about that, or maybe comforting, to not have to deal with the uncertainty of another way of organizing things, one we can’t imagine. This is the thing about presenting possibilities of experience in art—how do we construct the seemingly impossible if not through imaginative construction? Of course the risk is always that the imaginative spins away from us and any real possibilities.

**SL:** So that’s the thing about Hockney. It’s like saying, ‘Alright, now you’re *in* the picture plane. Now you’re *on* the picture plane. Now you’re *the focus of* the picture’—he’s shifting you around, constantly. A big part of it is him wrestling the concept for his whole life. But then you look at someone like Julie Mehretu—symbols and psychology and maps and all these things to talk about, the organization of systems, the organization of power. Okay, so that’s gone. And Frank Stella is gone. And gestural, abstract Impressionism, like Milton Resnick, is gone. So what do we have then?

Now we’re in this place where we’re trying to find a system. A system where we’re suspicious of systems. A logic where we’re suspicious of logic. A structure where we’re suspicious of a structure. And so it’s this constant back and forth. And instead of all of that stuff canceling each other out, you’re actually using all of those contradictions to build something. And that’s the thing I think the newer paintings do: they have all this stuff that’s baked into them, but they also are this fantastic ride as paintings—you’re actually engaged with the object, not in terms of any dogma that it represents. You think ‘How the hell did that guy make that color? Do that in that scenario?’ And to me, that’s enough. Sometimes, that’s enough.

**JP:** Yes, absolutely. As we talked about earlier, that experience—the ride—is where everything begins and returns to. You can take all the theory and thought that go into to this, and all the influences and references and all of it—the experience exceeds all of that. But not because theory doesn’t count, or because we’re after some kind of vague, ineffable feeling. Experience and theory are not separate—to borrow from Sellars, you could say they’re like the manifest and scientific versions of things,<sup>18</sup> they point to each other.

<sup>18</sup>See Wilfred Sellars, “*Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man*”, 1962. In *The Space of Reasons: Selected Essays of Wilfred Sellars*, Ed. Kevin Scharp and Robert Brandom, 2007, Harvard Univ. Press

I care about an experience opening a space of thought that wouldn't otherwise be available—but it's not in an essay or any of this talking about the work. The space of thought is in the experience. No, the experience *is* the space of thought. I just hope the works are generous enough to create that space of thought/experience and engage the viewer in the way I'm talking about.

**SL:** I think they become generous because of what you're *withholding*. I think that there's something about saying, 'I'm gonna sacrifice gesture, because I want to make a more definite kind of experience'. I had a teacher who said, it's very hard to have a vivid surface and a vivid subject at the same time. If there's a really agitated surface, you want to pay attention to the surface. But if the image is important, then you have to suppress something about the activity, so people can see the image. The paintings are almost Baroque—they offer so much that you can't dismiss them with theory. You can't simply say, 'oh, that's about a response to Greenberg.' In this painting [looking at *Construction (Denatural)*]<sup>20</sup> there's a weird concession to painting light in space—I feel like I'm looking at a structure floating in space. But now I'm not, I'm looking at flat shapes on a rectangle. Those two things happen, and you won't give up either one of them—I get to have both. And that allows me to have experience free from dogma. And I'm a big fan of theory, too. But I have never thought that art theory was separate from theories about how we live our lives. That's the difference.

**JP:** I think for a while in art meaning has become detached from experience, as if any attention to perceptual issues, or sensation—visual and otherwise—is considered unimportant, or even dangerous. It's as if the painting or the artwork is in a hermetically sealed chamber—and then there's a *meaning* over here that tells us what to think. And then, *we've got it*, and we can efficiently bypass the experience, the encounter, with all its difference and uncertainty—not to mention the labor required to look, consider, think, and construct meaning. You can just kind of *know*, without the risk of being in front of something that you have to actually engage with. I think *that's* the dangerous thing, because that *is* theory canceling experience. In my work the ideas unfold from the experience, you have to risk the ride.

**SL:** The work is not benign. It's not something decorating the room. It's something actually changing the room. This is the other thing that I wanted to talk to you about—in dealing with the linear elements, we're also talking about the seeds of architecture, planes, representations of space. So when the paintings exist in a space, they start to change the space that they're in. I start to look at the windows differently when I look at the 'windows' in the painting. If I were going to make

a horror movie about your work, it would be in a house. And when I came back to the house, the whole house would be the painting. The world of your painting would just keep expanding into the lived environment.

**JP:** (laughs) Horror is not a bad way to think about the way the paintings function! A horror film uses the uncanny, the impossible becoming the possible, and vice versa, to suspend and upend the familiar—which is the horror. Obviously, the folded axonometric planes are impossible as architecture, but they use familiar elements of architecture to invent or point to possible space, which resonates with the space we find ourselves in and can provoke a rethinking of that space.

**SL:** This one almost starts to feel Euclidean [looking at *Construction (Natural)*]<sup>19</sup>, that's the thing. Is that a different direction?



19



20

**JP:** Yes and no. The axonometric geometry is still the same. But what I'm introducing are varying scales of planes, all intertwined, with variable treatments. The *Natural* part is the stability established by the consistent verticals—there's something grounding you to the 'natural' relationship of those verticals to the rectangular picture plane. Whereas its twin, *Denatural*, is built on consistent diagonals, which cut against the orientation of the picture plane, and so unground and float the forms. They're both comprised of the same elements, essentially, which shows how a simple shift in orientation changes everything.

**SL:** Also, in these two paintings, [looking at *Construction (Natural)* and *Construction (Denatural)*] there's also a concession to this idea of a lit object in space. And that's what feels different than the previous paintings — these paintings seem to be embracing a figure ground relationship, that things are unfolding within a space or holding within a space.

<sup>19</sup>*Construction (Natural)*, Jeff Perrott, 2021-2022, Acrylic on linen, 42" x 39".

<sup>20</sup>*Construction (Denatural)*, Jeff Perrott, 2022, Acrylic on linen, 42" x 39".

**JP:** It's a different type of figure-ground situation. In the first body of work, those unfolding elements against the empty backgrounds created an alienated, disembodied space. In the *New Construction* paintings that clear empty background is gone, and with the scaled elements it's more crowded and full, more immersive. To me the figurative elements are embedded in a ground that feels more contested and contingent. Larger planes keep shifting and re-framing smaller elements, the line structures attaching to various forms are relentless. If the first body of work offered a sense of difference in a figure, against a ground, the newer work maybe presents a sense of social difference, a kind of contested social space where different elements continually intervene on and interact with each other. It's a kind of convergence of very different elements, each seemingly trying to create a different space.

**SL:** I feel like these paintings actually do the Hockney thing I spoke of earlier: they seem to project out from the surface more, and they encircle me. I feel like that painting [*Natural*] goes behind me as the viewer. And that's what I mean—if I turned around, I'd still be inside that painting. And that's different than the previous works. Those still have that vertical component, which makes me look at them. But this one, I think you're right, I think it's because of the development of taking that flat background color and pushing it and pulling it in different directions—that's what creating a kind of dynamic environment. It's really beautiful.

[Looking at *Construction (Subject)*] This work reminds me again of Julie Mehretu's work. I feel like the thing that is exciting about her work is the expanse of it. It really has something to do with the color and the scale. But in your work—I don't mean this in a negative way—I don't know how big it is. I feel like I'm looking at it and it's very easy for me to get lost in your paintings; but I'm very conscious of the beginning, middle and end of her paintings.

**JP:** I love Julie Mehretu's early works, with the fragmented, geometric shapes in ceaseless motion. To me those works present a deep, vast space that situates me both in and as a witness to that motion, and the geometric elements do suggest fragmented architectonic form. That's where I think my work connects with them, in that sense—something's being spun apart or getting constructed, you're never sure. But the space in my work is I think less certain, and more intimate to the viewer, you feel like you're in the presence of something immediate. That loss of a beginning, middle, and end is in part a result of the process—you feel like you're dropped into the middle of something that may be coming to be, or disintegrating, or being constructed, or collapsing. That's the edge here that I'm dancing on. And that's why the

engagement, from moment to moment throughout the work, needs to be sustained—it means maintaining difference throughout, which is hard. I think I'm asking a lot, since it doesn't have the stopping point that says, 'here you are.' But for me it is the 'enough' you talked about....

**Steve Locke** is a New York-based artist whose paintings, drawings, sculptures, and installations live at the intersections of portraiture, identity, and modernism. From the seductive nature of his paintings to the familiar but unreliable record of his photographs, he directs our gaze to help us look critically and unflinchingly at our shared history.



21

Locke was born in 1963 in Cleveland, Ohio and raised in Detroit, Michigan. He received his M.F.A. in 2001 from Massachusetts College of Art and Design. In 2020, he was awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. Solo exhibitions include the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, and Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, among others. He has done projects with For Freedoms, Kickstarter, the Boston Public Library, and P.S. Satellites/Prospect IV in New Orleans and has had gallery exhibitions with Alexander Gray Associates, yours mine & ours, Samsøñ, LaMontagne Gallery, Gallery Kayafas, and Mendes Wood. He attended residencies with the City of Boston (2018), the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (2016), The MacDowell Colony (2015), and Skowhegan (2002). Locke is a recipient of grants from Pollock-Krasner Foundation, Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, and Art Matters Foundation. His work has been reviewed in Artforum, Art in America, The Boston Globe, and The New Yorker, and his writing has been published in Artforum as well as in museum catalogues. Locke is a Professor of Fine Arts at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, NY. He is represented by Alexander Gray Associates, New York, and LaMontagne Gallery, Boston.

<sup>21</sup> *Homage to the Auction Block #44 - respite*, Steve Locke, 2020, Gouache on panel, 16" x 16". Private collection.









# Construction 2019

IDetail view| *Construction (Into Air)*, 2019, Acrylic on linen, 39" x 42"



***Construction (Utopian)***

2019

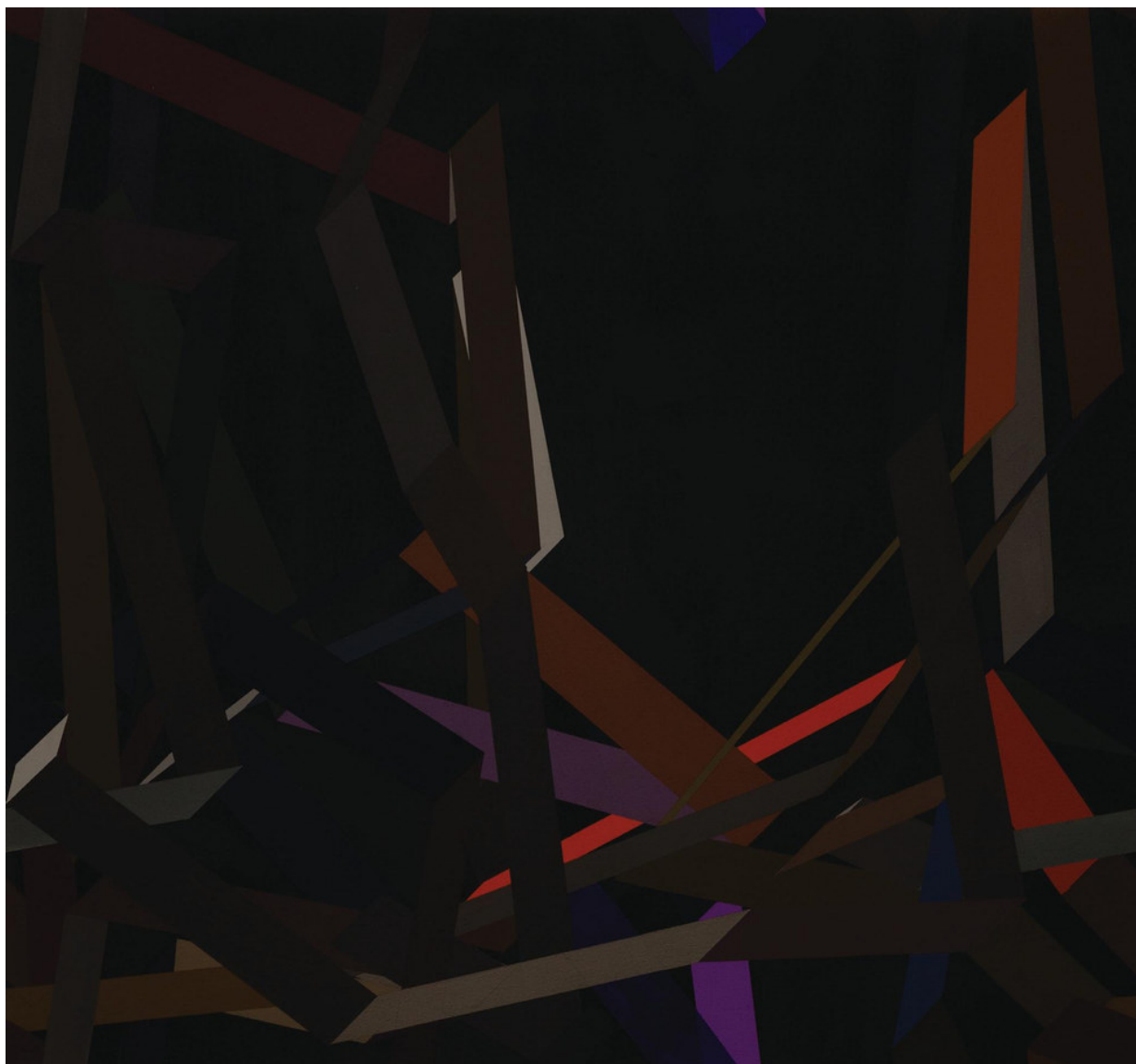
Acrylic on canvas

33" x 30.5"

Private collection



***Construction (Luminous)***  
2019  
Acrylic on canvas  
30.5" x 33"



***Construction (Collapse)***

2019

Acrylic on canvas

30.5" x 33"



***Construction (Vehicle)***  
2019  
Acrylic on canvas  
42" x 39"  
Private collection



***Construction (Figural)***  
2019  
Acrylic on canvas  
42" x 39"  
Private collection





***Construction (Pink)***

2019

Acrylic on linen

33" x 30.5"

***Construction (Black Lit)***

2019

Acrylic on canvas

42" x 39"

Private collection





***Construction (Disappeared)***

2019

Acrylic on linen

30.5" x 33"

Private collection



***Construction (Into Air)***

2019

Acrylic on linen

39" x 42"

Private collection

***Construction (Three Body)***

2019

Acrylic on linen

60" x 54"

Private collection



*Construction (Sun Machine)*  
2019  
Acrylic on linen  
50" x 64"









# New Construction 2022

IDetail view| *Construction (Into Air)*, 2019, Acrylic on linen, 39" x 42"

*Construction (Pharmakon)*, 2019 - 2020, Acrylic on linen, 60" x 110"





***Construction (Subject)***

2022

Acrylic on linen

82" x 62"





***Construction (Natural)***  
2021 - 2022  
Acrylic on linen  
42" x 39"





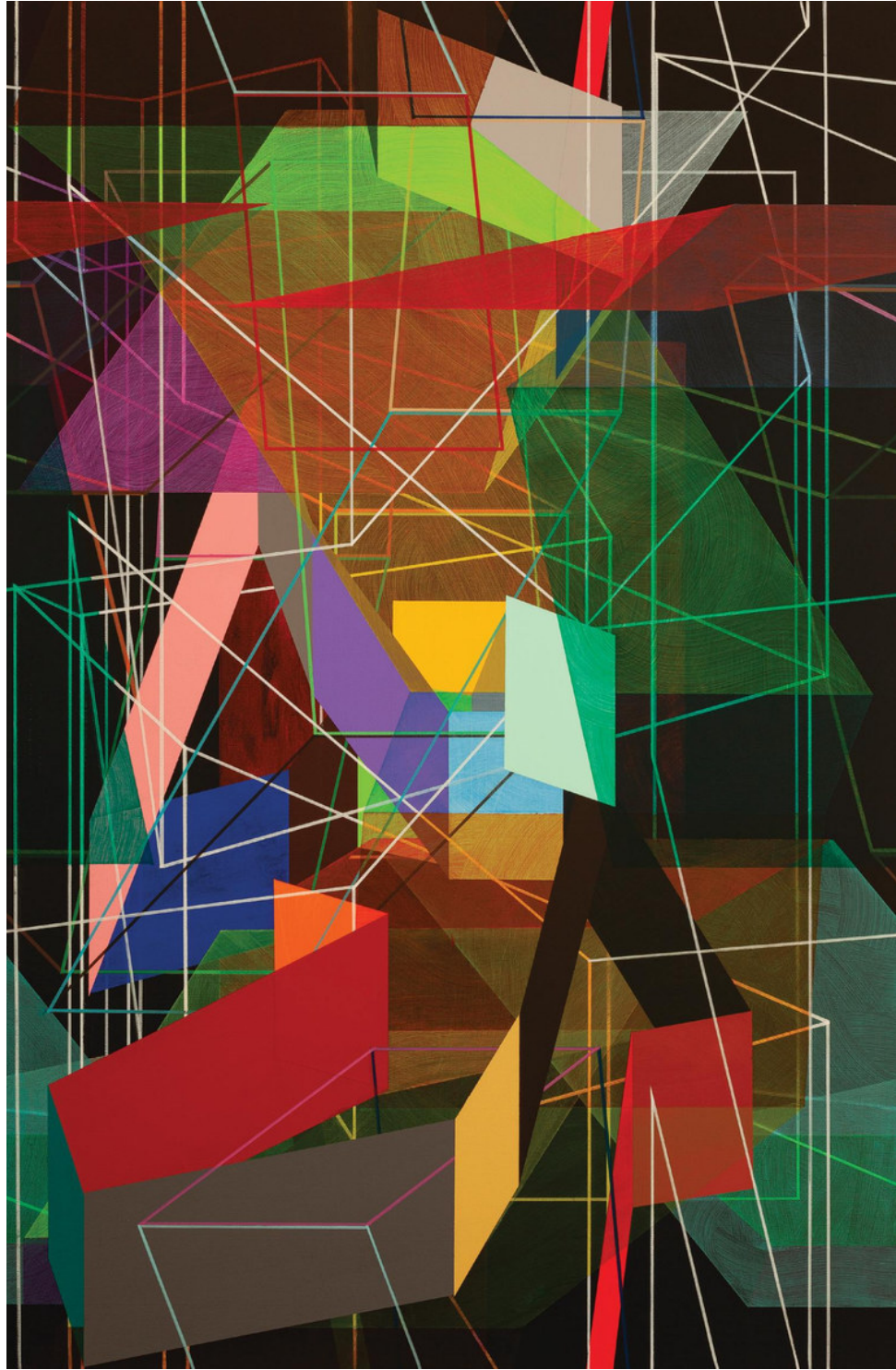
***Construction (Denatural)***

2022

Acrylic on linen

42" x 39"

***Construction (Door)***  
2021 - 2022  
Acrylic on linen  
42" x 28"





***Construction (Sublime)***

2021 - 2022

Acrylic on linen

28" x 42"



***Construction (Red Interior)***

2022

Acrylic on linen

28" x 42"

***Construction (Cosmic)***

2022

Acrylic on linen

82" x 62"



[Detail view] *Construction (Subject)*, 2022, Acrylic on linen, 82" x 62"





**Jeff Perrott** is an artist and writer. His painting and installation work engages contingency, perception, sensation, and abstraction—both the pictorial language of art-historical ‘abstraction’ and abstraction as a space of thought—to explore and expand the possibilities of painting, art, thought, and praxis.

By deploying the pictorial tropes and received art making, picturing, and interpretive practices of Modernism and Minimalism within a contingent, additive, and non-reductive methodology, Perrott’s work questions the problematic reductive teleologies of Modernism, while transforming its dominating hierarchies into sites of difference, expansion, and possibility.

Perrott writes about art, critical theory, politics, and philosophy. He has written numerous catalogue essays, reviews, and online articles in a self-published blog, *The (Art) Object*, and in *MetroWest Left*, which he founded and continues to edit. Currently, he is inquiring into, and theorizing, a role for indeterminacy in pragmatic approaches to art practice and theory.

Perrott’s work has been the subject of 18 solo exhibitions. His work is featured in the public collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Marsh Art Gallery, Richmond; the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford; and Yale Art Gallery, New Haven; and is included in many private collections.

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Perrott received his MFA from Yale School of Art in 1992 after attending Williams College. He recently earned a certificate in Curatorial Research from The New Centre for Research and Practice, and continues to do research at the school. His work is represented by LaMontagne Gallery in Boston and Morgan Lehman Gallery in New York. Associated Galleries include Zevitas Marcus Gallery, Los Angeles, and S3 Contemporary, Boston. He lives and works in Massachusetts.

## **Solo Exhibitions**

- 2022 | New Construction, LaMontagne Gallery, Boston, MA
- 2019 | Construction, LaMontagne Gallery, Boston, MA
- 2018 | Last Abstractions, SubSamson, Samson Gallery, Boston, MA
- 2017 | Dark Tomorrow, Morgan Lehman Gallery, New York, NY
- 2017 | Transitional Subjects, LaMontagne Gallery, Boston, MA
- 2012 | Vitavulnus, LaMontagne Gallery, Boston, MA
- 2012 | The View From Nowhere, solo project at Volta NY 2012 with LaMontagne Gallery
- 2010 | Random Walks in Endless Fields, LaMontagne Gallery, Boston, MA
- 2010 | Random Walks in Endless Fields, Morgan Lehman Gallery, New York, NY
- 2009 | Empty Canvas, Morgan Lehman Gallery, New York, NY
- 2006 | La Vie Éternelle, Morgan Lehman Gallery, New York, NY
- 2005 | Nature of Things, Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston MA
- 2005 | Vanitas, Morgan Lehman Gallery, Lakeville, CT
- 2002 | Gethsemane, Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston, MA
- 2001 | Current Work, The Tremaine Gallery, Hotchkiss School, Lakeville, CT
- 1999 | More or Less, Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston, MA
- 1996 | Events and Additions, Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston, MA
- 1995 | I., Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston, MA

## **Selected Group Exhibitions**

- 2016 | Overgrowth, DeCordova Museum and Sculpture Park, Lincoln, MA
- 2015 | This is Boston Not L.A., Zevitas/Marcus Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- 2015 | Recent Works on Paper, Walker Contemporary, Waitsfield, VT
- 2014 | Pulse Miami Art Fair with LaMontagne Gallery, Miami, FL
- 2014 | Assembled by Hand, Miller Yezerski Gallery, Boston, MA
- 2013 | Black and White, curated by Shay Kuhn, LaMontagne Gallery, Boston, MA
- 2008 | On The Road, curated by Lynn Cooney, Boston University Gallery, Boston, MA
- 2007 | Love's Secret Domain, curated by Seze Devres and Tracey Norman, 3rd Ward, Brooklyn, NY
- 2007 | It's Gouache and Gouache Only, Geoffrey Young Gallery, Great Barrington, MA
- 2006 | Fall Group Exhibition, Morgan Lehman Gallery, Lakeville, CT
- 2004 | Beautiful Male Objects, Sarah Nightingale Gallery, Water Mill, NY
- 2003 | Flow: Urban Organic 2, Morgan Lehman Gallery, Lakeville, CT
- 2002 | Urban Organic, Sara Nightingale Gallery, Water Mill, NY
- 2002 | Urban Organic, Morgan Lehman Gallery, Lakeville, CT
- 2000 | Polar Bear in a Snow Storm, Boston Center for the Arts, Boston, MA
- 2000 | Center Street Studio (prints), Marsh Art Gallery, Richmond, VA
- 1998 | Black and White, Forrest Scott Gallery, Milburn, NJ
- 1998 | A Gathering, Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston, MA
- 1998 | The Space of Speech, curated by Elizabeth Michalman, Boston Public Library, Boston, MA
- 1998 | Pattern, Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, OR
- 1997 | The Drawing Show, Boston Center for the Arts, Boston, MA
- 1997 | Summer Group Exhibition, Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, OR
- 1995 | Gone Later Today To Ward Off Further Hilarity "Happy to Have Saved Us All" & La Chute de Camus, Geoffrey Young Gallery, Great Barrington, MA

- 1995 | RipArte Mostra Internazionale e di Arte Contemporanea, Rome, Italy  
1994 | A Garden, Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston, Massachusetts  
1994 | Tickets, curated by Geoffrey Young, Littlejohn/Sternau Gallery, New York, NY  
1994 | The Studio Show, Boston Center for the Arts, Boston, MA  
1994 | Summer Group Exhibition, Geoffrey Young Gallery, Great Barrington, MA  
1993 | Anything-But-Paper Prayers, Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston, MA

### **Museum Collections**

- Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA  
Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, NH  
DeCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Lincoln, MA  
Yale Art Gallery, New Haven, CT  
Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT  
Marsh Art Gallery, Richmond, VA

### **Selected Corporate Collections/Installations**

- Fidelity Investments, Boston, MA  
Digitas Corporation, New York, NY  
Wellington Management, Boston, MA  
State Street Bank, Boston, MA  
The Abbey Group, Boston, MA  
KPMG, San Francisco, CA  
Bingham McCutcheon, Boston, MA  
Microsoft Corp, Redmond, WA

### **Education**

- 1992 | M.F.A., Yale School of Art, New Haven, CT  
1988 | B.A., Williams College, Williamstown, MA

### **Selected Publications**

- “Something Else: Steve Locke and Jeff Perrott in Conversation,” conversation in Jeff Perrott: Construction New Construction, Work 2019-2022, published by the artist and LaMontagne Gallery, 2022.  
Christopher Stackhouse: “Jeff Perrott – Recent Paintings,” catalogue essay in Jeff Perrott: Vitavulnus, published by the artist and LaMontagne Gallery, Boston, 2012.  
Francine Koslow Miller: “Random Walks in Endless Fields,” interview with Jeff Perrott in Jeff Perrott: Random Walks in Endless Fields, published by the artist, 2010.  
Francine Koslow Miller: “Empty Canvas: New Work by Jeff Perrott,” catalogue essay in Jeff Perrott: Empty Canvas, published by the artist, 2009.  
Francine Koslow Miller: “Jeff Perrott: Nature of Things,” catalogue essay in Jeff Perrott: Nature of Things, Open Studios Press, 2006.

### **Awards**

- 2006 | Nominee, Foster Prize, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA  
2005 | Winner, Eben Demerest Fellowship, Pittsburgh, PA

[Detail view] *Construction (Door)*, 2021 - 2022, Acrylic on linen, 42" x 28"



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Mostly, thanks to **Alexandra**, for more support and love than anyone could ask for; for tolerating the house as a studio; and for making a world together.





An abstract geometric composition featuring overlapping planes and lines in a variety of colors including teal, orange, purple, green, and brown. The lines and planes create a sense of depth and movement, with some elements appearing to recede into the background while others come forward. The overall effect is a complex, multi-layered visual space.

LaMontagne Gallery