

# Jeff Perrott's roller coaster of color

At LaMontagne Gallery, the artist's abstract paintings unloose chaos and careen in exciting directions

By **Cate McQuaid** Globe Correspondent, Updated September 13, 2022, 3:15 p.m.



Jeff Perrott, "Construction (Passage)," in "New Construction" at LaMontagne Gallery. LAMONTAGNE GALLERY

Jeff Perrott's abstract paintings are akin to professional skydives. He follows precise rules, and then he leaps, not sure where he will land. He builds chance into his process, using a digital version of a spinner from a board game to determine directions his lines take, a method he calls "random walks." But he also relies on intuition, the urges of his hand and eye.

The dazzling paintings in his exhibition at LaMontagne Gallery are at once confections and riddles. Perrott's high-keyed palette keeps the eye jumping. He weaves armatures of straight lines and unfolding planes in a way that makes space feel erratic. Each piece is, in a way, never-ending: The bottom could join seamlessly with its top, and the sides would meet, too, as if they depict an infinite loop. They are agitating, provocative, and luscious to look at.

They are also deeply rooted in art history — [Marcel Duchamp](#), that wily subverter of notions of high art, used chance in his work. And Perrott's paintings, such as "Construction (Cosmic)," are sly critiques of the pure formalism espoused by Modernist critic [Clement Greenberg](#) — a reductive approach, with the picture plane's flatness a kind of god.

Perrott comes at the canvas adding, not paring down. He makes lines into planes; some are opaque, some transparent; some show brushwork, others don't. Colors battle and buzz against each other. The more complicated the painting gets, the harder it is for viewers to assign a story or make sense of a space. Instead, we're thrown into something enveloping, something that requires us to be nimble and vigilant.





Jeff Perrott, "Construction (Subject)," 2022. Acrylic on linen. LAMONTAGNE GALLERY

For instance, Perrott toys with the old, familiar organizing principle of [figure and ground](#). In “Construction (Subject),” thin horizontal lines cross a fuchsia field like utility wires. Broad planes in many colors topple through them. Perrott brushes narrower ones with light and dark streaks so they look three-dimensional, like chutes, popping off the canvas as they jut and tangle near the center.

At first, those chutes draw the eye the way a figure does, but then they bounce it away. It's like William Butler Yeats's poem, “[The Second Coming](#)”: “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold/ Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.”

Using systems, chance, and instinct, Perrott's paintings hold space for the anarchy. These days, that's exactly what we need.

**JEFF PERROTT: NEW CONSTRUCTION** At LaMontagne Gallery, 460 Harrison Ave., through Oct. 22. 617-487-3512, [www.lamontagnegallery.com](http://www.lamontagnegallery.com)

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