



# OREGON ARTSWATCH

## ARTS & CULTURE NEWS

## 2024 in Review: In Oregon's museums and galleries, a big boom of art

A baker's dozen stories highlight some of the best, brightest, most imaginative and thought-provoking work of the year on display by Northwest artists.

**DECEMBER 28, 2024 | OREGON ARTSWATCH**  
**2024: A YEAR IN REVIEW, VISUAL ART**

Open your eyes and your imaginations: Oregon's visual arts world is about to finish a year of vibrant activity on all sorts of fronts.

The Portland Art Museum has been open on a reduced scale during a massive renovation and expansion project that will connect its two main buildings, add more gallery space, and vastly improve access and interior layout by the time it's finished in fall 2025.

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### 2024: A Year in Review

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And Russo Lee Gallery, one of the city's blue-chip galleries, is heading toward a February 2025 reopening after being closed for several months to deal with smoke and soot damage from a next-door restaurant fire.

Yet the state's been awash in provocative, pleasing, and mind-expanding art in its galleries, museums, and art centers, and Oregon ArtsWatch has responded with close to a hundred stories about what's been happening. From those, Visual Arts Editor Laurel Reed Pavic has chosen a baker's dozen to represent the best and brightest from the year's visual arts scene.

### **JULIE GREEN'S FIRST AND LAST MEALS**

## MICHELLE ROSS'S DEEP AND FLUENT ABSTRACT EXCLAMATIONS



*Michelle Ross, "Mythos (tree)," 2024, oil, acrylic, plaster, chalk on linen on panel, 50 x 40 inches. Image courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery.*

**Aug. 23:** In Michelle Ross's exhibition at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, *Never an Even Folding*, "we find a painter so deeply knowledgeable about her materials, so fluent in her techniques, and so assured in her abstract vocabulary that she can challenge herself to new ways of making," Abby McGehee writes in her essay "[Michelle Ross at Elizabeth Leach Gallery.](#)"

"The viewer can chart the artist's process – or at least guess at it – from thick impasto to thin washes, dribbles to turgid pools, large swaths of color to subtle mark-making," McGehee adds. "We are simultaneously in the studio at the artist's side watching her work and in the gallery encountering these panels as landscapes, windows and spaces. ... Ross's conversation with Modernism does not present itself solely as a continuing cultural critique. Like her previous work, these paintings demonstrate her profound engagement with twentieth-century abstraction."



# OREGON ARTSWATCH

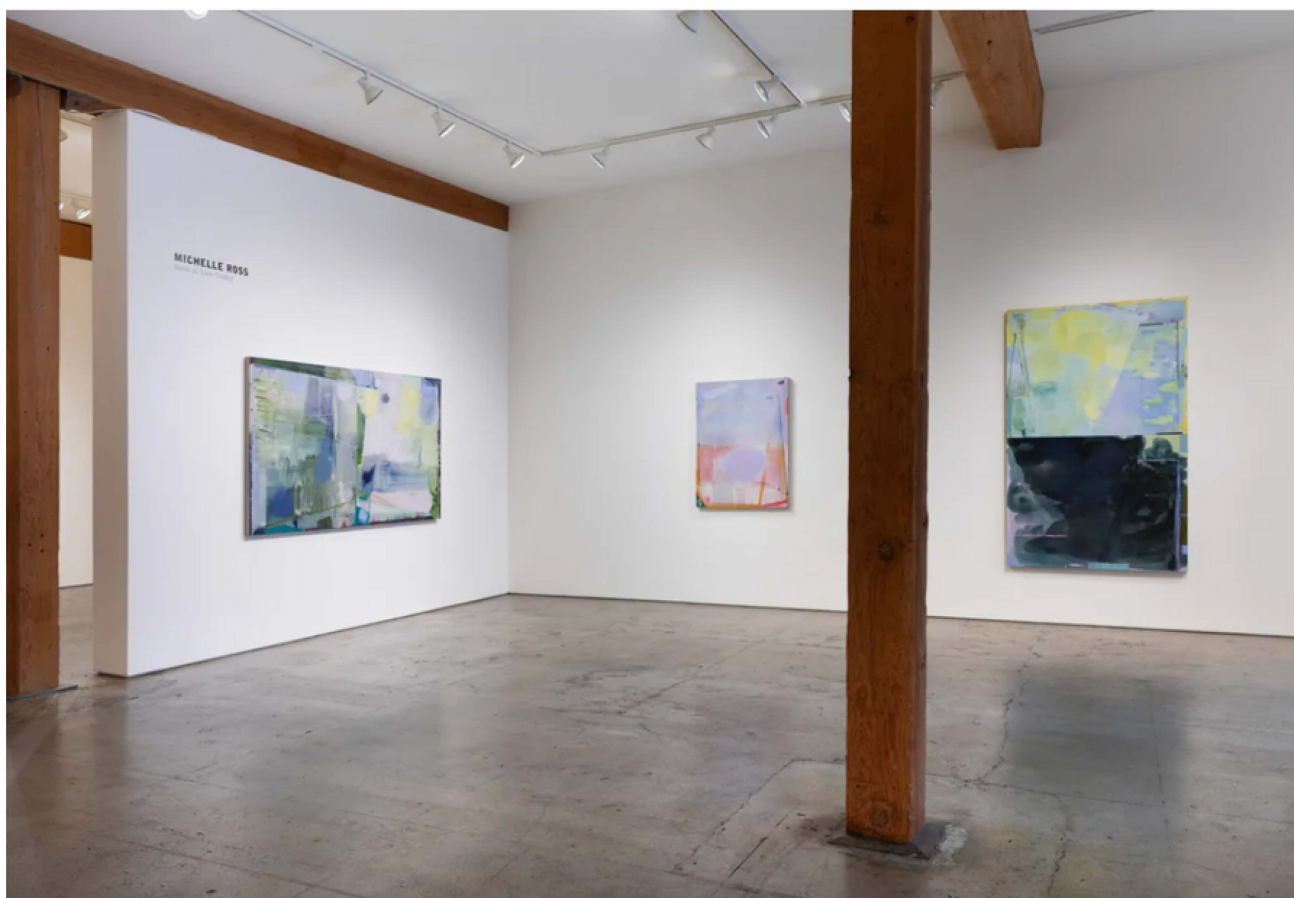
## ARTS & CULTURE NEWS

### Michelle Ross at Elizabeth Leach Gallery

"Never an Even Folding" features twelve paintings that confirm the painter's deep knowledge of her medium and engagement with the Modernist tradition.

AUGUST 23, 2024 | [ABBY MCGEHEE](#)

VISUAL ART



*Install view of Michelle Ross's Never an Even Folding at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 2024.  
Image courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery*

In Michelle Ross's current exhibition at Elizabeth Leach Gallery, *Never an Even Folding*, we find a painter so deeply knowledgeable about her materials, so fluent in her techniques, and so assured in her abstract vocabulary that she can challenge herself to new ways of making. 12 works of both single panels and diptychs of various dimensions utilize oil, acrylic, chalk, plaster and graphite to give the works a variety of textures and depth.

The viewer can chart the artist's process – or at least guess at it – from thick impasto to thin washes, dribbles to turgid pools, large swaths of color to subtle mark-making. We are simultaneously in the studio at the artist's side watching her work and in the gallery encountering these panels as landscapes, windows and spaces. Titles provide a roadmap for Ross's inspirations and subject matter but these are allusive images that allow the viewer latitude to find their way through the work.



*Michelle Ross, Mythos (tree), 2024, oil, acrylic, plaster, chalk on linen on panel, 50 x 40"*  
Image courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery

In historian and philosopher Marshall Berman's *All That is Solid Melts Into Air*, the author examines the triumphs and perils of Modernism and its challenging relationship to a rapidly changing world in the late 19th and 20th centuries. Continuing in this Modernist tradition of inquiry and boundary-pushing, *Never an Even Folding* is Ross's response to our own present moment in which our understanding of the supposedly immutable laws of nature and physics are being upended and reconsidered.

Theoretical physicist Carlo Rovelli (to whom Ross pointed me) has written: "space is no longer different from matter. It is one of the "material" components of the world, akin to the electromagnetic field. It is a real entity that undulates, fluctuates, bends and contorts." [1] In this show, Ross has taken on a destabilized aesthetic, material, and poetic response to this challenge. To paint a world that we can see but cannot know. And to manifest these ideas through material thinking. Just like Berman's bewildered and bewildering Modernists, Ross has created work that allows us to test our discomfort with shifting paradigms.

The idea of contingency is key here. Ross has discussed her interest in unreliable structures and the reality that our world is not symmetrical, fixed, predictable. These paintings revel in that instability and disrupt what we think we know. In *The frost took up the Search for your company*, two small panels of very different sizes and surface treatments evoke a soft blue sky and a micro-view of something organic seemingly cultured out of ungessoed linen. What constitutes figure and ground, substrate and image are disrupted.



*Michelle Ross, Light-eaters, 2021-2024, oil and acrylic on panel, and linen on panel, diptych: 12x21" Image courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery*

In *Light-Eaters*, two panels of different dimensions are paired but their palettes and paint application seem to speak in different dialects. Yet closer inspection reveals interesting formal contrasts and a new understanding of each. [2] Given the source of the title, it also alludes to unseen plant networks that require our careful consideration. In *Day and Night* and *Night and Day*, the firm division of the diptych is disrupted by incursions of paint from one panel to the other, much in the way our experience of time fades into itself. All of the diptychs question independence/dependence, the elimination or doubling of the center, and the (theoretical) possibility of being open or closed.



*Michelle Ross, Night and Day, 2023, oil, acrylic, chalk, and graphite on panel, diptych, 45×70" Image courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery*

Ross's conversation with Modernism does not present itself solely as a continuing cultural critique. Like her previous work, these paintings demonstrate her profound engagement with twentieth-century abstraction. Evident is Hans Hoffman's push-pull, Mark Rothko's immersive environments, Helen Frankenthaler's landscapes of washes, Richard Diebenkorn's reduction, palette, and structure, and Cy Twombly's sgraffito. Two other Modernist works that came immediately to my mind were Henri Matisse's foray to the brink of abstraction in paintings like *Window at Collioure* from 1914 and Arthur Dove's abstract landscapes evoking sound like *Foghorns* from 1929. The painting as a window or a structure governs some of Ross's works like *Confluence* and *Husk*. In others, *Telegraphic* and *Highwire*, in contrast we are already outside the structure and immersed.

Titles lead us in a general direction toward themes. There are times of the day, Day and Night, Dusk and Dawn; reference to trees and plant systems, Mythos (tree); and references to movement in time and space, Confluence, Telegraphic. In conversation with the artist, I learned how deeply influenced she was by the changing light and colors of the sky outside her studio as well as investigations into quantum theory and plant intelligence. The subject matter operates on both a somatic and cerebral level. While the viewer may not have immediate access to Ross's reading list, we can see the contingency of the forms, the shifting of planes and the consideration of space in its many manifestations.



*Michelle Ross, Telegraphic, 2023, oil, acrylic on linen on panel, 45 x 35" Image courtesy of Elizabeth Leach Gallery*

The title of the show, *Never an Even Folding*, guides our inquiry. Folding implies manipulation of material, caring, covering, perhaps obscuring. There is the literal folding of the linen onto the panels, but also the metaphoric suggestion of the folding together of the diptychs. Like Rovelli's notion of bending space, the imaginatively folded diptychs move the furthest points – the outer edges of the paintings – to immediate adjacency. This in turn leads to the metaphysical notions of time and space folding in upon each other. And because none of this folding is even, we circle around again to asymmetry and the imperfect structures (and perhaps beliefs) with which we live.

[1] Carlo Rovelli, *Reality is Not What it Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity* (Riverhead Books: 2018).

[2] The title is a reference to Zoe Shlanger, *The Light Eaters: How the Unseen World of Plant Intelligence Offers a New Understanding of Life on Earth* (Harper: 2024).

*Elizabeth Leach Gallery is located at 417 NW 9th Ave and open from 10:30 am – 5:30 pm Tuesdays through Saturdays. Never an Even Folding is on view through August 31st.*

# THE SEMI-FINALIST

4/24/2021

## ***THE SEMI-FINALIST IS: MICHELLE ROSS***



*Like A Mountain (two fists of solid rock CM)*  
2021, acrylic, flashe, oil, graphite, and pastel on panel  
65 ¼" x 83"

Photo by [Mario Gallucci](#)

### ***The Not-Center and Synthesis***

Seeing Michelle Ross's recent show at Elizabeth Leach was an hour of joy that almost felt tailor-made to mark the arrival of spring in Portland, Oregon. Ross is not a landscape painter, but her paintings paralleled the light outside on that day, from the atmospheric pools of indigo and silver to the punches of vivid color which act as stabilizing forces in her often tempestuous compositions.

Ross's recent paintings are, in her own words, de-centered. Visually, this means that the linear energy in her compositions is pushed out to the edges, leaving an interior space that is largely -but not entirely- atmospheric. The more concrete elements often suggest a geometric structure, but habitually avoid any obvious solutions. Buttresses - small, nearly solid shapes of vivid color - also make their way to the edges of these allusive forms. And like architectural buttresses holding up thin walls of stained glass in a gothic church, Ross's small, colorful supports dutifully stabilize planes of luminous, ethereal color.

One of Ross's many strengths is her willingness to embrace both the haptic and the literary. Her paintings stand on their own, but the titles - alternately poetic, clever, timely and suggestive - grant access to another level of her aesthetic stronghold. The titles function not so much as an open front door, but instead an unlocked window on the second or third floor. Scaling the trellis and shimmying over the sill is undoubtedly going to take time and energy, but it's an effort worth making. Once inside, it's as if the space of the unapologetically visual begins to expand, opening up plenty of room for the conceptual framework that holds it in place. This is also the point where you'll realize that you've just snuck into a fantastic party and you won't want to leave.

This month on The Semi-Finalist I'm pleased to present my interview with Michelle Ross. In it she talks more about de-centering, her competing aesthetic impulses, and making sense of the last four years.



**Michelle Ross in her studio.**

**The Semi-Finalist:** Michelle, we first met back in the 1990's, but I have to admit that I still don't know your full origin story. How did you get started with painting and when did you make the decision to forge ahead as an artist?

**Michelle Ross:** My first art classes were at the Oregon School of Art and Craft (later known as the Oregon College of Art and Craft) – when I was 19 or 20. I had wanted to pursue writing when I was a high school student and I read a ton- but I never took any art classes. It was because of a dedicated mentor who basically challenged me to go to art school after doing some independent study work with them. I had returned to Portland after a year at an alternative college program in Bellingham, Washington called Fairhaven College. It was an insular little bubble and again I was trying to get started with writing but felt restless and unsatisfied. So I returned to Portland and eventually enrolled at PNCA (Pacific Northwest College of Art) – which was at the time still embedded in the Portland Art Museum as the Museum School. I graduated from PNCA in '87 and went up to Washington State University in Pullman for my MFA in '91.



*Sensor*  
**2021, acrylic, oil, paper, silver leaf, graphite, pastel and  
 colored pencil on panel, 24" x 30"**  
**photo by Mario Gallucci**

**S-F:** This next question comes out of our conversation about how one's temperament is connected to whether an artist's work is the result of slow accretion, spontaneous improvisation, or something else entirely. It's really a question about being true to

oneself in the studio. So, with that in mind, can you talk about how you see yourself as a painter in relation to materials, techniques and the impulses that drive your work?

**MR:** I think I often operate in a kind of dialectic between those poles you mention, and in the process of the back and forth some kind of synthesis emerges. At times I yearn to proceed in an either/or, fully committed, one way or another fashion, but I know that what drives the work is a kind of problem-solving mentality – so that neither approach totally satisfies what I want to see and therefore needs to be modified by the opposite approach. Which often creates a mess. This is true with materials as well – when I start to feel burdened with the preciousness and weight of the history of oil painting I end up introducing “low” materials- paper, textiles, scraps of detritus. Drawing materials also intrude into those surfaces. These things complicate the beauty and sensuality of the painted surfaces. Recently I have been using more aggressive techniques like pouring, smearing and staining, which then need to be corralled or harnessed with an overlay of geometry. This acts as a collision that results in the synthesis I am looking for.



*Twelve Twenty-One Twenty Twenty*  
2021, acrylic, flashe, oil, graphite, and pastel on panel, 65 ¼" x 83"  
photo by Mario Gallucci

**S-F:** Your titles often insist on evoking the here and now while your paintings seem to enjoy navigating the intangibles of life. Can you talk about that?

**MR:** Sometimes that is true, especially with this last body of work, for example False Flag – which smacks of the current political conditions in the US. That painting in particular was a thorny problem to solve, meaning I thought I could keep it simple and concise and it became quite convoluted with many competing forces- color, directionality, asymmetry. I had to accept those contradictions while resolving the painting. That struggle seems to mimic the intangible, perhaps mental struggles of a year living through the pandemic and a nerve-wracking political climate.



*False Flag*  
2021, acrylic, oil, vintage canvas, vinyl, silver leaf, pastel chalk,  
and graphite on panel, 30" x 40"  
photo by Mario Gallucci

At other times the titles are quotations from poetry, or print media text. And with that the “here and now” and the “intangibles” can vary quite a bit. I think of titles as a way to point to a territory or context or lens through which to consider the abstraction of the paintings.



*Above: Lamplight Surprise*  
2017, acrylic, oil and graphite on panel, 12.5"x 10"

*Below: Chicken Little*  
2017, acrylic, oil and graphite on panel, 12.5"x 10"  
photos by Mario Gallucci



**S-F:** You've talked a lot about the concept of de-centering in relation to the body of work you made for "I Am Your Signal," your recent solo show at [Elizabeth Leach Gallery](#). Can you expand on that concept and how you see it manifesting itself in your paintings?

**MR:** De-centering is a literal and formal strategy in many of the newest works. I noticed the tendency emerging with this and other recent work. I seemed to be inclined toward the periphery. I was drawn to engage and activate the edges of the paintings with a compression of shape, compressed energy and hot, saturated color. This got me wondering about empty(-ish) centers and unreliable or unstable centers that shifted, that weren't clearly grounded or appeared unanchored. In relation to constructing pictures, I was considering how we are supposed to address the center, have a hierarchy of focal points, a balance of centralities.

In some ways this visual thinking about the center and the *not-center* may reflect certain power dynamics that are currently at play between progressive, reparative, social activism (the hot periphery?) and repressive conservative politics (the unreliable center?). These paintings were made at a time in late 2020 with this intensified backdrop playing out. I think we absorb these social dynamics as experiences from our own vantage point and often they get echoed in subconscious ways. For me it seems to be playing out in this formal dynamic of *not-center /compressed periphery*. I think Jan Verwort is pointing to something like this in his essay on the painter Toma Abts, *The Beauty and Politics of Latency*:

*"In one moment, abstract art might hurl itself forward in time towards the yet unrealized and unthought. In other moments, however, abstraction only works because its enunciations reverberate with latent memories of things once seen or ideas once thought and then forgotten... In this sense, the space of abstraction is an echo chamber in which each enunciation resonates with intuitions of the yet unthought and the presently forgotten... Abstraction...treasures the latencies of thoughts, memories, and feelings as a source that is inexhaustible precisely because its content can be neither instantaneously nor ever fully actualized."*



*Tempest*  
2021, acrylic, oil, pastel chalk, and graphite on panel, 65 x 83"  
photo by Mario Gallucci

Or maybe it - the de-centering idea – is a parallel to my own very lateral way of associative thinking. I am always interrupting my own thoughts with adjacent next thoughts to the point where every idea feels like an edge, pressed outwards and up next to something else equally compelling. Where is the center in that? The center is a moving target and always contingent on what the quality or clarity of the periphery is.

Anyway....below is a list of stream-of-consciousness thoughts that I think contribute to an understanding of what the paintings manifest:

- I Am Your Signal came to me as a phrase while working in the studio about a year ago. Over the course of this year I have come to understand it as a framework for this body of work.
- Isabelle Graw writes of the "quasi-subjecthood" of a painting in her book "The Love of Painting: Genealogy of a Success Medium". The title of my show is a wry nod to this idea. The artist is not the "I" in the title, rather the painting.
- The paintings are complex, troubled surfaces that sometimes yield to invented geometries, that are found by connecting plotted and random points after initial layers of color are laid down.

- We count on geometries to rationalize space and yet these paintings suggest otherwise. Historically, geometry is a type of violence imposed on the natural world to map and dominate.
- Geometries are also a mystical technology.



**Installation shots of Ross's show, *I Am Your Signal*, at [Elizabeth Leach Gallery](#).  
Photos by Mario Gallucci.**

- The surfaces of these paintings ask the viewer to sift through conflicts, tensions and hierarchies of line, shape, form, color in order to discern what signal (if any) might be present.
- Silver paint, silver leaf (silver is a material associated with the feminine, healing and the moon – but also destructive extraction economies) AND varying applications of matte, gloss, light value and texture compete and change depending on the viewers position and lighting conditions.
- This is intended to create a dynamic and active viewing experience that echoes the cultural and personal uncertainties and conflicts of this time.
- Like a mirror flashing sunlight from a great distance you have to be standing in precisely the correct place to receive the signal.
- I am working to destabilize the notion of painting as a static or fixed image.



*Keep*

2021, acrylic, oil, Korean hemp linen, canvas, silver leaf, tape,  
and graphite on panel, 30" x 40"

- I am working to create a whole or a gestalt with the composition while acknowledging the instability present in compositional devices, color and light.
- Color alternates between high key saturation, punctuating dark blues and greens that reference the natural world. Low key neutrals modify the use of yellows and reds which have crept in this year, possibly pointing to anxiety and violence.
- I am inspired every day by the sky.
- I am thinking about the concept of “signal to noise ratio” (SNR). Conflicting attraction and attention values are engineered into the paintings to create more of an equalized or binary (50/50) SNR. This also seems to reflect our current social and political divisions. Ideally a signal is clear with much less noise to contend with.
- As a queer identified lesbian feminist, abstraction continues to be a form of resistance to essentialized, surveilled bodies, while acknowledging the necessity and politics of visibility as a different co-equal form of resistance. I have a suspicion of representation. See [David Getsy: Ten Queer Thesis on Abstraction](#).



*Bathyscaphe (for CM)*

2021, acrylic, oil, paper, silver leaf, graphite, and pastel on panel, 24" x 30"  
photo by Mario Gallucci

- I consider my work a form of embodied abstraction, in that the labor of realizing the images and surfaces is very physical and is imprinted with direct traces of my body. Shapes and forms are often scaled to my body.

- I am interested in the idiosyncrasies of irregular polygons and their classifications: convex, concave and self-intersecting. This seems analogous to bodily conditions in a kind of poetic way. Michael Fried unpacks Frank Stella's formal exploration of this and the problem of "fit" with form to format in his essay "Shape as Form". This has been influential in how I think about applying pressure to the periphery of the compositions.
- I am seeking and finding a faceted, oppositional, periphery that challenges a dissolving, gaseous, or indefinite center. I am more interested in an ill-fit.



*Idyll Wild*  
2021, acrylic, oil, vintage canvas, vinyl, silver leaf, pastel chalk,  
and graphite on panel, 30" x 40"

**S-F:** Who do you count as formative influences on your work and who have you been looking at recently?

**MR:** Formative: Twombly, Stella, Judd, Diebenkorn, Noland, Joan Mitchell, Frankenthaler, Joan Snyder, Hilma Af Klint.

Recently: Harvey Quaytman, R.H. Quaytman, Prunella Clough, Svenja Deininger, Elizabeth Neel, Yunhee Min, Tala Madani, Shara Hughes, [Amy Bay](#), Lois Dodd, Julie Mehretu, Vivian Suter, Torkwase Dyson, Tormory Dodge, Monique Van Genderen, Pia Fries, Marina Adams....



Talking about formative influences.

**S-F:** What's next?

**MR:** More experimental works, drawing paintings, affective color studies, simplification or a push more deeply into maximalism. I want to work on repetition.

Returning to some older unresolved works, possibly shaped panels, more textile works.

I want to do an artist book also – from the magazine page interventions. I have several different categories of works from those pages that form an organizing principle that could be a book.



Above: Research.  
Below: The studio.



Below are more shots of Michelle Ross's work. You can also find her...  
at her [website](#)  
on the [Elizabeth Leach Gallery](#) website  
on Instagram: @michelle\_ross\_studio



*Winter Bloom (1)*  
2015, oil, spray paint, house paint, paper, plaster, linen, chalk,  
and graphite on birch panel, 45" x 42"  
photo by Mario Gallucci



*As is, So There*  
2015, acrylic, oil and graphite on panel, 12.5"x 10"  
photo by Mario Gallucci



*The Inexperienced Miracle Worker*  
2015, oil, flashe, paper, plaster, chalk and graphite on panel, 62"x 65"  
photo by Mario Gallucci

Mario Gallucci's photography website can be found at: <https://www.mariogalluccipho.com/art-documentation>

[Life & Culture](#)

## Art shows a bit more intense and cerebral this winter in Portland

Updated 6:57 AM; Today 6:57 AM

By [Briana Miller](#) | [Special to The Oregonian/OregonLive](#)

Emerging out of 2020, galleries and art institutions are showing new and invigorating work by new and interesting artists. Some shows continue the hard conversations churned up in 2020; others offer well-earned distraction. In general, shows this season feel a little more intense, a little more cerebral than they have in the past. Maybe our attention spans are stretching after a year of social distancing.

**Michelle Ross: “I Am Your Signal”**



Michelle Ross' "Bloom" (2020), oil and mixed media on panel. Courtesy of the artist and Elizabeth Leach Gallery. Mario Gallucci

Michelle Ross' commission for The Standard Insurance Company, four site-specific paintings measuring 16 feet tall by 7 feet wide that were completed and installed this past fall, are the largest paintings she's ever created. For her solo show, she maintains some of their scale in a series of angular abstract paintings on panel that combine swift painted gestures with vigorous shots of saturated color. Raw canvas geometric shapes affixed to the panel add visual texture, as does silver paint applied as a base layer, another carryover from The Standard paintings, along with silver and platinum leafing.

Feb. 4-March 27, Elizabeth Leach Gallery, 417 N.W. Ninth Ave., [elizabethleach.com](http://elizabethleach.com) or 503-224-0521



## Joseph Gallivan interviews painter Michelle Ross

**Hosted by:** Joseph Gallivan

**Produced by:** KBOO

**Program::** Art Focus

**Air date:**

Tue, 10/13/2020 - 11:30am to 12:00pm



Joseph Gallivan interviews painter Michelle Ross and gallery director Daniel Peabody about Ross's new four-painting commission at the Standard Insurance Building lobby "The Turn of a Shape: Dawn, Dusk, Midday, Midnight".

On Tuesday Oct 13, 2020 at 11:30 a.m. Joseph Gallivan interviews painter Michelle Ross and the Elizabeth Leach gallery director Daniel Peabody about Ross's new four-painting commission at the Standard Insurance Building lobby. The works, called "The Turn of a Shape: Dawn, Dusk, Midday, Midnight," hang in the four corners of the remodeled lobby at 900 SW 5th Ave, viewable by the public in office hours. Ross talks about her choice of colors and shapes, her variety of paint types, and both her response to light at different times of day and to corporate strictures.

### **From the press release:**

The year-long project culminated in the installation in October 2020. Michelle Ross has created four large paintings, each 16 feet tall by 83 inches wide, a monumental undertaking. These are huge, magnificent paintings commissioned by a private company, The Standard Insurance.

Ross is currently studying kiln glass work at the Yucca Valley Lab in California. <https://www.yuccavalleymaterial.org/>

[michelleross-studio.com](http://michelleross-studio.com)

[www.elizabethleach.com](http://www.elizabethleach.com)

This show was recorded by Zoom on Oct 12, 2020, although the final audio is from a backup recording a voice memo on an Android phone.

## ARTFORUM

**Michelle Ross****ART GYM****17600 Pacific Highway, BP John, 3rd Floor****October 11, 2016–December 9, 2016**

For Portland-based painter Michelle Ross, the pictorial language of abstraction is formed in relation to the careful observation of physical gesture and its subsequent flattening and transmission through contemporary forms of visuality, such as print magazines and video. This is where Ross's obsession with fashion comes in: Imaginatively transforming stretcher bars and their surfaces into a synthesis of good bones and material geometries, the artist paints on top of pages from *W*, for instance, or scans editorial spreads in order to blow them up and attach them to her canvases. Velvet, cotton, polyester, paint, plaster, and other media are stretched, folded, or layered atop these initial layouts, redacting representation. The works' imagery sets the stage for "dressing" the paintings like a body; and if a painting fails, it's stripped down and redressed later.

In *Redress: With a Composure Periodically Fractured by Wailing (For D.R.)*, 2016, sheer and textured fabrics are fused with plaster and paint around a geometric portal of ombre satin. The residue of the work's first layer and subsequent undress reveal stain-like expressionistic markings. In some places where Ross has ripped fabric away, raised scar-like edges reinforce the presence of touch and intimacy.

Her paintings often begin with small sewn-fabric constructions that she refers to as "prompts"—studies in texture and color that channel ideas into the paintings. Several are hung near their companion pieces in the exhibition. More than studies or accessories, they become a set of anecdotes for expanding the works' style and beauty.



**Michelle Ross, *Redress: With a Composure Periodically Fractured by Wailing (For D.R.)*, 2016**, cotton, polyester, crinoline, hemp linen, spray paint, oil paint, digital print, graphite, 56 x 43".

— Stephanie Snyder

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## Gallery openings June 2013

John Motley | Special to The Oregonian By John Motley | Special to The Oregonian

Email the author

on May 31, 2013 at 2:00 PM



**View full size**

Artist Michelle Ross; Agent, 2012; archival pigment print, 11 x 14"

In the past few years, Michelle Ross has emerged as the city's most tirelessly experimental abstract painter. In recent memory, she and collaborator Karl Burkheimer organized "Open House Opening," a one-night group show installed in a Southeast Portland residence that questioned how an exhibition's setting influences its reception. A year later, she uprooted artworks from the homes of her neighbors for "Home Curating," presenting those private treasures in a public gallery at the Oregon College of Arts and Craft.

At the same time, she's explored the impact of various formal departures on her own work: painting over pages of magazines; incorporating fabric into her compositions; and removing them from stretcher bars, so that they hang like tapestries. Behind all this boundary testing is a very serious artist, who is wrestling with the limits of her medium in deeply critical terms. Last year, Ross was deservedly recognized with a Hallie Ford Fellowship in the Visual Arts.

For "Symptomatic" at **Elizabeth Leach Gallery**, her first solo show since receiving that honor, Ross pairs new paintings with photographed paintings, continuing to consider how the context in which a piece of artwork is presented affects how we see it. (417 N.W. Ninth Ave., 503-224-0521, through June 29)

**Portland Art Museum:** Dutch bad boy Folkert De Jong traffics in grotesquerie, making sculptures that, like horror movies, are equal parts unsettling and hokey. This



is the last month to catch a selection of his work at Portland Art Museum, including "Business as Usual: The Tower," 2008, his utterly leaden commentary on U.S. involvement in the Middle East, which depicts the three wise monkeys of lore -- who, respectively, see, speak, and hear no evil -- perched on an oil drum and smeared in black crude. (1219 S.W. Park Ave., 503-226-2811, through June 23, admission \$15)

**Adams and Ollman:** The relatively new gallery continues its run of solid programming with "Moons of a Dewdrop," a collaborative installation by Philadelphia artists Paul Swenbeck and Joy Feasley. The multimedia show promises to be an esoteric delight, featuring ceramic works inspired by Neolithic ritual objects and fossil forms as well as paintings informed by science fiction and Romantic landscape painting. (811 E. Burnside #213, through July 20)

**Nationale:** Portland painter Marie Koetje presents her first solo show at Nationale, building on the chaotically abstract canvases of "Space Invader," exhibited last year at the Vestibule in Disjecta. While Koetje is very much a traditional painter, her work can't help but reference digital culture with its Day-Glo palette, Microsoft Paint-mimicking squiggles and sprays, and a layered composition that suggests an avalanche of browser tabs. (811 E. Burnside, 503-477-9786, through July 7)

**Augen Gallery DeSoto:** While this exhibition of etchings and woodcuts by Edvard Munch is limited to just a handful of works, it's more than worth the trip. Not only did the Norwegian artist inspire German Expressionism, he pioneered the



**View full size**

Folkert de Jong, "Business as Usual: The Tower," 2008, Styrofoam and pigmented polyurethane foam

Courtesy of the artist and James Cohan Gallery, New York © Folkert De Jong



expression of intense psychological states in his work (Munch's iconic painting "The Scream" sold for \$120 million at auction last year), making him one of the most influential artists in modern history. (716 N.W. Davis St., 503-546-5056, through June 29)

**12128:** In late June, Springfield's excellent artist-run space Ditch Projects comes to Portland with "Dumb Angel," a group show of new work by its members, who include Mike Bray, Isami Ching, Brooks Dierdorf, Surabhi Ghosh, Nika Kaiser, Donald Morgan and Jack Ryan. This also marks the first chance of 2013 to visit 12128, charmingly located aboard an enormous decommissioned crabbing vessel. (12900 N.W. Marina Way, through July 12)

**Gallery Homeland:** From the warped minds of Weird Fiction, a multimedia arts collective that revels in our culture's digital overload, comes the offshoot "Weird Shift." The event will unfold as both a monthlong exhibition, "The Long Share," and, from June 14 to 16, a conference with the modest goal of imploding "(ir)reality prismatically into many new streams for retrieval and report." If you're confused, that's the idea. "The Long Share" gathers such oddities as a para-fictional photo essay by Rosalynn Rothstein; a speculative history of WikiLeaks by Australian art collective Soda Jerk; and Portlander Stephen Slappe's video of a surprisingly erotic bomb-diffusing robot. Weird, indeed. (2505 SE 11th Ave., through June 28)

-- John Motley

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Edvard Munch, Maneskinen ved havet (Moonlight on the Sea) - 1912, woodblock printed in black ink, 7-1/4 x 10-1/8 inches

VISUAL ART // oregonlive.com/art

## June busts out all over in galleries

By JOHN MOTLEY  
SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

In the past few years, Michelle Ross has emerged as the city's most tirelessly experimental abstract painter. In recent memory, she and collaborator Karl Burkheimer organized "Open House Opening," a one-night group show installed in a Southeast Portland residence that questioned how an exhibition's setting influences its reception. A year later, she uprooted artworks from the homes of her

neighbors for "Home Curating," presenting those private treasures in a public gallery at the Oregon College of Arts and Craft.

At the same time, she's explored the impact of various formal departures on her own work: painting over pages of magazines; incorporating fabric into her compositions; and removing them from stretcher bars, so that they hang like tapestries. Behind all this boundary testing is a very serious artist, who is wrestling

with the limits of her medium in deeply critical terms. Last year, Ross was deservedly recognized with a Hallie Ford Fellowship in the Visual Arts.

For "Symptomatic" at **Elizabeth Leach Gallery**, her first solo show since receiving that honor, Ross pairs new paintings with photographed paintings, continuing to consider how the context in which a piece of artwork is presented affects how we see it. (417 N.W. Ninth Ave., 503-224-0521, [elizabethleach.com](http://elizabethleach.com), through June 29)

**Portland Art Museum:** Dutch bad boy Folkert De Jong traffics in grotesquerie, making sculptures that, like horror movies, are equal parts unsettling and hokey. This is the last month to catch a selection of his work at Portland Art Museum, including "Business as Usual: The Tower," 2008, his utterly leaden commentary on U.S. involvement in the Middle East, which depicts the three wise monkeys of lore — who, respectively, see, speak, and hear no evil — perched on an oil drum and smeared in black crude. (1219 S.W. Park Ave., 503-226-2811, [pam.org](http://pam.org), through June 23, admission \$15)

**Adams and Ollman:** The relatively new gallery continues its run of solid programming with "Moons of a Dewdrop," a collaborative installation by Philadelphia artists Paul Swenbeck and Joy Feasley. The multimedia show promises to be an esoteric delight, featuring ceramic works inspired by Neolithic ritual objects and fossil forms as well as paintings informed by science fiction and Romantic landscape painting. (811 E. Burnside, 503-477-9786, [nationale.us](http://nationale.us), through July 7)

**Augen Gallery DeSoto:** While this exhibition of etchings and woodcuts by Edvard Munch is limited to just a handful of works, it's more than worth the trip. Not only did the Norwegian artist inspire German Expressionism, he pioneered the expression of intense psychological states in his work (Munch's iconic painting "The Scream" sold for \$120 million at auction last year), making him one of the most influential artists in modern history. (716 N.W. Davis St., 503-546-5056,



Folkert De Jong's "Business as Usual: The Tower," 2008, Styrofoam and pigmented polyurethane foam, on view at Portland Art Museum, depicts the proverbial three wise monkeys who see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil.

Courtesy of THE ARTIST AND JAMES COHAN GALLERY, NEW YORK

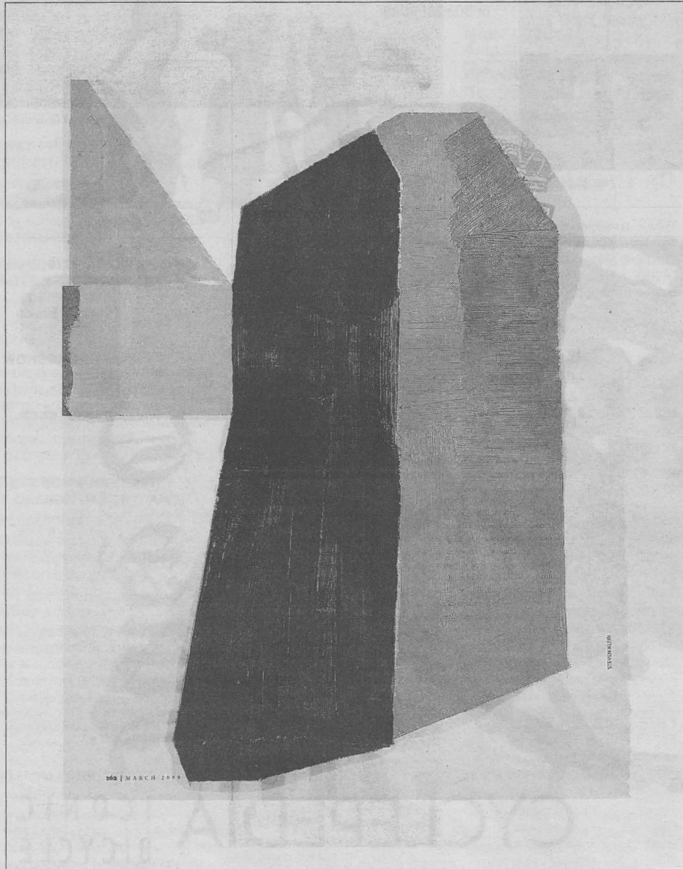
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John Motley is a Portland freelance writer; [motley.john@gmail.com](mailto:motley.john@gmail.com)

Edvard Munch's "Maneskin Ved Havet (Moonlight on the Sea)," 1912, woodblock printed in black ink, is among the renowned artist's print works in a show at Augen Gallery.



Michelle Ross' "Agent," 2012, archival pigment print, is part of the artist's solo show at Elizabeth Leach Gallery.



# Art in America

## MICHELLE ROSS

3/20/13

NINE

by sue taylor



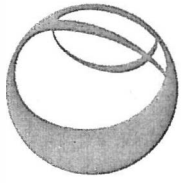
**PORTLAND** A respected abstract painter and teacher at the Oregon College of Art and Craft, Michelle Ross is a 2012 winner of the coveted Hallie Ford Fellowship in the Visual Arts. In this exhibition of four works (all 2012), she fulfilled what she began gingerly to essay at the Portland Art Museum's 2011 biennial of Northwest art—where one of her untitled panels unexpectedly trailed a length of pale blue tulle. Fabric now rules Ross's practice, with *Redress*, for example, repeating the conjunction of painted panel and translucent veil. Neatly wrapped in an irregular swatch of white and pale-mustard chiffon, the punningly titled 10-by-13-inch painting with collage appeared mysterious and reticent, as if painting had reconsidered its obligation to be looked at, and donned a head scarf.

At stake here is the nature of painting itself, for fabric is of course typically the medium's literal support; in these works, Ross conflates painting with clothing, drapery and upholstery. *Silencer 2* presents a riot of fabrics standing in as painting and spilling onto the floor. Large sheets of vinyl, linen and faux leather, sewn together and pinned to the wall, supplant solid painted planes; creases and seams resemble drawn lines. Organdy and organza provide see-through layers, like thin glazes, while shadows among the sensuous folds are cast rather than rendered. Seduced by colors, textures and sheen, viewers might easily overlook the work's gessoed panel at bottom left. Leaning against the wall, mostly hidden behind a velvet black swatch, the diminutive painting suggests the return of the repressed. In *Blind*, the proportion of painted panel to textile is reversed, with a thin strip of ragged cocoa-brown polyester tacked along the right edge of a 5-by-4-foot expanse of beige paint, enlivened with patches of white and blue and a single, vertical graphite line. Listing interior latex and plaster among her mixed mediums in this work, the artist relates painting to home improvement, just as her ambiguous title invokes blocked vision and/or a particular kind of window treatment.

In hanging *Blind* low on the wall, Ross aligned it not with the viewer's eye level but with the body, that crucial element absent but always implied in her abstract compositions. "These are the costumes I never made for the children I never had," she writes in a poignant gallery statement, "the winding sheets I would make if I had to." Indeed a figural presence seems to haunt *Cura*, a "painting" without paint that traversed one wall and continued onto another, a giant cloth collage in black, brown and blue.

Interrupting this horizontal progression of blackout drapery and weed barrier around the corner, a tall vertical passage of elegant white-and-ivory silk and linen read to me like a stately bride, the train of her dress flowing onto the floor. For this occasion, humbler stuffs shed their workaday roles, as fabric—in all its quotidian utility, variety and sometimes beauty—is subsumed in Ross's material wedding of art and life.

*Photo: Michelle Ross: Silencer 2, 2012, mixed mediums, 77 by 92 by 28 inches; at Nine.*



OREGON ARTS  
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[www.oregonartscommission.org](http://www.oregonartscommission.org)

July 16, 2004

## Oregon Arts Commission Announces Visual Arts Fellowships

The Oregon Arts Commission announces Artist Fellowships to ten Oregon visual artists. Selected for these honors, first established by the Arts Commission in 1978, are:

Inge Bruggeman, bookarts, Portland  
Jessyca Burke, multimedia, Eugene  
Stephen Hayes, painter/printmaker, Portland  
Judy Hill, ceramic/glass, Portland  
Cynthia Nawalinski, multimedia, Portland  
Trude Parkinson, painter/multimedia, Portland  
Michelle Ross, painter/multimedia, Portland  
Joseph Schneider, found object installation/assemblage, Corbett  
Barbara Tetenbaum, bookarts/installation, Portland  
Marie Watt, multimedia, Portland

Fellowship applications from 143 Oregon visual artists and designers were reviewed by a distinguished panel of arts professionals. The \$3,000 non-matching grants recognize the achievements of professional artists and may be used to advance their work.

Says the panel: "These ten artists can compete on any level and within any geography. This is world-class work. And while there are certainly overarching themes—the mapping of public and personal space and a fascination with mannerisms of uncertainty—each artist across this diversity of medium has developed a definitive personal style."

From craft, figurative and abstract painting, to text, bookarts and installation, this year's recipients bring a diversity of medium that represents the breadth of Oregon art. While at varying stages in their careers, each has demonstrated great talent and dedication to professional involvement. They exhibit both regionally and internationally, lecture, serve on boards and selection committees for local arts organizations, and through teaching shape the next generation of Oregon artists.

This year's panel was chaired by Oregon Arts Commission Vice-Chair Cynthia Addams, and included the following professionals: Stephanie Snyder, Director, Cooley Art Gallery; Kate Wagle, Head, Department of Art, University of Oregon; Chris Rauschenberg, Artist, Board Chair, Blue Sky Gallery; Julie Beeler, Studio Director, co-founder, Second Story Interactive Studios; Jeffrey Thomas, Producer, Polara Studios and founder of Jamison/Thomas Gallery; Heidi Preuss Grew, Willamette University faculty and past recipient; Angie Kim, Program Officer, Arts, Flintridge Foundation.