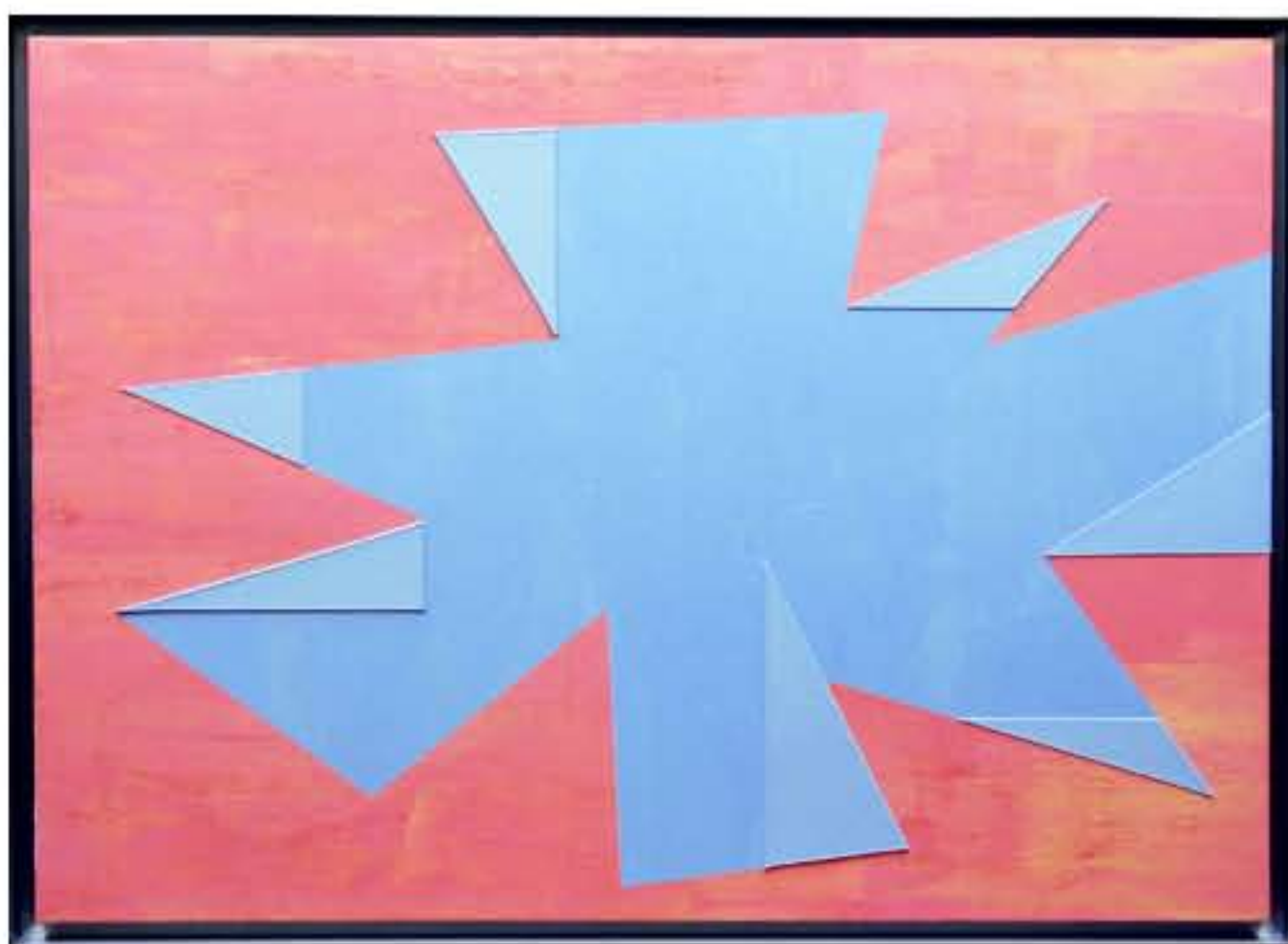


HOME > REVIEW > JONATHAN FORREST: EXPLODING ABSTRACTION'S HISTORIES

Jonathan Forrest *Spring Fever* 2010 Courtesy Newzones

REVIEW

Jonathan Forrest: Exploding Abstraction's Histories

By Jeffrey Spalding

POSTED: APRIL 8, 2010



Consensus may adjudge that there are few, if any, productive new avenues left to explore within the confines of modernist abstraction. Thankfully, [Jonathan Forrest](#) is blissfully unaware of this sentiment. Year after year he plunders art history, pillaging the past and seeking clues for new beginnings. In the process, he forges a bright future for himself; his current exhibition is a case in point.

In previous series, Forrest channelled grid structures, akin to late 1950s Molinari or 1930s Abstract-Creation Group, grafted onto procedural, post-minimalist strategies, incongruously produced with luscious painterly application employing extraordinarily idiosyncratic colour combinations. Juxtaposing full chroma primaries and black and white against Easter-confection pastels of robin's egg blue, lilac or sunny yellow, one might predict aesthetic calamity. Instead of being road wrecks, they spring to life, raucous, spirited ragamuffins, wayward orphans of formalism that delight and surprise. Their jocular nature would keep impish good company alongside [Jonathan Lasker](#), [Peter Halley](#) and crew.

Thereafter, in "Power Play" at [Michael Gibson](#), Forrest donned more elegant, restrained garb. Utilizing a subdued, close-keyed palette of natural earth tones, his work played off reminiscences of 1970s Jack Bush: calligraphic gestures offsetting a mottled backdrop.

"Splinter Group" at [Newzones](#) breaks from restraint. Shattered shards explode and burst outward with boundless energy in bold, declarative compositions with connotative titles: *Sky Burst*, *Flame Thrower*, *Trumpet* and *Spring Fever*. In *Hop, Skip and a Jump*, a central anthropomorphic lumpen "figure" frolics in space. It would seem that this animated character morphs in shape throughout the series.

Seen in the flesh, the paintings are physical wonders. Their final form appears to be governed by the process of their own making, though just what that process is we can't quite ascertain. Surfaces lavished with built-up layers of icing-cake impasto ooze tantalizingly over the edges. Other areas are scraped right back to a residual stained ground. Slabs of clean line and hard-edged painterly slivers of varying thicknesses have the appearance that their corners have been folded over, origami gone mad. We are inclined to marvel: "Just how did he do that?"

Loving references to prior accomplishments by revered artists abound in Forrest's work: *Step by Step* is Mondrian meets ziggurat step pyramid, while *Setting the Stage* bows to [Doug Haynes](#) and the muted colouration of analytic cubism. [William Ronald's](#) *In Dawn the Heart* is part of the mix, as are the heraldic [Spanish elegies](#) of Motherwell. [Hans Hofmann's](#) push and pull is evoked, along with the legacy of suprematism, [William Perehudoff](#) and [Robert Christie](#).

Colour dynamics are still the core of Forrest's work. "Splinter Group" conjures the colouration of mid-century modern housewares, sporting spunky pairings of Pepto-Bismol pink, powder blue, hospital green, blush "flesh" tone, Fire-King Jadite and sunburst yellow. It should be a recipe for disaster. However, constrained by stately aluminum shadow-box frames, each painting is pulled into check: a rambunctious teenager yanked straight from the playground, scrubbed, then stuffed into a Sunday suit. "Splinter Group" demonstrates that playfulness works, and that art employing matter as subject still matters.