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Binlot, Ann. "Landon Metz's New Abstraction Echoes the Work of the Genre's Masters," *Forbes*, October 17, 2018.



Installation view of Landon Metz's Asymmetrical Symmetry at Sean Kelly, New York. JASON WYCHE/COURTESY SEAN KELLY, NEW YORK

It's not every day that a respected, veteran dealer like Sean Kelly compares the work of a young artist to that of some of the greatest in history, but when he first caught glimpse of Landon Metz's work in a summer group show at his gallery in 2014, Kelly was immediately intrigued. A large-scale abstract diptych by Metz hung side by side in the basement gallery of the space, each canvas was marked with exact same rough, navy-hued semicircle on the left, and a thick rectangular shape on the right. When placed together, a repetitive pattern formed.

"I was so fascinated by the audacity of his painting, because it was an idiom that had been so looked over whether it was the decorative quality of [Henri] Matisse, or whether it was Morris Louis (Metz was in a two-person show with the Color Field legend at Paul Kasmin in 2016)—the staining—and I thought, How is this kid coming along thinking he has the right to make this painting at this moment in the beginning of the 21st century?" questioned Kelly. "He challenged all these preconceptions."

Kelly invited Metz to a meeting, and he placed two chairs in front of the diptych. "I need to talk to you about this painting, because I'm so shocked by the audacity of the painting, and also the chutzpah of him thinking he can get away with it," Kelly

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recalled telling him. Whatever the two discussed impressed the art dealer so much that he bought it and placed it in his upstate New York home, and a few years later—Metz was with another dealer at the time—Kelly scheduled a solo show for him in fall 2018.

The result is *Asymmetrical Symmetry*, on view at Sean Kelly Gallery through October 20. For the exhibition, Metz created a series of works that interacted with the architecture of Toshiko Mori, who designed the 22,000-square-foot, two-story space located at 475 10th Avenue. His canvases speak to the structural forms in the gallery, submitting themselves to a dialogue with the columns that stand on its main floor. Repetitive, biomorphic shapes form patterns in vivid hues of green, purple, and blue.

“I also want the spaces that the works inhabit to sort of somehow impact or influence or articulate the way the works unfurl through the space, so like that one wall to the left when you walk in, that becomes a formal measure for all the horizontal work,” said Metz. “They’re all exactly the same width as that wall, and the negative space between all the works also is identical to that wall.”

The New York-based Metz—who is expecting a baby with his wife in March—was born in Phoenix, Arizona, and grew up playing music in the nearby suburb of Tempe. He went to Canada, where he met his wife, before relocating to Los Angeles to find his medium, experimenting with photography, performance, art, sculpture, and avant-garde film before discovering the ink-on-canvas abstraction

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for which he would become known. Born to a mother with Italian parents, and a father whose father was Mexican and mother was Dutch and French, Metz's last name could have been Gonzalez—had his grandparents not changed his father's name to Metz, his grandmother's maiden name, to avoid the rampant racism in 1930s Chicago. He started exhibiting in 2010, and his works often frame the architecture that surrounds them; he recently created art that framed The Conrad hotel in Washington, D.C., designed by Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron.

Metz created the canvases in his Sean Kelly show with a meticulous process that involves painting a custom dye—he created it over the course of several years, working with a pigment company in California to get the ideal formula—on to a canvas to form a shape, and then repeating it several times on numerous canvases so that they can be installed together to create a repetitive pattern, or stand alone individually. The shapes stay the same, but the gradation of the dye varies depending on the way it's absorbed into the canvas.

“There's this a core sentiment in my practice that's dealing with notions of authorship and relinquishing formal roles and hierarchies of authorship, so let's say that the most simple place that it becomes apparent is in the materials,” explained Metz. “It's dye, that's the paint, so it's really merging with the fibers of the canvas and the way the canvas reacts and pushes back against the medium, you get this natural vernacular that is beyond my control. There's a lot of chance in the depth of all these little holes.”

In a time when abstraction is often overlooked and underappreciated, especially when compared to the myriad politically-charged works on the market that are responding to the tumultuous times, Metz's work proves that it is still going strong. “Landon's work is really wonderful, and I think we're at the front end of a very interesting arc of the development of his work, but for another generation, but in a very different way from the way I would understand it,” said Kelly. “I think Landon is the best practitioner of that work.”