

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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# HYPERALLERGIC

Art **Reviews** Weekend

## Terry Winters's Allegiance to Science and Abstraction

Winters's art is about decisions, choices, quality of attention, the shaping of one's existence in time.

by John Yau  
June 12, 2021

A list of words came to mind: field, layer, cluster, shape, line, frame, and diagram. They did not come all at once, but slowly, as I walked around the exhibition *Terry Winters: Table of Contents* at Matthew Marks Gallery (May 14–June 26, 2021). The accumulation of these words seemed to echo Winters's paintings, which feel as if a series of different visual vocabularies have been both worked out and bonded on the painting's surface.

Drawing might be the jumping off point, a way to begin, but the additive process of painting inevitably takes over. Working in oil, wax, and resin on seven paintings, all measuring 88 by 68 inches, Winters begins with a thinly painted, brushy layer, which he may cover entirely or partially with a linear structure or pattern of abstract shapes.

The recent paintings, which are eight inches larger than the ones he showed at this gallery



Terry Winters, "Index 1" (2021), oil, wax, and resin on linen, 88 x 68 inches (all images © Terry Winters, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery)

in 2018 (they measured 80 by 60 inches) and all vertically oriented, suggest that Winters is testing the limits of what could still be regarded as a human-scaled painting.

These paintings are complimented by five paintings on paper measuring 40 1/2 by 30 1/2 inches and *Table of Contents* (2020), a series of 26 drawings done in graphite, ink, and wax, measuring 11 by 9 inches, on the tabbed dividers you would buy in a stationery store.

Working within these established parameters, with a vocabulary that is derived largely from the sciences, Winters suppresses the individuality of the artist but does not eliminate it: everywhere in his work we can sense his direct and passionate engagement with materials and processes, as he breathes life into what could be a dry undertaking.

Winters employs a process that is about layers and different abstract vocabularies, working back into the painting, and making visible changes and adjustments. He leaves the work open enough for the viewer to consider the steps he took to arrive at the final painting. This is one of the many deep pleasures that his artwork offers us. It both invites scrutiny and provokes self reflection.

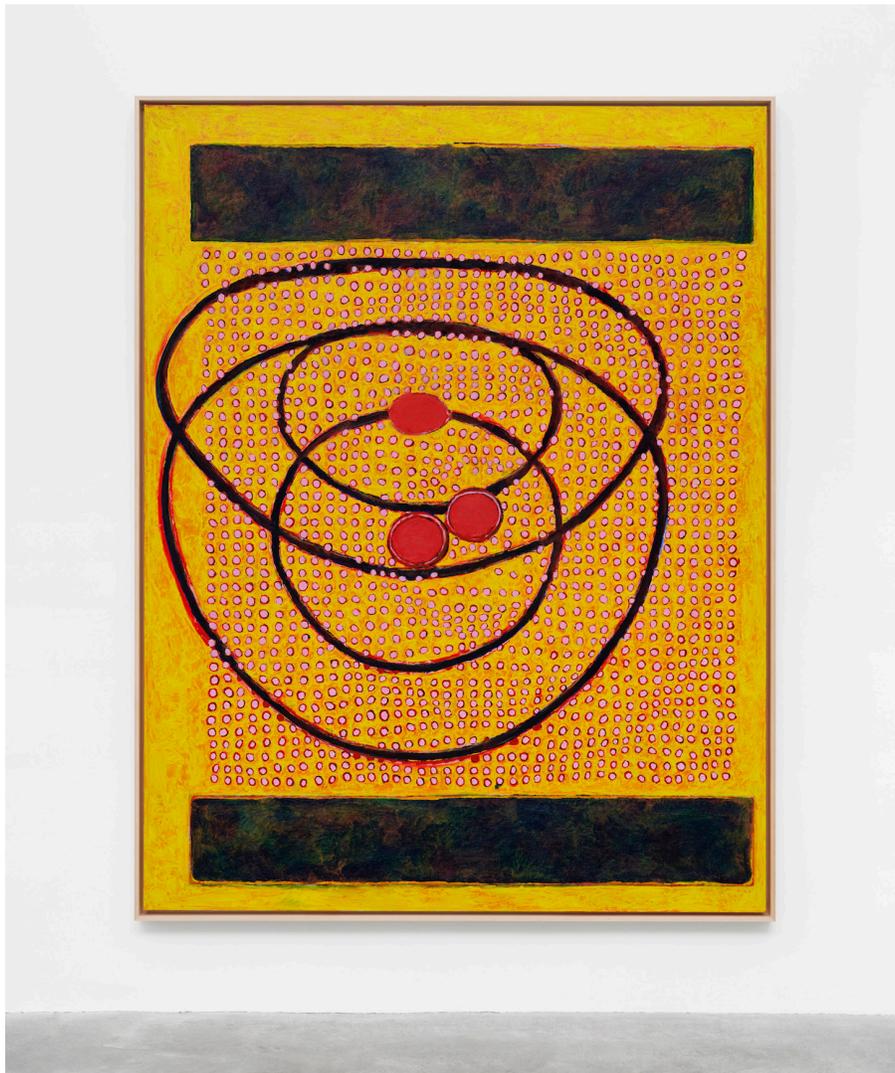
While Winters's working method shares something with process painting (the working out of everything in the painting), the differences are crucial. If process art, which originated with Jackson Pollock and developed with the rise of Color Field painting and Sol LeWitt's rule-bound wall drawings, was intended to minimize the importance of the artist's hand, Winter brings the hand and drawing back into painting without nostalgia for gesture and signature flourishes. In fact, the link between drawing and thinking is decisive to his works. They are like diagrams charting the steps of their emergence into full view. In that regard, his paintings are visual proposals.



Terry Winters, *Table of Contents* (2020), graphite, ink, and wax on paper, 26 sheets, each 11 x 9 inches

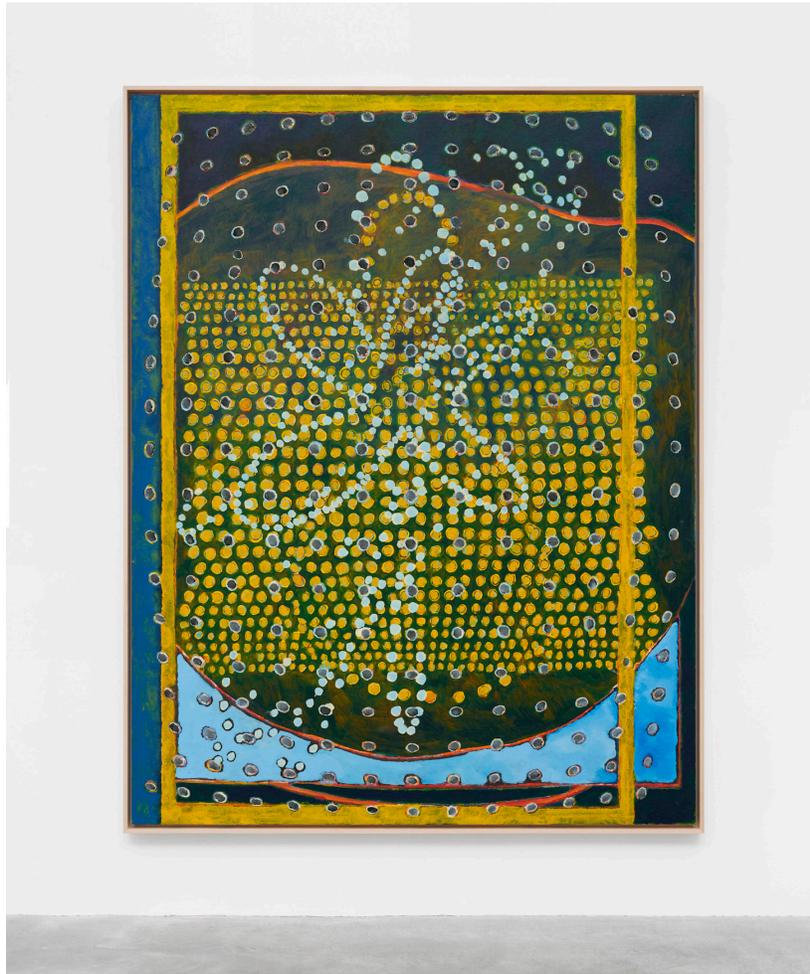
By bringing together different abstract vocabularies used in different branches of science, Winters both reimagines LeWitt and turns his machine-like efficiency into an accumulation of handmade and visible decisions — into a state of forthrightness and vulnerability. Beyond the domain of art, which is to say in the realm of everyday life, Winters’s art is about decisions, choices, quality of attention, the shaping of one’s existence in time, owning everything you do, and staying intimately connected with the thing you are making. His works praise painting as an everyday activity

In “Index 1” (2020), Winters begins with a thinly painted, brushy turquoise ground, to which he adds a number of layers, each consisting of a specific set of open forms or perforated shapes (circles that are outlined and filled in with color). By accumulating a form that is open rather than solid and impermeable, he finds ways to join together his layers. The artist composes the wavering field of red circles, for example, by brushing red into the circles and outlining them in dark blue, with the turquoise blue of the background often still visible. As a result the red circles produce a halation effect.



Terry Winters, “Index 3” (2021), oil, wax, and resin on linen, 88 x 68 inches

Yau, John. “Terry Winters’s Allegiance to Science and Abstraction.” *Hyperallergic*, June 12, 2021.



Terry Winters, "Magic Architecture" (2020), oil, wax, and resin on linen 88 x 68 inches

A large, irregular red circle seems to rest on one of the bands going from the top to the bottom edge of an off-center rectangle within the turquoise field. Is it part of the field of wavering circles, which imply motion, or is it separate? Can it be both? The use of warm (red) and cool (blues and greens) colors suggests the answer is yes.

In the largely pink and red oil on paper "Curtain" (2020) and the other four works in this group, Winters generally brings together a few configurations of abstract patterns, usually circles and irregular shapes, and both joins and sets them at odds with each other. In "Echo" (2020), my attention shifts between how the different vocabularies connect and push against each other.

"Thyreos" (2020) is dominated by an outlined salmon-colored oval that contains a smaller oval composed of perforated circles, many of which are outlined in red and cream and filled in with gray and black. (A thyreos is a large oval shield that was used by Hellenistic soldiers after the death of Alexander the Great.) The ghostly outlines of earlier circular shapes are visible in the pink oval, which is set within a perforated blue ground. These outlines are among the features that will cause viewers to refocus attention, as well as recognize the visual instability of the painting.

Winters establishes a dialogue among the various layers by setting the pink oval within the blue field and overlaying both with perforations. The openings and perforations brought to mind the incised and punctured ceramic works of Lucio Fontana, and prompted a feeling that the picture plane had been violated and damaged. His use of multiple abstract patterns shares something with Australian aboriginal bark paintings, but Winters is not concerned with cosmology. He brings these associations to mind without resorting to direct citation or parody, deepening the breadth of his work.

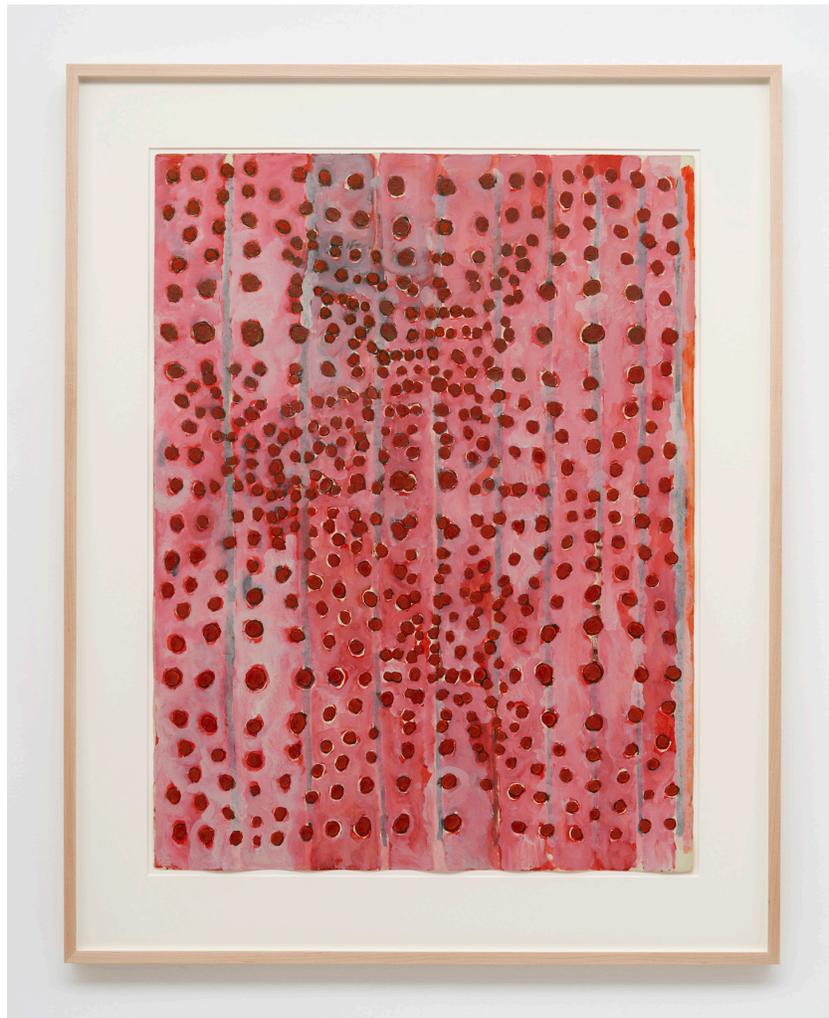
By superimposing perforated layers and fields of distinct forms, Winters arrives at a destabilized composition, where the boundaries between figure and ground are porous, while the smaller circles within the oval and the larger ones superimposed on them convey an irresolvable visual tension in which similarity and difference maintain a constant friction. That friction seems crucial to our experience of the work, as well as its meaning. We live in a state of continual contention and co-existence.

Consider all the different abstract patterns and compositional structures that Winters has brought together in “Magic Architecture” (2021), and one senses his ability to choreograph and compress multiple vocabularies.



Terry Winters, “Thyreos” (2020), oil, wax, and resin on linen, 88 x 68 inches

Yau, John. “Terry Winters’s Allegiance to Science and Abstraction.” *Hyperallergic*, June 12, 2021.



Terry Winters, "Curtain" (2020), oil on paper, 40 1/2 x 30 1/2 inches

In "Curtain," the superimposing of a dense field of outlined red circles on a pink, abstract curtain made me think of the computer-generated representations of the COVID-19 virus, to electronic microscopes and other ways of detecting the invisible — all the new apprehensions that have entered our lives.

Winters's attention to the world of science gives this exhibition a particular twist, given the pandemic we have been living through for more than a year. In the 26 drawings done on tabbed index dividers, viewers may sense that each index sheet frames the "contents," but does not show what will be added. This adds a note of foreboding to the works in the exhibition, starting with the drawings, their patterns, clusters, tonal difference, and shifts in materiality. I think Winters is determined to make abstraction open to the world that he inhabits without becoming narrative or literal. This is one reason why he is a compelling artist.

Terry Winters: Table of Contents *continues* at Matthew Marks Gallery (522 West 22nd Street, Chelsea, Manhattan) through June 26.