



KATHLEEN KUCKA

Beneath the Surface: *Recent Work*

Essay by **Ellen Keiter**

Above: **Untitled**, 1995 Burns on Canvas/Velvet 16h x 16w inches

Cover: **Burn Thru 7-25-13 4:49**, 2013 Acrylic and Burns on Canvas/Velvet 84h x 84w inches

gallery
geranmayeh

In Kathleen Kucka's newest body of work, the past becomes the present. Two years ago, after moving into a new Brooklyn studio, Kucka unwrapped some of her earlier canvases, done about a decade ago, in which she used burning as the primary element. She was instantly struck by the "freshness" of the burn marks and their expressive configurations. She was inspired to work the medium again.

Almost seamlessly, she picked up where things left off continuing her investigation of abstract mark-making. Burning canvas or paper is a conscious physical act, one that cannot be erased or reversed. While it may be easy to interpret burning as a metaphor for destruction or a symbol of pain, Kucka is cautious that her marks never become referential. She uses fire as process.

Choreographing an abstract dance between materials and process, Kucka shares a kinship with the former Japanese avant-garde artist collective Gutai (meaning "concreteness"), which advocated a direct engagement between artists and their materials. In their 1956 manifesto, Gutai artists stated that the appeal of their artworks "lies solely in the strength of their material properties, their colors and forms."¹ Similarly for Kucka, burning is a means of "making a primal mark".

It is with an electric charcoal lighter that Kucka began to physically break through the painting surface. The artist acknowledges the influences of Lucio Fontana's mid-century slash paintings, Yves Klein's Fire Paintings of 1961/1962, and Alberto Burri's sewing and stitching work on burlap and canvas. Her initial burns were large and assertive. The six vertical scorches in "*Untitled 1995*" suggest thick tar oozing down the canvas. The black velvet backing creates an illusionistic void and renders it nearly impossible to perceive the depth behind the picture.

The largest work, Kucka has completed, is "*Color Burn*", dated: 2003/2013. Here hundreds of small oval-shaped burns swirl in whirlpool patterns. While similar in shape, the marks do not conform to any standard size or symmetry; rather, their sweeping accumulations create a dazzling visual vibration. "*Color Burn*" represents Kucka's first experiment with multiple fabric colors, which peek through each singed opening creating a visual field of color beneath the surface of the burns.



Burn Thru 4-19-13 5:22 pm, 2013 Burns on Canvas, 85h x 75w inches



The works comprising the *"Burn Thru"* series follow the example of Gutai; there are no longer titles, but instead each piece simply notes the date, year, and exact minute of completion. "It's like a birth record," she says, "of when the painting became itself."² *"Burn Thru 9-19-12 4:22"* is a large canvas that achieves a structured rhythm. Kucka's strands of elliptical burns form three columns that convey a sense of volume and drape. Interestingly, when viewed from the left-hand side, the black velvet backing becomes indigo due to the nape of the material. Rabbit skin glue is applied to the finished canvases to ensure that the delicate charred edges remain intact. Equally integral to her compositions is the wispy residue of smoke that drifts above each burn. The "rising" smoke in *"Burn Thru 2-4-13 11:00"* creates the impression of movement: the burned forms appear to slide down the canvas, like contrails, leaving smoky streaks in their wake.

In *"Burn Thru 4-8-13 12:49"*, Kucka's burns create sinuous lines of complimentary orange and blue that dance like the flames of a fire, an impression enhanced by veils of smoke. Individual bursts of neon orange fabric, punctuate the otherwise subdued palette. The incorporation of colored fabrics has taken on greater relevance over the past year. Her color choices are bold and often combine multiple hues within a single composition.

Another work spanning two time periods, is *"Burn Over Burn"*, which was begun in 1995 and completed this year. For this multi-paneled work, Kucka seared numerous vertical lines into nine pieces of paper. She then darkened their surfaces with charcoal, careful not to conceal the brown borders around each burn. The thin streaks of exposed white ground create shimmering optical effects against the pitch-black paper. Framed in clear Plexi boxes, the artwork poetically evokes the patterning of rain on a glass window.

The *"Burn Bright Series"* is a large installation composed of nearly sixty individual works. It features both older burn pieces and more recent drawings; it is, in essence, a visual diary of Kucka's multiple processes over the years. Varied burn formations are visible throughout—straight lines and starbursts, sweeping arcs and structured grids—creating lively juxtapositions of pattern and scale. Included amidst the sea of abstract shapes are twelve miniature hand-sewn outfits and three figurative portraits. These delicately articulated faces have a haunting presence as they gaze outward with empty eyes. Kucka's monochromatic arrangement is interspersed by bursts of bright crimson color on several drawings.

For her works on paper, the artist must act quickly and diligently since paper burns much faster than canvas. The smaller scale and change of medium, however, allow for greater expression in gestural marks and color selections. Unlike the neutral canvas of her burn paintings, Kucka's drawings on paper are vibrant and saturated with pigment. She uses oil pastels and beeswax crayons to chart new designs amid the numerous burns. In *"Burn Thru #7"*, Kucka shepherds a swarm of burn marks into a dark stream that flows through a bright field of yellow. She transmutes the elliptical forms in *"Burn Thru #9"* into diamonds of blue, their loose configuration reminiscent of a textile print or Ikat weaving.

The drawings all share a fluid, organic sensibility. The sequence of crescent burns in *"Burn Thru #8"* flutters like feathers in a fiery sky of red and black. Kucka's discernible crayon marks are evidence of the artist's hand, lending immediacy to the works. In every drawing she intentionally leaves a halo of untouched paper around each burn. It would be sacrilege to cover it; for Kucka, "the burn mark is paramount."³

Kathleen Kucka's exploration of materials and mark-making has led her on a decades-long journey. She has remained steadfast in her formal investigations. Her burns, whether on canvas or paper, compose complex, lyrical compositions that ultimately revel in the process of their creation. Like Gutai, who championed "a willful rite of destruction to yield something new,"⁴ Kucka deconstructs the canvas to reveal its intrinsic beauty and potential as an art object itself. She engages simply and wholly in the process of her art.

Ellen J. Keiter

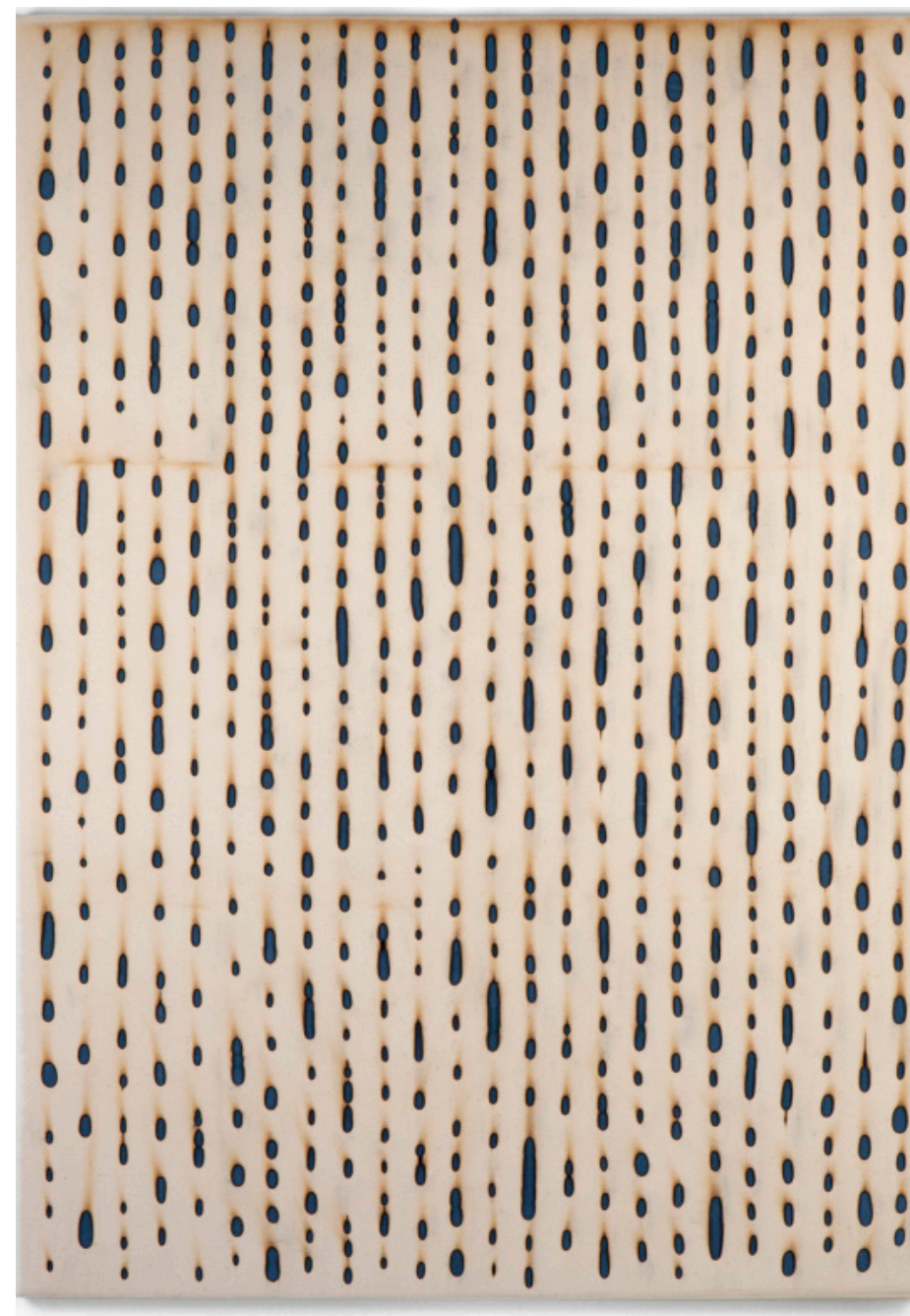
*Curator of Contemporary Art
Katonah Museum of Art*

¹ Guggenheim Museum, 1 May 2013, <<http://web.guggenheim.org/exhibitions/gutai/>>.

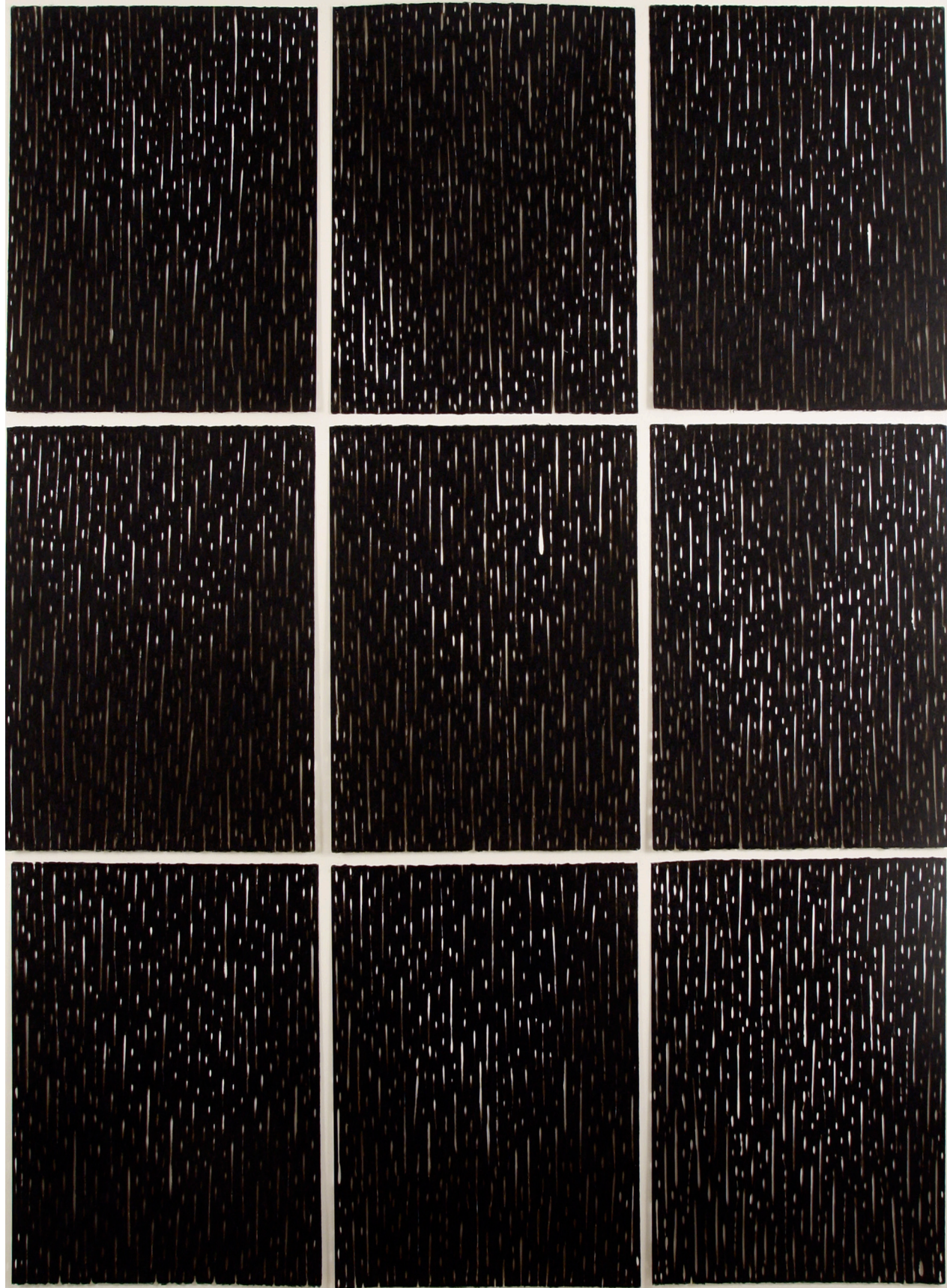
² Author interview with the artist, 7 March 2013.

³ Ibid

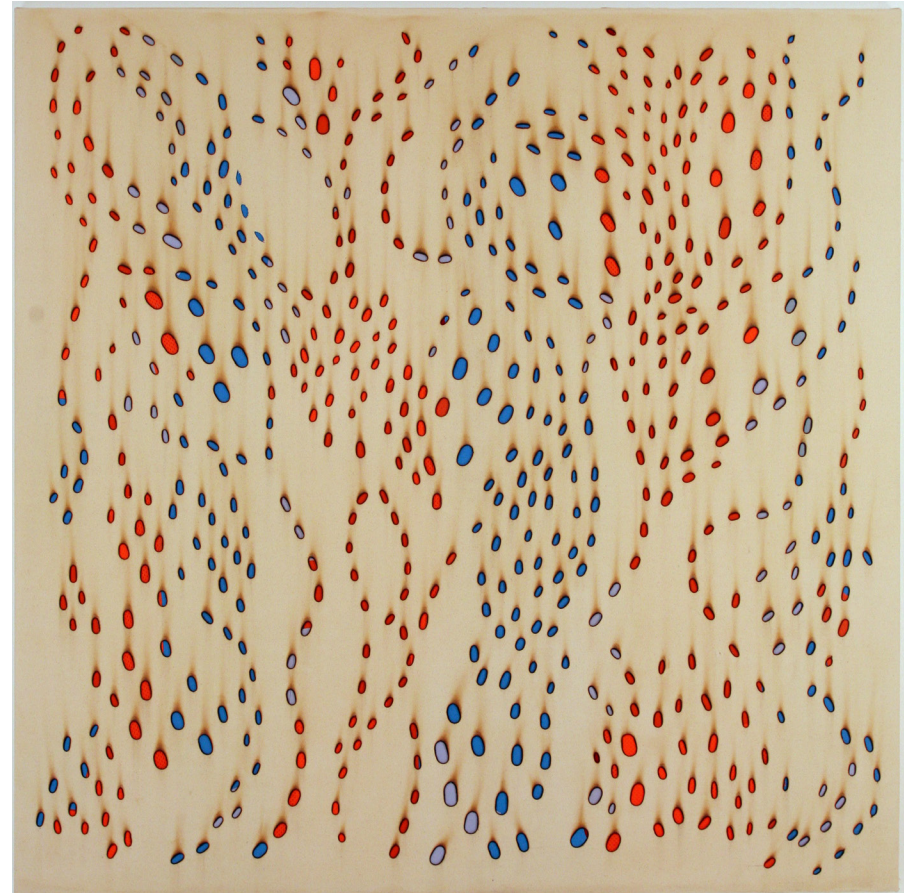
⁴ Guggenheim Museum, 1 May 2013, <<http://web.guggenheim.org/exhibitions/gutai/>>.



Burn Thru 2-4-13 11:00, 2013, Acrylic and Burns on Canvas/Velvet, 70h x 52w inches



Burn Over Burn, 1995-2013 Burns and Charcoal on paper/plexiglass boxes



Burn Thru 4-8-13 12:49 pm, 2013 Burns on Canvas/Velvet/Mesh 60h x 60w inches

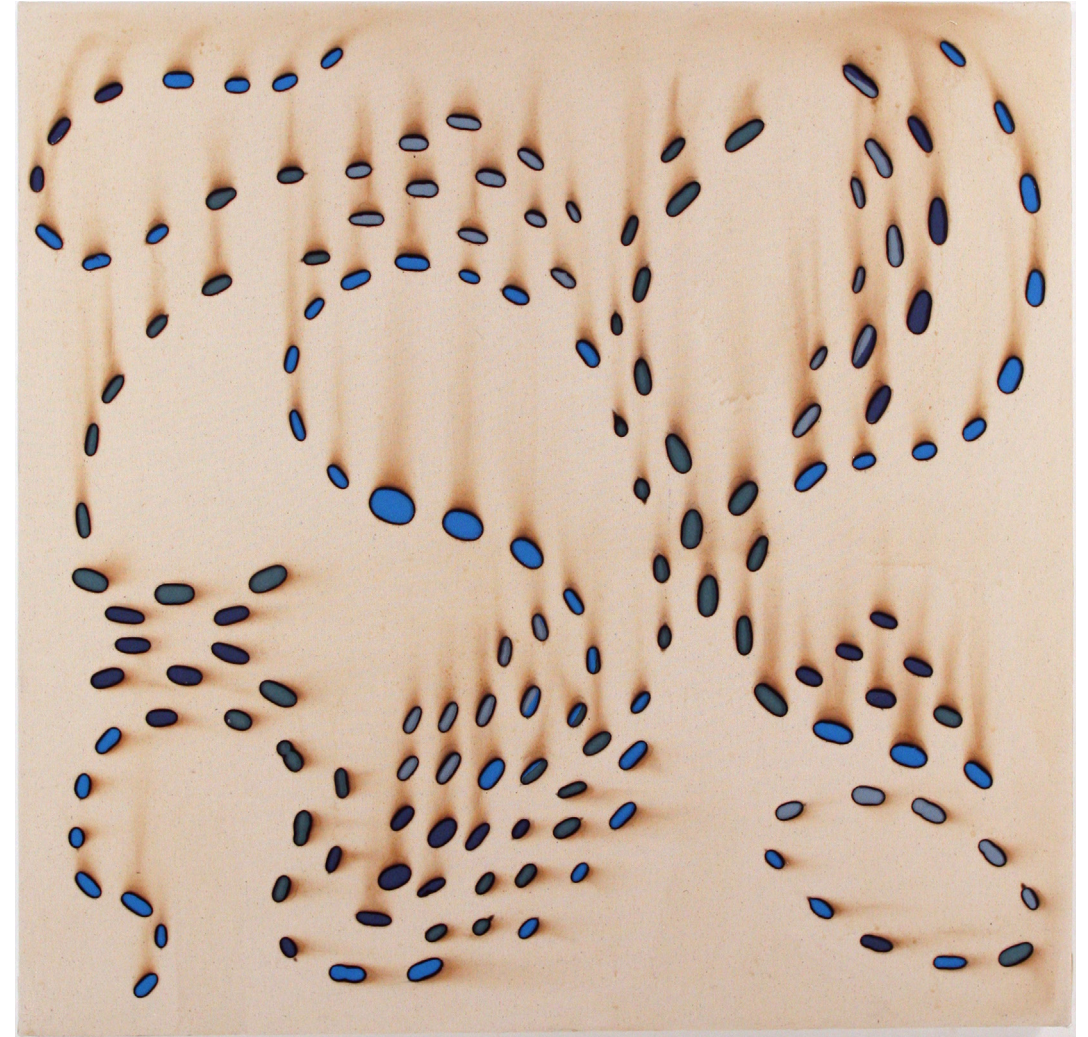


Above from left to right:
Burn Thru #7, 2012 Beeswax Crayon and Burns on Paper 20h x 13w inches
Burn Thru #9, 2012 Beeswax Crayon and Burns on Paper 20h x 13w inches
Burn Thru #8, 2012 Beeswax Crayon and Burns on Paper 20h x 13w inches

Right Page: *Burn Thru #1*, 2012 Beeswax Crayon and Burns on Paper 20h x 13w inches



Burn Thru 2-4-13 11:18, 2013 Acrylic and Burns on Canvas/Velvet 24h x 20w inches



Above: Burn Thru 4-19-13 5:29 pm, 2013 Acrylic and Burns on Canvas/Velvet 24h x 24w inches

Next spread page Burn Bright Series, 2013 Mixed Media on Paper 96h x 96w inches



Kathleen Kucka

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2014 Gallery Geranmayah, New York, NY (upcoming)
2011 Ultra Structures, Brenda Taylor Gallery, New York, NY
2010 Fluidity, Gallerie Roger Katwijk, Amsterdam, Netherlands
2009 Marsha Mateyka Gallery, Washington, DC
2006 Brenda Taylor Gallery, New York, NY
2004 Kristen Frederickson Contemporary Art, New York, NY
Marsha Mateyka Gallery, Washington, DC
2003 Jeffrey Coploff Gallery, New York, NY
2001 Jeffrey Coploff Gallery, New York, NY
1999 Jeffrey Coploff Gallery, New York, NY
1995 Thread Waxing Space, Project Room, New York, NY
Saint Peter's Church, Lexington Avenue, New York, NY

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2013
"Untitled Art Fair," Gallery Geranmayah, Art Basel, Miami Beach, FL
"Pushing the Line: Drawing in the Age of Anxiety," ArtsWestchester, White Plains, New York. Curated by Neil Watson.
"Come Together: Surviving Sandy," Industry City, Brooklyn, NY. Curated by Phong Bui.

2012
"Urban Fiction," Nuartlink Gallery at JAR Project Space, NYC
"In Plain View," Nuartlink Gallery, Westport, CT

2011
"Rhythms in Translation," Nuartlink Gallery, Westport, CT

2010
"Crazy Beautiful," Kenise Barnes Fine Art, Larchmont, NY
"San Diego Art Fair," Brenda Taylor Gallery, San Diego, CA
"Red Dot Art Fair," Brenda Taylor Gallery, New York, NY
"PAN Art Fair," Gallerie Roger Katwijk, Amsterdam, Netherlands

2009
"Verge Art Fair," Brenda Taylor Gallery, Miami, FL
"PAN Art Fair," Gallerie Roger Katwijk, Amsterdam, Netherlands

2008
"Group Exhibition," Gallerie Roger Katwijk, Amsterdam, Netherlands
"Art Amsterdam Art Fair," Gallerie Roger Katwijk, Amsterdam, Netherlands
"Material Color," Hunterdon Art Museum, Clinton, NJ. Curated by Mary Birmingham
"Summer Collection 2008," Gallerie Roger Katwijk, Amsterdam, Netherlands
"Art Amsterdam Art Fair," Gallerie Roger Katwijk, Amsterdam, Netherlands
"I Dream of Genomes," Islip Art Museum, East Islip, NY. Curated by Janet Goleas

2007
"Red Dot Fair," Brenda Taylor Gallery, Miami, FL
"Group Show," Brenda Taylor Gallery, New York, NY
"artDC," Marsha Mateyka Gallery, Washington, DC
"Red Dot Fair," Brenda Taylor Gallery, New York, NY

2006
"New Year New Work," Marsha Mateyka Gallery, Washington, DC
"Surface," Brenda Taylor Gallery, New York, NY

2005
"Head Over Hand: Pushing the Limits of Paint," Denise Bibro Fine Art, New York, NY
"LV," Dust Gallery, Las Vegas, NV

2004
"Mindscape," Pavel Zoubok Gallery, New York, NY
"Scope Los Angeles," Jeffrey Coploff Gallery, New York, NY
"Concentrics," Marsha Mateyka Gallery, Washington, DC
"Hard and Soft," Margaret Thatcher Projects, New York, NY

2003
"Pour Pierce Pounce," Kristen Frederickson Contemporary Art, NY
"Prima Facie," New Abstract Paintings, Angles Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
"Bold," Jeffrey Coploff Gallery, New York, NY
"Abstraction: An Invitational Exhibition," Marsha Mateyka Gallery, Washington, DC
"Young and Brash and Abstract," Anderson Gallery at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA. Curated by John Yau.

2001
"That Which Remains," Bernadette Salvage Fine Art, Brooklyn, NY. Curated by Mo Eich.
"Burn: Artists Play with Fire," The Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, FL. Also traveling to the Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, SC
"Pierogi 2000 Traveling Flat Files," Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA; Post Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; Block Art Space, Kansas City, MO

2000
"Group Show," Jeffrey Coploff Fine Art, New York, NY
"Fluid Flow," James Graham and Sons, New York, NY
"Eye Candy: Contemporary West and East Coast Women painters," California State University, San Bernardino; The Visual Arts Center- California State University, Fullerton.
"24/7 The Inaugural Exhibition of The Nantista Discoveries Series," Guild Hall Museum, East Hampton, NY

1999
"Two Person Show," Nylon Gallery, London, England
"34th Annual Art on Paper," Weatherspoon Art Gallery, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC
"Fabrications: Art, Fashion, Style," TIAA/CREF, New York, NY (Organized by ViART Corporation)

1998
"Focus on Materials," Staller Center for the Arts, University Art Gallery, State University of New York at Stony Brook, Stony Brook, NY
"Paper," Jeffrey Coploff Gallery, New York, NY

1997
"Text and Touch," Hunter College, Voorhees Gallery, New York, NY. Curated by Kristen Fredrickson.
"Current Undercurrent: Working in Brooklyn," The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY
"New York Drawers: The Pierogi 2000 Flatfiles," Gasworks, London, UK

1996
"Limbo," Ah! Space Gallery, New York, NY
"Repeat," The Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery, Hunter College, New York, NY
"Painting and Works on Paper," The Houghton Gallery, Cooper Union, New York. Juried by Stephen Haller, Lisa Lawley and Richard Vine

1988–94
"Modulating the Exhibition: Free Falling," Berlin Shaffir Gallery, New York, NY
"Passion," Peconic Gallery, Riverhead, New York.
"National Juried Visual Art Exhibition," Juried by Ann Philbin (The Drawing Center, New York, NY)
"Mark as Metaphor," PS 122 Gallery, New York, NY
"States of The Art: National Juried Show of Women Artists," A.I.R. Gallery, New York, NY
"Burning in Hell," The Franklin Furnace, New York, NY. Curated by Nancy Spero
"Selections Show, 1988," The Drawing Center, New York, NY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Simmons, Todd. "Clarity Amidst Liberated Perspectives," Gay City News, September 28, 2011.
Genocchio, Benjamin. "Looking Into the World of Genomes and Seeing an Unreliable Future," The New York Times, March 2, 2008
Lieberman, Rachael. "Kathleen Kucka's Multi-Dimensional Impressions," Gay City News, October 2006.
Mendelsohn, Meredith. "Kathleen Kucka Burns and Pours," ArtNews, December 2004.
Jacobson, Lewis. "Concentrics," Washington City Paper, Washington, DC, June 2004.
Knight, Christopher. "Surface and Color in Abstract Group Show," Los Angeles Times, August 9, 2002.

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Dawson, Jessica. "Three Artists of Different Stripes," The Washington Post, March 21, 2002.
Schudel, Matt. "Fire Works," The Sun-Sentinel, Fort Lauderdale, FL., April 2001.
Korotkin, Joyce. "Kathleen Kucka," The New York Art World.com, April 2001.
Schmerler, Sarah. "Fluid Flow," Time Out: New York, July 27–August 3, 2000.
Knaff, Devorah. "'Eye Candy' by Women Reveals Beauty Beyond Good Looks," The Press Enterprise, Los Angeles, CA., April 19, 2000.
Johnson, Ken. "Kathleen Kucka," The New York Times, March 19, 1999.
Scott, Sue. "Kathleen Kucka," Review: The Critical State of Visual Art in New York, Review Magazine, March 15, 1999.
Braff, Phyllis. "On the Edge," The New York Times, May 31, 1998.
Daigle, Claire. "Text and Touch," Art Papers-New York, March–April 1998.
Long, Robert. "Perspectives: A Style Shift," The Southampton Press, May 18, 1995.
Harrison, Helen A. "Depicting Passion, in its Many Guises and Garbs," The New York Times, March 20, 1994.

RESIDENCIES AND GRANTS

Vermont Studio Center, 2008
The Nancy Ashton Memorial Fund Award, Hunter College, New York, NY
The Alternative Worksite, Bemis Foundation, Omaha, NE. Artist residence. Change Grant

WORKS IN COLLECTION OF

Birmingham Museum of Art
Borusan Contemporary, Istanbul, Turkey
J. Jill, 28 pieces at corporate headquarters, Quincy, MA.
Intercontinental Hotel, Times Square, New York, NY.
Museum of Modern Art, Franklin Furnace Archives, New York, NY.
The Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida.
The Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock, AK
The Ritz-Carlton, Battery Park, New York, NY
The Ritz-Carlton, Washington, DC
The Weatherspoon Art Museum, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, NC.
Sally and Wynn Kramarsky

EDUCATION

1984 B.F.A., The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York
1994 M.F.A., Hunter College, Graduate School of Art, New York



Burn Room, Gowanus Brooklyn