

GERALD GARSTON THE JOY OF COLOR



PUCKER GALLERY | BOSTON



QUIETUDE
Oil on canvas
36.5 x 36.5"
GP938 (JW)

GERALD GARSTON THE JOY OF COLOR

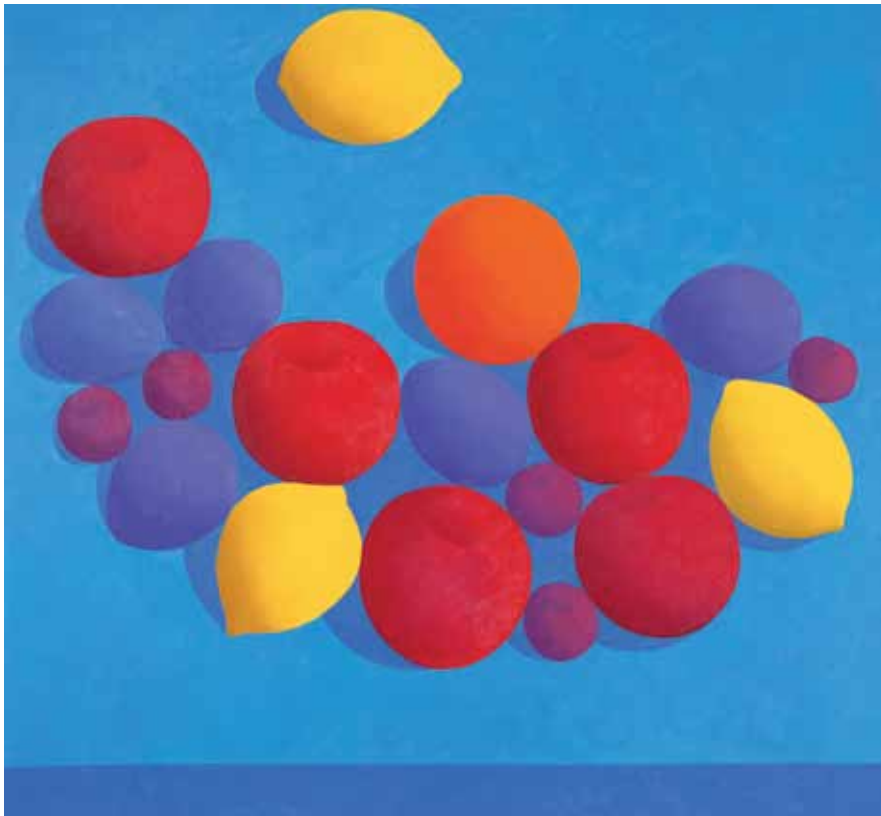
Imagine walking into a museum and finding yourself before a work of art with no context outside of the work itself. How would you begin to “read” the piece? You might turn to its physical elements, commonly referred to within the lexicon of art history as color, form, light/shadow (chiaroscuro), composition, perspective, medium, etc. Yet these words at times lend themselves to an obtuse reading of art, in which value is placed on an analysis that is ostracizing, inaccessible, and overbearing. How then do we engage with these terms in a way that is concise, thoughtful, and

accessible to a wide and diverse audience? Few artists have so beautifully simplified and thoroughly understood the value of these components as Gerald Garston (1925-1994).

To understand Garston’s fascination with each of these elements, it is important to look back on his influences. In the seminal work, *Interaction of Color*, Josef Albers, Garston’s professor at Yale University who, in Garston’s own words, had “exerted the greatest influence on (his) work,” wrote that “in musical compositions, so long as we hear merely single tones, we do not hear music.



STILL LIFE CITRUS
Oil on canvas
36 x 40.25"
GP935 (AS)



GATHERING
Oil
36 x 40"
GP917 (AS)

Hearing music depends on the recognition of the in-between of the tones, of their placing and of their spacing.”

Albers applied this understanding of music to the visual arts; he pioneered the study of how the human eye almost never sees a single color without influence from neighboring colors. While we can differentiate between musical notes in a sequence, colors placed next to each other or arranged in various forms are perceived differently (for example, just as yellow and blue combined create green, our eyes register green when we see yellow and blue directly next to one another). Albers furthered these chromatic experimentations by placing lighter shades within darker shades and vice versa to create depth; pasting the same-colored shape on two different colors to trick the eye into recognizing two different colors; and varying the distance between shapes to see how the intermittent spaces change our perception of the colors at hand.

While Albers employed abstraction in his pursuit of these experimentations, Garston favored representational art, creating an interesting distinction between himself and Albers and employing his own unique method of accomplishing similar effects. Yet these representational works also operated as abstract concepts—Garston did not derive meaning from the subject matters of his compositions. Rather, bright, plump oranges, moonlit white stallions, golden candlesticks, and more are the vehicles through which Garston experimented with compositional and chromatic variations. He adamantly rejected the notion that there was any hidden meaning behind the subjects of his paintings and quoted the French novelist André Malraux as saying that “artists become artists because they love painting, not because they love sunsets.”

Garston’s decision to use familiar, easily identifiable subjects allows for their easy

abstraction. He was able to relegate them to forms and colors, stripping them of context, while maintaining their accessibility for a wide audience. In Pucker Gallery’s 1998 exhibition catalogue of Garston’s works, Cornelia Reid wrote that “Garston distills the randomness and multiplicity of our visual world into its essences, ordered in deceptively simple paintings to look behind the objects that clutter and confuse our lives to the ideal in them.”

These “deceptively simple paintings” thus allowed Garston to focus his attention on color theory. In *In the Moonlight (Panther)*, Garston depicted a nighttime landscape with solid planes of color. Dark green composes the groundwork, behind which three layers of blue mountains progressively darken until they are engulfed by the night sky. A pale, yellow moon bisects the upper third of the print, eclipsed by the gaping jaw of a dark panther. The panther’s coat, only a few shades darker than the sky, is defined by a pointillist contour of tiny dots that give the panther an incandescent quality as it prowls through the night. The dots, composed of light blue and purple, are reminiscent of the work of Georges Seurat, the fin-de-siècle French post-impressionist who shared an interest in color theory with Garston. In 1884, Seurat coined the term chromoluminarism, a style of painting that creates optical illusions by placing small dots or patches of color next to one another, a concept that Albers would expatiate on almost a century later.

This lineage is one that Garston readily included himself in, while noting the uniqueness of his own experiences. “I think of all painting as one continuous line,” he explained in an interview for Pucker Gallery in 1978, “I am as related to Rembrandt as I am to Jackson Pollock—our involvement in this activity is common to us all (...) in another way, it is quite personal and individual. I am, after all, a twentieth century person with certain traditions that have gone before, and I



IN THE MOONLIGHT (PANTHER)
Serigraph
13.5 x 18.125"



COWBOYS
Oil on canvas
48 x 54"
NN1

experience new things in my environment that were quite inconceivable in Rembrandt's day. My painting should therefore reflect me, personally, and my time, yet still have some connection with the tradition before me."

That Garston's twentieth century art continues to resonate into the twenty-first century is a testament to the longevity of his creative vision and his commitment to art that can hold its own within the changing of traditions. In many of his works, contemporary subject matters are utilized in innovative new ways, specifically pertaining to Garston's human figures. In *Cowboys* (NN1), the upper bodies of two cowboys make up most of the canvas, with the cowboy on the right slightly overlapping the cowboy on the left with his right arm. Their wide brimmed hats cast purple shadows on their faces, exposing two sets of focused brown eyes in a steady gaze with the audience. They each wear red floral handkerchiefs tied around their necks and patterned button-down shirts; the one on the right wears a blue and purple checkered shirt in which the blue squares become progressively darker from left to right and the purple squares range in colors across the shirt, giving the impression of fabric rippling under a bright overhead sun.

Josef Albers once described a similar effect to Garston. In plate XV111-2 of *Interaction of Color*, Albers aligned rows and columns of same-sized circles in different shades of green. "The only freedom left," he wrote, "is a choice of color and light." He went on to describe the intention behind this pattern, explaining that "in our free studies we aim at a visually challenging interplay of influencing and influenced colors—in other words, a presentation of active relatedness." Garston's choice to use two colors, blue and purple, to respond to one another in addition to the various shades of each color creates "active relatedness" that engages and moves our eye across the shirt vertically, horizontally, and diagonally.

This effect, and Albers' corresponding explanation, allow the viewer to engage with the work critically and viscerally. Both Albers and Garston were educators, with Garston teaching *Interaction of Color* for many years at the Creative Arts Center in New Haven, Connecticut and Paier College in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Their backgrounds inform not only the basis of their missions as artists to educate, but also to learn from and employ a plethora of multi-disciplinary sources. Likewise, the cowboy on the left wears vertical stripes of green, blue and purple with similar effects of gradients. His breast pocket, shaped like the body of a wine glass, and the rope he carries in his hand echo the shape of the branding tool in the other cowboy's hand. This mirroring of shapes almost goes unnoticed, and yet our eyes register the duplicity of the cowboys as visually satisfying even if we cannot immediately explain why. Additionally, the branding tool incorporates a sideways G, a clever signature. The landscape behind the cowboys, composed of a clear blue stream weaving through a mountain range of pink and orange hues, also feels soft and inviting. What are we then to make of the fact that we, as the audience, stand in place of the horse about to be roped and branded?

Garston enjoyed the possibilities of form and color in his still lives as well, many of which include the perplexing addition of eggs, especially when paired with fruits and tableware as is the case in *Table* (GP810). We do not necessarily envision eggs scattered across a table, their fragile shell and spheroidal shape posing imminent disaster. And yet, twelve eggs seemingly placed on a table at random help to soften the contrast between the two bright oranges in their midst and a stout, round cobalt blue vase. It flanks a dark brown pitcher, on the other side of which a cream-colored bowl with a thin blue line encircling its body almost perfectly matches the muted brown shade of the wall. By rearranging the subjects of each still life, Garston



EGGS IN WHITE BOWL ON WHITE TABLE

Oil on canvas
24 x 30"
GP839 (AS)



STILL LIFE—MAJOR THEME

Oil on canvas
36 x 36"
GP871 (AS)



PALE HORSE
Oil on canvas
48 x 66"
GP860 (KB)

experimented with various combinations of the same objects. It is enjoyable to find recognizable objects across his oeuvre, such as *Still Life - Major Theme* (GP871), in which the same brown pitcher and blue striped bowl are joined by a pink vase, lemons, and striped, blue wallpaper to create an entirely different effect.

Additionally, the shadows of the objects in *Table* play an important role. Each shadow guides our eyes from one object to another, creating a path that compliments the alignment of the composition. In this way, the shadows do not necessarily appear to be visually accurate, slanting at different angles from an unknown light source as if the laws of light in the real world do not apply to Garston's creative landscape. Their purpose as guides supersedes any need for realism. This effect is used in many other still lives by Garston, including *Harmony* (GP873). The composition

consists of six objects, all ceramics, oriented like bowling pins so that the other bowls and vases fan out behind the white vase at the front and center. Their shadows reaffirm this shape, with the light source situated behind the audience casting a shadow that creates a single line on the right-hand side of the objects. The perspective moves our eye away from the center, upwards and into the liminal background space.

In such a tumultuous time, Garston's works require that we slow down, embrace the beauty of restraint in form, color, light, and composition, and find new and exciting ways to think about and look at art. Their "deceptive" simplicity allows an audience the opportunity to think critically about the ways we engage with art, and how something as simple as the placement of an egg can make all the difference.

— JOCELYN FURNISS



TABLE
Oil on canvas
40 x 65"
GP810 (DK)



THREE EGGS, A LEMON, AND ORANGE
Oil on canvas
23 x 23"
GP921 (AS)



KITCHEN STILL LIFE EGGS
Oil on canvas
16 x 20"
GP910 (AS)



PEWTER PITCHER
Oil on canvas
36 x 40"
GP849 (AS)



ON PARADE
Oil on canvas
44 x 54"
GP882x (AS)



PROFUSION
Oil on canvas
40 x 50"
GP464 (DJ)



TERZETTO
Oil on canvas
40 x 30"
GP948 (AS)



BOUQUET WITH LILY
Oil on canvas
40.25 x 30"
GP903 (KB)



SEXTET
Oil on canvas
28 x 44.25"
GP930 (AS)



DESSERT
Oil on canvas
36 x 40"
GP024 (JF)



ELEGANCE
Oil on canvas
37.5 x 47.25"
GP416 (JF)



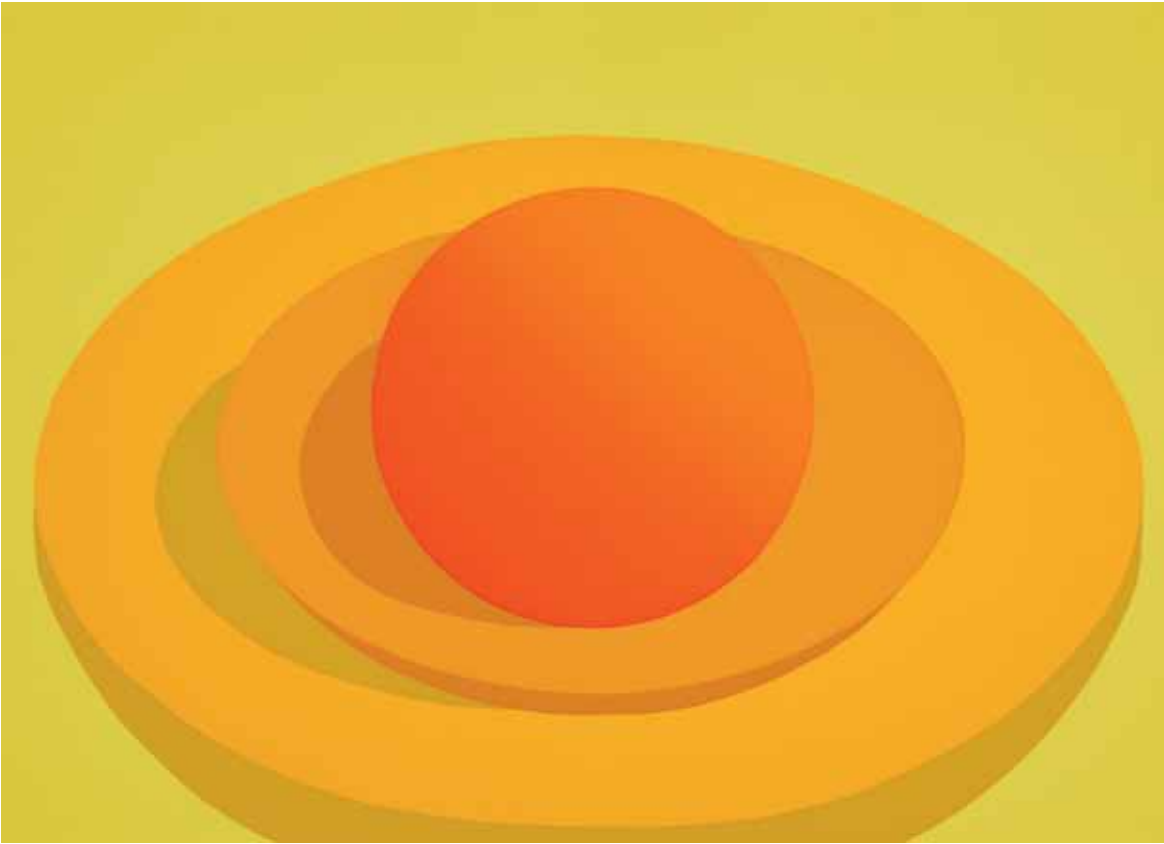
BETWEEN INNINGS
Serigraph
20 x 20"



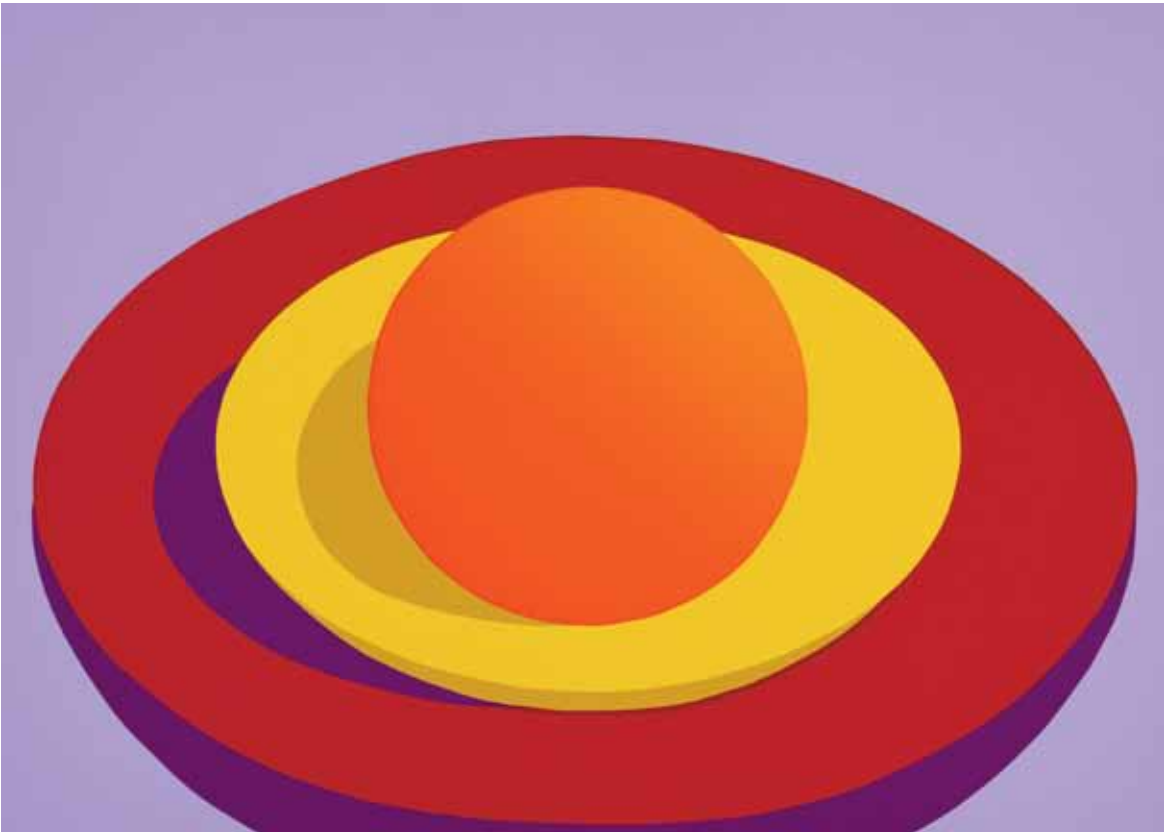
ON DECK
Serigraph, white untextured paper
57/100
24 x 20"



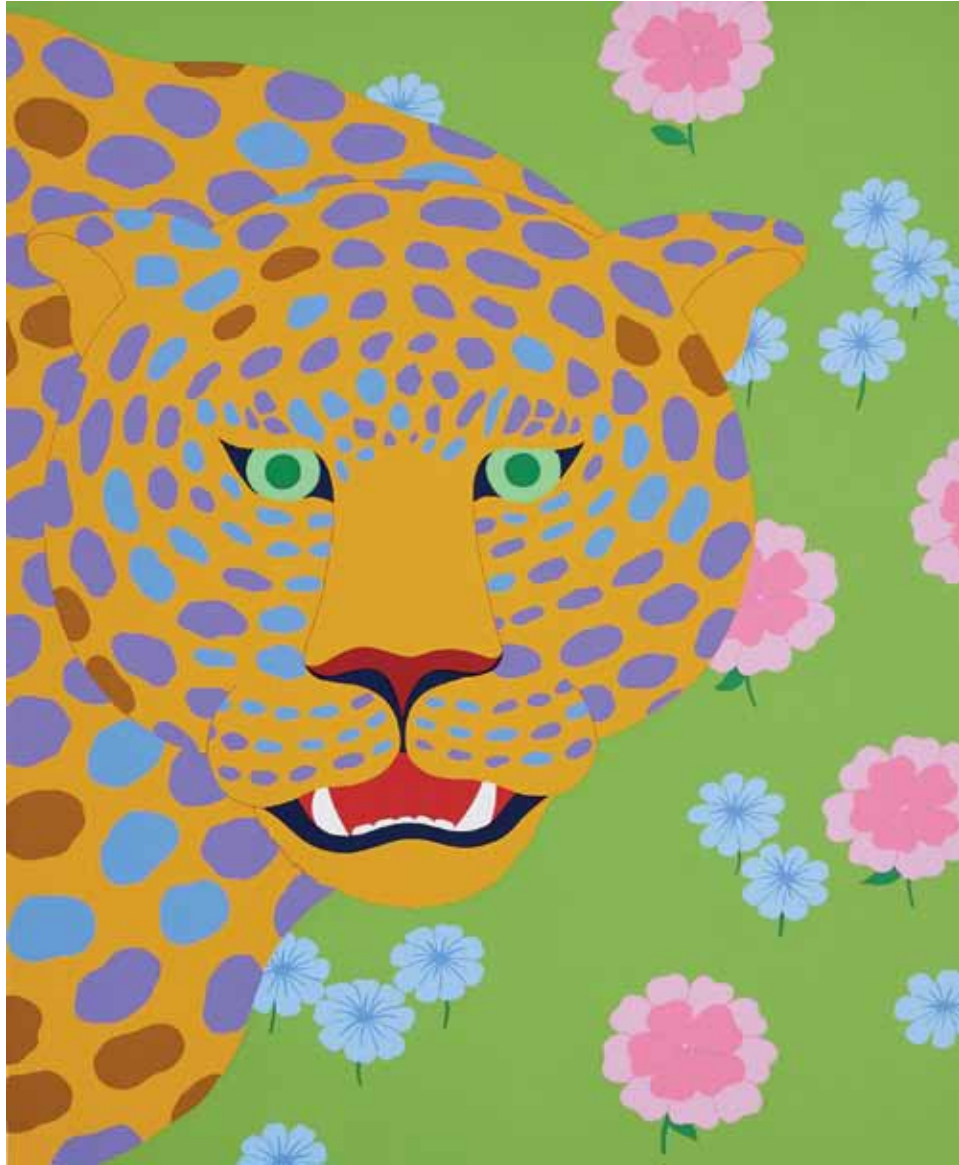
STARS AND STRIPES
Serigraph
27 x 24"



ORANGE STATE I
Serigraph
20 x 28"



ORANGE STATE II
Serigraph
20 x 28"



JAGUAR
Serigraph, white untextured paper
22 x 18"



NUDE PENSIEVE
Lithograph
9 x 13"



BURNING BRIGHT (BLUE)
Serigraph
34 x 17"



BURNING BRIGHT (YELLOW)
Serigraph
34 x 17"



ENCHANTED FOREST (ZEBRA)
Serigraph
14.25 x 18"



TWO CATS
Serigraph
17 x 14"



FOCUSED
Oil
29 x 29"
GP926 (AS)



DAHLIAS
Oil on canvas
48.25 x 36"
GP893 (AS)



END OF THE SEASON
Oil on canvas
54 x 42"
GP505 (C&M)

GERALD GARSTON (1925-1994)

If artists are indeed here to offer constructive criticism of life's disorder, then Gerald Garston was among our kindest, but most uncompromising of critics. Garston distilled the randomness and multiplicity of our visual world into its essences, ordered in deceptively simple paintings to look behind the objects that clutter and confuse our lives to the ideal in them; to see shapes, structures and colors, intensified and purified, in pleasing and rational coexistence.



The effect of contemplating a Garston painting is profoundly meditative. We feel graced by its harmony, as its beauty and peace do their work in us, and become ours. Educated at John's Hopkins University in Maryland, Garston's work is represented in numerous collections including the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Fogg Museum at Harvard University, the Los Angeles County Museum, and the Rose Museum at Brandeis University. Garston passed away on April 2nd, 1994.

GERALD GARSTON THE JOY OF COLOR

DATES: 21 January through 5 March 2023

PUBLIC OPENING RECEPTION: Saturday 21 January 2023 | 3PM to 6PM

ONLINE EVENTS: Please visit www.puckergallery.com for a list of virtual gatherings and events accompanying *The Joy of Color*.



HARMONY
Oil on canvas
30 x 40.25"
GP873 (AS)

PUCKER

ESTABLISHED 1967 BOSTON

GALLERY

PUCKER GALLERY
240 Newbury Street, 3rd floor
Boston, MA 02116
617.267.9473
contactus@puckergallery.com

GALLERY HOURS:
Monday through Saturday
10:00 AM to 5:30 PM

Sunday
1:00 to 5:00 PM

We are open to all and taking the necessary precautions for visitor and staff safety. We welcome appointments to maximize visitor experience.

Pucker Gallery is a member of the Boston Art Dealers Association and the New England Appraisers Association.

Cover:
COMPOTE WITH FRUIT
Oil on canvas
44 x 44"
GP951

CREDITS:

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Please visit www.puckergallery.com to view current and past exhibition catalogues and subscribe to the *Artwork of the Week* email list.