

# Group exhibit focuses on the contemporary

Painting seen as relevant, interesting in abstract works

BY GAIL PHILBIN

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GRAND RAPIDS — In the 20th century, the primacy of painting in the art world took a hit from many sides. Photography and printmaking gained respect as legitimate forms of expression, and the new video and digital technologies made image-making with a brush and paint seem archaic.

Post-modernism embraced multimedia works and pushed the envelope of traditional art categories. Painting often appeared only as one component of many in service to such larger artistic goals as installation and conceptual art.

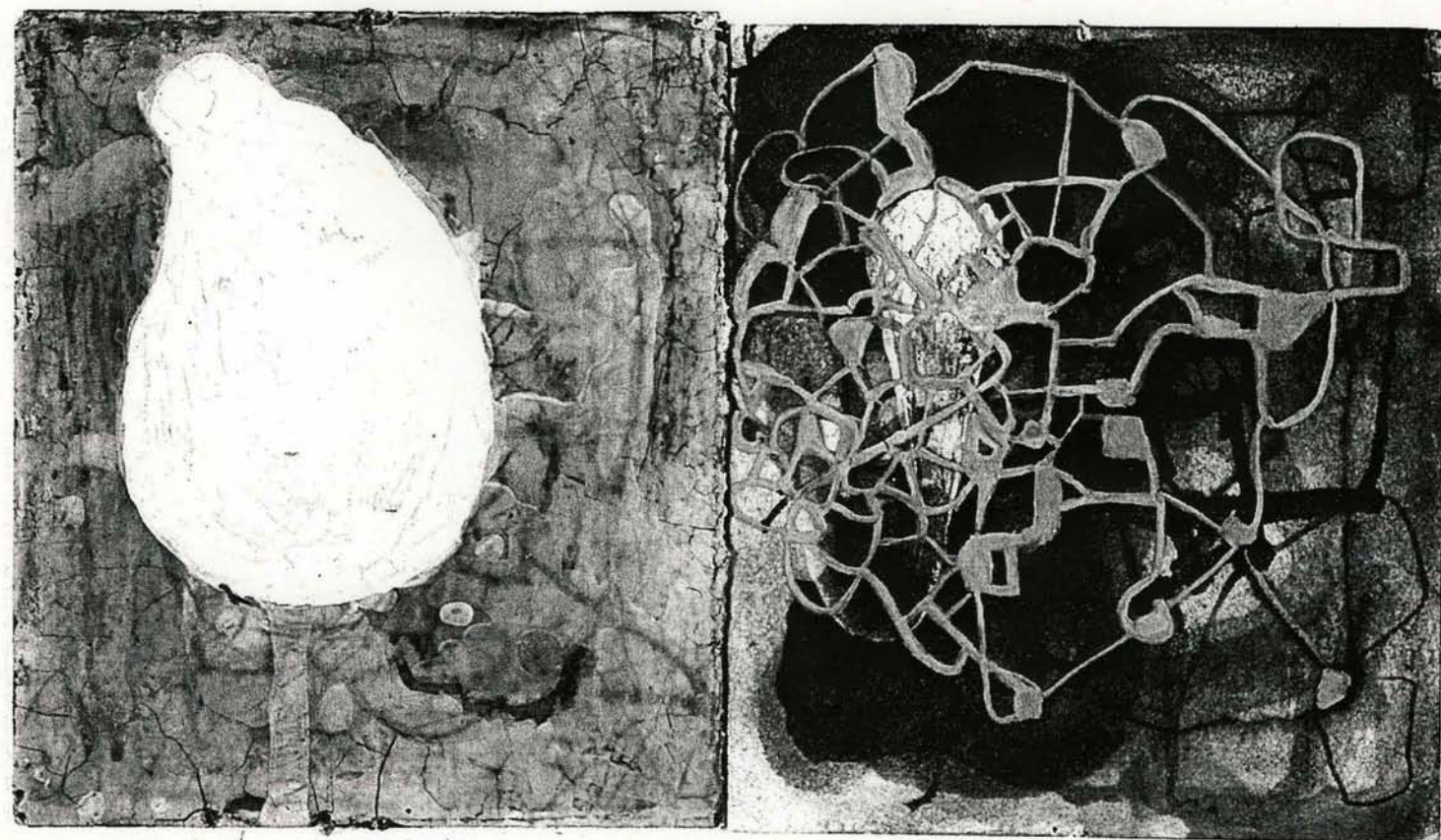
Locally, no venue has done more to expose West Michigan to such ideas than the Urban Institute for Contemporary

Arts, a multidisciplinary arts center presenting the latest in art trends for nearly three decades. However, in an exhibit in its Monroe Avenue Gallery, the organization aims to demonstrate the importance of painting.

"Succession" is a group exhibit of works by five artists from around the country that's billed as showing "contemporary art that is just as vigorous and relevant as any work being made today." Participants are: Betsy Stirratt of Bloomington, Ind.; Darra Keeton, who splits her time between New York City and Houston; Jim Morris of Batavia, N.Y., and Sandra Luckett and Kirsten Kindler, both of Richmond, Va.

Judging from the pieces in this show — an array of colorful, small and large abstract paintings with somewhat similar palettes and styles — the answer to the question "Is painting obsolete?" is a qualified "no."

These pieces demonstrate painting is still an interesting medium, but you might think



20th century works: Jim Morris' "Piece of Mind" is gouache, inks, varnish and shellac on paper and is one of the works in the exhibit "Succession" at UICA.

representational painting has fallen off the planet, given that all the selected works are abstract. (To the contrary, some would say realism is making a comeback in these post-post-modern times.)

Also, the answer to the "Is painting obsolete?" question offered by "Succession" is a bit misleading, because not all of the works in the show are paintings in the conventional sense. Three of them — a se-

ries of small, multimedia pieces by Luckett, a three-dimensional paper cutout by Kindler and a joint installation by Luckett and Kindler — depend on the post-modern habit of mixing media and creating "environments" to make their points.

One could interpret this to mean that painting alone isn't a sufficient means of expression; that it is obsolete, or at least inadequate, to the task of expressing ideas in our high-tech, multitasking world.

The most eye-catching piece in "Succession" is a paint-less paper collage by Kindler that is

part of what she calls her "clippings" series. Using cut-up magazine pieces adhered to a transparent background, she has assembled jumbles of loops and other shapes in frothy wall hangings.

From afar, the largest piece resembles a pile of plastic, black-and-white children's sunglasses strung together.

Moving along the continuum of painted versus non-painted works, Morris' "Piece of Mind" series of 29 postcard-sized pieces on blocks of wood provides an interesting blend of layered media that has painting at its core. Each work offers a

## IF YOU GO

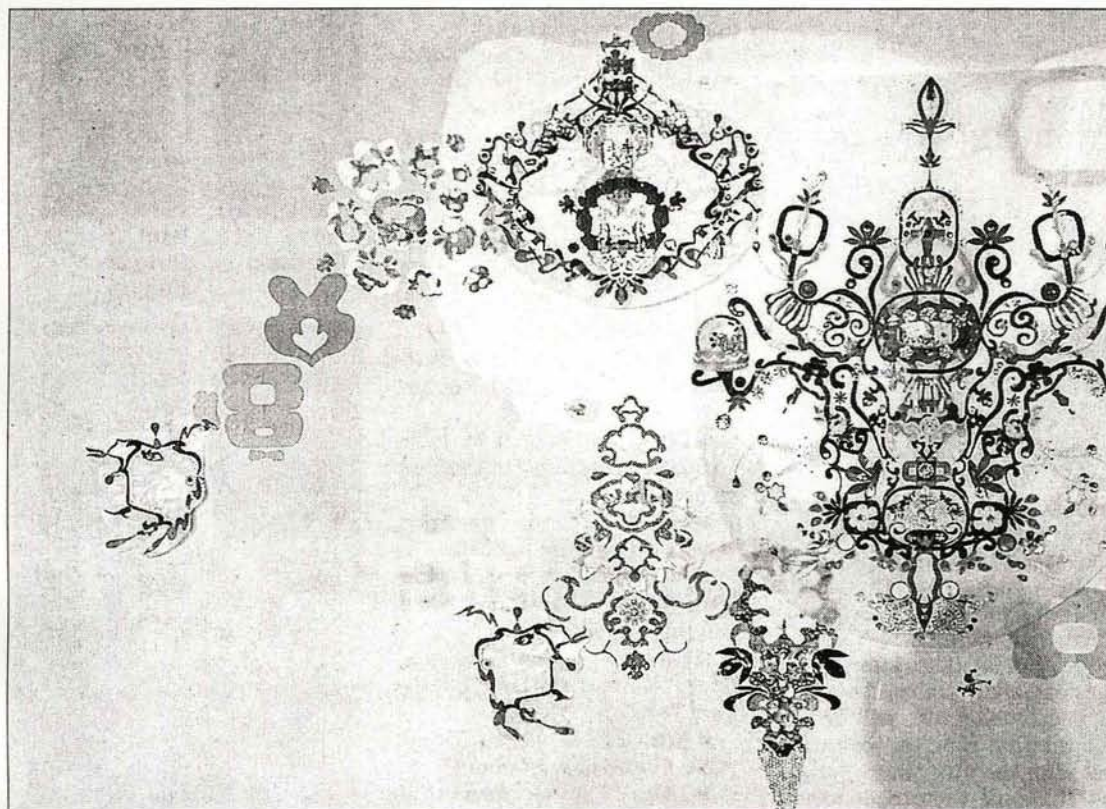
### 'Succession' A group painting exhibition

**When:** Through March 5  
**Where:** Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts, 41 Sheldon Blvd. SE  
**Hours:** Noon-10 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, noon-7 p.m. Sunday, closed Monday  
**Admission:** Free  
**More information:** 454-7000 or [www.uica.org](http://www.uica.org)

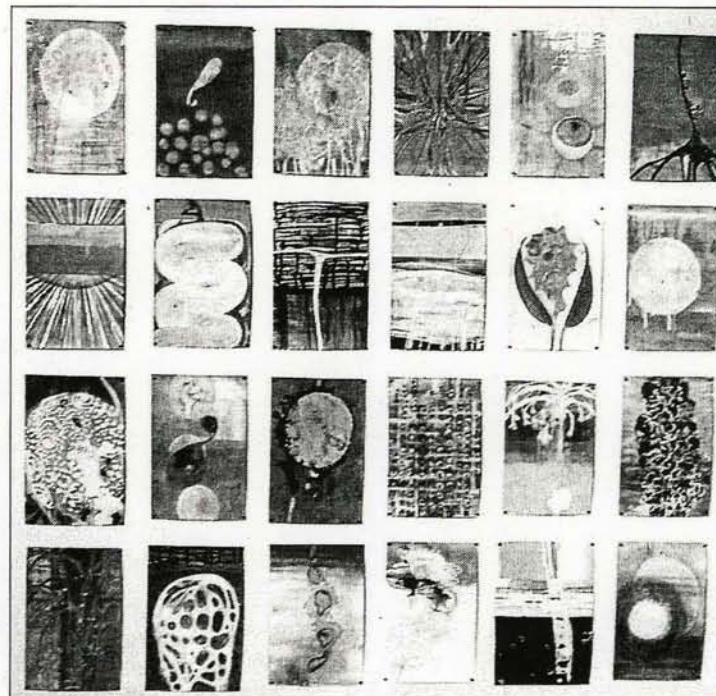
small, detailed scenario of abstract shapes, collections of dots and color shifts that can be interpreted in endless ways.

For example, to this viewer, one bisected work seems to show a city skyline on one side and, on the other half, a throng of bees in the shape of an upside-down hat and a close-up of a hive. Morris describes his work as "mapping the interaction and interdependency of the coexisting systems (organic, social or linguistic) that comprise our world."

The most direct approach to painting comes from Keeton, who presents a series of eight large acrylic abstracts she calls "Theory of Forgetting" and a grid of 24 smaller paper pieces titled "In Vivo." The latter group features many round, organic shapes and loose, running colors that give the works the feel of being under water or in vitro.



A collaboration: Kirsten Kindler and Sandra Luckett created this mixed-media work titled "Simulated Splendor."



Many frames: Darra Keeton's "In Vivo" has an organic feel.

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