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Zhou B. Center  
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## **Post Abstract Figuration:** Paintings by the Midwest Paint Group

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**Bob Brock**, *Missouri*  
**Philip Hale**, *Ohio*  
**Timothy King**, *Illinois*  
**Barbara Lea**, *Minnesota*  
**Michael Neary**, *Indiana*  
**David Rich**, *Minnesota*

Introduction by Gabriel Laderman

**December 2 – 22, 2005**

Opening Reception, December 2, 5pm - 10pm

Third Friday Reception, December 16, 5pm - 10pm

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*Gallery Hours: Fridays: 3pm - 6pm, Saturdays: 1pm - 5pm  
and by appointment.. 708-837-4534*

[www.33collective.com](http://www.33collective.com)

**Midwest Paint Group Website:**  
[midwest-painting-group.org](http://midwest-painting-group.org)

# Post Abstract Figuration: Paintings by the Midwest Paint Group



David Rich, *River, Dusk*, 34" x 30" oil on wood



Philip Hale, *Bajo Piuces*, 24" x 36" oil on canvas



Timothy King, *Burnidge Prairie Path*, 24" x 24" oil on canvas



Michael Neary, *Ohio at 7th*, 22" x 36" oil on Masonite



Barbara Lea, *108 Degrees*, 16" x 14" oil on canvas



Bob Brock, *Green Apples*, 14" x 20" oil on canvas



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Bob Brock, *CMSU Landscape II*, 24" x 33"  
charcoal & Gesso on paper



Philip Hale, *Las Gradass with Flowering Tree*,  
15" x 20", oil on paper



Michael Neary, *Party at Sam's*, 30" x 44",  
acrylic on paper



Timothy King, *Still Hall, NIU, DeKalb*, 16" x 24"  
oil on wood panel



Barbara Lea, *Beso*, 11" x 15" oil on canvas



David Rich, *Conversation*, 23" x 30"  
mixed media on paper

**Bob Brock**, *Missouri*

**Philip Hale**, *Ohio*

**Timothy King**, *Illinois*

**Barbara Lea**, *Minnesota*

**Michael Neary**, *Indiana*

**David Rich**, *Minnesota*



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33 Collective Gallery  
Chicago, Illinois

Introduction by **Gabriel Laderman**

GABRIEL LADERMAN is a New York painter and an important exponent of the figurative revival of the 50's and 60's. Mr. Laderman is the recipient of several National Endowment for the Arts grants, a Fulbright Fellowship and the Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship. He is represented in public collections such as the National Academy of Design, Boston Museum of Fine Arts and The National Gallery of Art. He studied with a number of leading American painters, including Hofmann, de Kooning, and Rothko. He received his MFA from Cornell and taught painting at Queens College (retired).

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## An Exhibition of Mid Western Post Abstract Art

Gabriel Laderman [November 2005]

The art of the twentieth century was like the art of no other century. Much of the finest work produced in the century was either abstract or, if figurative, quite influenced by ideas of abstraction. The Cubists went through a period, Analytic Cubism, which was nearly completely abstract. Matisse wedded Fauve extreme color in the teens with intense, simple abstract compositions. This is not to say that there were not some figurative artists who cleaved to the motif in all of their work. But artists of the French school like Bonnard, Balthus, Dufy, Braque and Giacometti, all worked with awareness of abstract pictorial values.

All of us who came of age in the 1940s or later who believe in these values, also had a much more radical introduction to pictorial thinking. Art schools by and large all over the country had among their beginning courses two-dimensional and three-dimensional design. The existence of such courses in the curriculum was largely the work of Arthur Wesley Dow, artist and educator. He was the most influential Art Nouveau educator in the country. He was, among other things, John Dewey's art educator, and professor at Teacher's College Columbia University which was Dewey's fief. Starting in the 1930s radical artists and educators left Europe and turned up in the USA. The Bauhaus was represented not only by Laszlo Moholy Nagy who started the Chicago Bauhaus, but also by Josef Albers who ran the Yale Art School, and Serge Chermayeff who began what can be called "The Brooklyn Bauhaus" at Brooklyn College.

Their two and three-dimensional Design courses merely changed the curriculum of the pre-existing Dow classes where they taught the principles of abstraction taken from abstract painting. This change was not a violation of Dow's original course, which also dealt with such issues, but with much more emphasis on a flatness derived from Japanese art.

Besides the Bauhaus oriented artist/teachers, other artists who were not tolerated by prewar and WW II totalitarian regimes arrived in the USA and taught out of modernist abstraction. Four of the most important were Amedee Ozenfant [who taught at Brooklyn, as well as at his own school], Leger, S.W. Hayter and Hans Hofmann. Many of their American students also taught throughout the country. Hofmann, in particular, taught out of a profound understanding of Mondrian, and of how Mondrian's structures were rooted in working from the motif, in Hofmann's school it was always from the nude.

Today, in the USA, we have many different kinds of figurative painting. Some of it is truly reactionary and is involved in an attempt to revivify 19th century academic painting. Others continue a valid tradition based on an American response to Impressionism, found in Edwin Dickinson and Lennart Anderson's students. These artists though are all people who have been profoundly influenced by modernist abstraction. Their work comes out of abstraction and engages with forming methods derived from Cubism, Mondrian and the Fauves as well as with the motif before them. They are thus fundamentally different from artists who are

looking backward at representation. They are looking forward to the possibilities available in modernist construction and sensibility when applied to the motif, its form and space.

These artists, unlike other American figurative painters, are not involved in ironic comments about art or life. They believe in the forms and motifs, which they deal with on a daily basis, and wish to give the observer the same, intense, felt emotion, that they experienced in the process of making these paintings. They might all be called expressionists, but the earlier artists to whom their works relate are all formally intense as well as intensely expressive. Such artists as Soutine, Vlaminck, Roualt, Marquet, and Matisse (especially of the Nice period) come to mind.

During my teaching days from about 1965 to 1995, I and a number of my colleagues in other MFA programs throughout the country (Yale, Boston University, Berkeley, UC Santa Cruz, the Parsons School) were aware that the Kansas City Art Institute undergraduate painting program was the strongest in the country. All of these artists, either directly or indirectly are connected with it. The painting faculty consisted of Wilbur Neiwald (chairman), Ron Slowinski, Stanley Lewis, Lester Goldman and Michael Walling. Wilbur's first influential style was as an abstract painter influenced by earlier Mondrian. Later on he became quite figurative and was influenced by Cézanne and Corot. Ron Slowinski was an abstract painter throughout his tenure at the school. Stanley Lewis' most important teachers included Nicholas Carone, a Hofmann student, as well as Leland Bell whose early style was

profoundly influenced by Arp. Lester Goldman spent a good part of his life as a post abstract figurative painter, himself, before he returned to abstraction, Michael Walling had a typical art school education (with design courses) but seems never to have left figuration (in the Nice Matisse sense) behind.

The artists grouped here, show the evidence of their education. They are perhaps more generally committed to the motif and the kind of forming which develops the motif into a painting full of all the joys of abstraction, but in place in a landscape or figure composition. They do not turn their backs on 20th century modernism, but they can use it to step back into previous centuries and learn from constructional artists, there, too. The influence of Chardin, Corot, and the Venetians, the Dutch, and many others can be felt, and is being profitably used in their work, as well. They do represent the potential future which cares about the past and its values and cares about communicating intense emotions to the viewer.

This is an unusual show by a very special group of artists. It requires your attention because it is unlike most figurative work seen in galleries, today. You need to concentrate on the experience of each painting and get into its world of forming and emotion. If you do this you will receive the wonderful gifts of these artists' fully formed emotional view of the forms, light, and color, the drama of nature.

*Continued-*



Gabriel Laderman *Continued*—



Bob Brock, *Laurent House, Cassis, France*  
24" x 36" oil on canvas



Bob Brock, *Blue Pitcher w/ Onions*,  
35" x 33" oil on canvas

**Bob Brock** seems freer formally in his description of objects as well as the total picture space in landscape than in his still-lives. Both are clearly influenced by Cézanne. Blue pitcher with Onions, in its small relationships, is relatively normative. The composition as a whole, with its major shifting along the vertical axis defined by the cloth, is again, almost cubist. The work is slow, intense and searching for quality in the description of the motif, and the adjustment of the motif to the axes of the rectangle. His landscape, *Laurent House*, seems closely related to the late, black Cézannes. His still life's as well as his landscapes, by virtue of his use of strong contrasts in value as well as intensification of the local color, reminds us more of Fauve painting than of Cézanne and the cubists. He is ultimately his own man, using some Cézannist and some Cubist devices, but reaching for an intensity of emotion, which they did not strive for.



Timothy King, *Street Corner View of Elgin Tower*,  
24" x 24" oil on canvas



Timothy King, *Wing Park #1, Elgin*, 20" x 24" oil on canvas

**Timothy King** shows the influence of Fauve and Expressionist painters. French style expressionists, only, of course, because he is not only intensifying an experience, it is an experience with rich formal as well as emotional content. The influence of Andre Derain of the 1920s and 30s can be felt, as well as of the work of Leland Bell. Looking through them one can also see the influence of Corot, Courbet, and Constable. He seems, thus far, primarily a landscape painter. His intense reaction to the motif is played back by his paintings for us. Through his brush stroke and his inspiration, which together create the space and forms, the over all rhythm, we are meant to experience his ecstasy in the landscape.



Michael Neary, *Arleth St. with Mower*,  
25" x 35" oil on Masonite



Michael Neary, *Shamus Steps In*, 30" x 44" acrylic on paper

**Mike Neary** had the same pictorial education that his friends had. This can be seen in "Lawn Mower on Arleth Street." On the other hand most of his work combines humor and story telling with forming. His work reminds me of that earlier Midwesterner, Lionel Feininger. Feininger did a comic strip called *Wee Willie Winkie* before he left for Germany before WW I. It influenced his later paintings. In them the character of the objects, the cars, buildings and people were all distorted in order to improve the fun. His work also became more cubist, nonetheless, humorous proportional relationships between figures and settings, and small intensification of details cant the picture towards one full of wit as well as of form. I think Mike Neary is a partisan of a similar response to the motif in his paintings. We have had very few good poetic, and witty artists in this country.



But Europe boasts not only Feininger, but also Klee, Andre Masson, the Balthus of the first Street painting, Seurat, and Odilon Redon. Do note that several of these artists are abstract pioneers as well as being poetic and witty. Mike Neary is on the same limb of the tree of art that they are found upon.

Although **Philip Hale's** expressionist process is not like that of the cubist Jacques Villon, or the slower, more graphic process of Bernard Buffet, his work, in general shares qualities with both of them. There is a very solid Cubist underpinning to everything. Planar effects and a tangle of linear movements in space are both characteristic of his work. However, unlike the two French artists mentioned, his process is much more the result of quick brush drawing and painting inspired by the motif. Rather than being coldly analytic, his work betrays the fury of an expressionist impulse, through which an analytic response to the motif flows.

**Barbara Lea** is another kind of poet. Her forming sense emphasizes the light falling on, and sometimes produced by her objects. They glow in an otherworldly manner, and convince us that their life in art is precious and much needed. Whether she is painting flowers or pots everything has this quality. These qualities can also be found in the American painter Loren MacIver. Unlike MacIver, who was a poet of light, but not of form, Barbara Lea is intensely, formally secure. She discovers the forms of her paintings, including the objects within them at the same time that she informs us of the light they cast, glowing, on our world.

**David Rich's** work has at least as much to do with the abstractions of Hofmann, and early Cavallon, as they do with the work of Roualt, Leland Bell and Al Kresch. He makes a form (the painting) and parts of that form are people. The people react to the (usually urban) setting and between them and it a mood of intensity, solitude, and sometimes-even loneliness pervades the work. Using all of his pictorial skills, and the rich modernist sources for picture making given us by the Fauves and Cubists, as well as the Section D'Or and American Abstract Artists' Group, he produces paintings of great intensity and emotion. He needs the reference to intensify his paintings. The painted figure responding to a motif inside the painting is meant as a model for our own behavior when we experience his paintings. It does help, and it draws us into the picture with great intensity.



Philip Hale, *Steps 3*, 24" x 30" oil on canvas



Philip Hale, *Copey and Mountain 2*, 30" x 36" oil on canvas



Barbara Lea, *Madrugada*, 17" x 13" oil on canvas



Barbara Lea, *Blue Pandora*, 11" x 15" oil on canvas



David Rich, *Rising Moon*, 34" x 30" oil on wood



David Rich, *River*, 20" x 24" oil on canvas