



JULIE S. GRAHAM **Stack, Layer, and Arrange**

LOCATION

Aidekman Arts Center / Medford
Tisch Family Gallery
40 Talbot Avenue, Medford

CONTACT

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August 22–September 29, 2019

Opening Reception: Thursday September 5, 6-8pm

First comprehensive retrospective of Julie S. Graham (1947–2018), Boston-based painter and beloved instructor at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts (SMFA) at Tufts.

Medford, MA — *Stack, Layer, and Arrange* presents paintings, drawings, sculptures, and photographs spanning Julie S. Graham's career, an artist consistently inspired by architecture and the incidental alignment of shapes in the world. The core of her work was painting, and she playfully experimented with it in all of its formal, spatial, and expressive possibilities. She drew from urban and natural landscapes, paying close attention to details like corners, walls, and surfaces. She was curious about how lines intersected and shapes fit together, motifs that she translated into her art by stacking, layering, constructing, and arranging.

This exhibition will present Graham's work chronologically, organizing Graham's focused series—in which she explored painterly spatial and material questions—by a desire to blur painting with sculpture and to explore experimental processes. These sections include her early paintings from the mid-1970s when she began using canvas as a



sculptural object, wrinkling its surface and building texture. A section on materiality features selected works from the 1980s when Graham began mixing her paint with drywall compound and incorporating plaster, wood, and straw onto the surfaces of her canvases to test the limits of different materials. “Working the surface is a process, not unlike, in my mind, making a building,” Graham explained. A survey of these earlier works concludes with a grouping from the 1990s of paintings characterized by earthy browns, ochres, and taupes layered with natural materials such as wood, grasses, and hay. Interested in feminist spiritual themes and myths of indigenous cultures, Graham created her own personal visions of nature.

From the 2000s on, Graham’s focus shifts to the exploration of aerial topographies, architectural perspective, and landscapes often inspired by vernacular architecture, or as she put it, the “formal beauty revealed in unexpected places.” These works include drawings on paper that play with perspectival vanishing points and small, tabletop sculptures made out of architectural construction materials, such as plaster. A section focuses on Graham’s “constructions” series, where she used the materials that make up painting—wood, canvas, sometimes wire, and paint—to make unexpected and playful configurations. Graham asserted, “It’s exciting to me when forms bump up against each other and form unlikely new relationships.” She was also particular about hanging these smaller works in unexpected ways—some up high and others down low—resulting in a constellation of singular, yet connected, paintings.

Stack, Layer, and Arrange concludes with Graham’s recent paintings when she began to mine the expressive potential of pattern and color in the form of hot pinks, fresh greens, and soft blues. A primary inspiration were the juxtapositions of architectural details she noticed, such as the errant color combinations on abutting apartment buildings, or a pile of tools tangled against a fence. In 2012, she traveled to Italy, and buildings like Siena’s Duomo, with its striated black-and-white marble blocks, had a profound impact on her compositions in both painting and photography. Seeking to understand spatial geometries—from her earliest canvas to her very last paintings—Graham created unexpected relationships between the physical and the abstract, compositionally spirited, structurally intriguing, and colorfully exuberant works of art.

Julie S. Graham earned her bachelor of arts from Hood College, Frederick, Maryland, and her masters of fine arts from Central School of Art, London. She spent a formative year at the École du Louvre and Sorbonne, Paris. Exhibiting since the 1980s, Graham had numerous solo exhibitions at many Boston Galleries. She taught painting at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts for three decades and frequently led painting workshops in New England and Italy.

Guest curated by Martina Tanga.

Martina Tanga is a curator and art historian, with an interest in art that engages with social concerns, feminism, and the built environment. She is a specialist in Italian 20th-century Italian art, and her book, titled *Arte Ambientale: Urban Space, and Participatory Art*, released by Routledge Press, examines radical artistic practices situated in Italy's 1970s urban landscape. She held positions at the Worcester Art Museum, deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, and is currently at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Tanga earned her BA and MA in the History of Art from University College London and a Ph.D. in the History of Art and Architecture from Boston University.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

5 September 6pm –8pm, Thursday
Tisch & Koppelman Gallery

OPENING RECEPTION

22 September 2pm, Sunday
Tisch Family Gallery

Curator Tour: Martina Tanga

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