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At the Galleries

THE PAST SEASON HAD THE EXPECTED SHARE OF THE GROUP shows that are the summer staple of museums and galleries, but there was also no shortage of provocative alternatives.

The most interesting of last summer's group shows in Chelsea offered an opportunity to see unexpected works in unexpected relationships. "Shapeshifters," at Luhring Augustine, had as its theme challenges to the traditional rectangle. The show started with a bang: Ron Gorchov's *Alioth*, 2015, a terrific, towering, six-and-a-half-foot stack of the subtly curved, warped rectangles that Gorchov has made his own. The masterly chromatic orchestration of the densely applied colors, from pale, chalky lavender and blue to clear yellow, via deeper red, violet, and green, coupled with an absolute rightness of scale, made *Alioth* memorable. Gorchov must have been happy about the proximity of a small but compelling, richly textured, deeply layered painting on wood by the late Ralph Humphrey, an artist he admired.

Moving into the galleries, we encountered a potent 1966 Frank Stella, a brilliantly colored Irregular Polygon. In this oddly shaped clash of a seemingly interpenetrating triangle and square, implicit illusionism not only thumbed its nose at the notions of flatness that were articles of faith among many of Stella's peers at the time, but also pointed the way to his own aggressively projecting later works. The argument was advanced by a just plain gorgeous, vast, shaped 1980 Kenneth Noland, a warped, stretched hexagon that made the concept of parallel lines irrelevant, while emphasizing the eloquence of the tension between bands of unnamable "impure" primaries across an indescribably shaped expanse of saturated red. The Stella and Noland together made clear the context to which Elizabeth Murray was responding, in 1982, when she assembled the interlocking, wildly shaped components of a brash, cartoon-like, ten-foot-high construction that seemed to hover against a nearby wall.

Other works explored piercing, slicing, projecting, and the like, generating varying amounts of excitement as they did so. Joanna Poussette-Dart's unpredictably shaped *3 Part Variation #5*, 2011-2013, a vertical arrangement of three sleekly curved panels, interrupted with elegantly modulated, overscaled "calligraphy," was among the most noteworthy.