



Roy Dowell, *untitled #1179*, 2022. Courtesy of Evan Bedford

Roy Dowell

The Landing
By Jody Zellen

Roy Dowell's acrylic paintings are abstractions filled with interlocking and overlapping shapes of differing opacities. Though created from the depths of his imagination, Dowell's many works reference textile designs, floral patterns, Tantric diagrams and mandalas, cosmological maps, illuminated manuscripts, as well as early 20th-century abstractions by painters such as Hilma af Klint and Sonia Delaunay. Identified only by number (in an untitled exhibition), these untitled paintings invite viewers to free associate and extrapolate, to make sense of the shapes and patterns. The chief peculiarity of Dowell's paintings is that the compositions, while based on geometric patterns, are willfully asymmetrical, creating a sense of unbalance through misaligned layers with unexpected elements, cloaking and intersecting with those below.

The artist's rejection of titles demands that the viewer excavate the meaning, if any, from the artist's imagery, and that in deciphering these works there can be no wrong answers. His *untitled #1166* (2020) is, like most of his works, formally similar yet stylistically divergent from the others; a semi-transparent circle floats towards a darkly opaque ground, while thin black lines feather out from its center, suggesting rotation. Below are bright horizontal and vertical

bands layered with delicate designs reminiscent of Spirograph drawings, a combination hinting at planetary movements through the night sky.

Continuing the celestial references is *untitled #1179* (2022), a painting featuring circular white saw-blade shapes with black dotted centers. Varicolored concentric rings hover above a red and green patterned background. They appear set in motion, these saw-blades, spinning on their axes, as if ready for takeoff toward an unknown destination, far from the abstracted landscape below.

The artist allows the viewer the pleasure of free association—no arrangement of shapes is so concrete as to be entirely decipherable. Maybe the off-white "X" that spans from the bottom of *untitled #1159* (2021) is a harlequin figure, abstracted and headless, whose arms and legs are peppered with large black dots. Behind this striking and dominant form is a lush combination of painted shapes, triangles and rectangles of differing transparencies that contrast with areas of stippled dots reminiscent of the harlequin's diamond-patterned costume. Personification is not the norm in Dowell's work, and in most of his paintings he explores the dynamics of shape and what a combination of shapes can come to signify, be it a planet, a target, a medallion or a bouquet of fictitious flowers.

The deeper and longer one investigates Dowell's paintings, the more layers are revealed. Each work is a complex amalgam of organic and geometric shapes that manage to coexist in kaleidoscopic disharmony. The pieces have their own strange and private logic: they are both loose and tight, precise and unsettled, a bit off balance but skewed with symmetry. Across the 22 works, Dowell's idiosyncratic patterns and methods of mark-making become a language that communicates the nuances and joys of abstraction.

This review originally appeared in print and has been reproduced here in its entirety.

Images of untitled #1166 and untitled #1159 did not appear in the original publication, but are included here for illustrative purposes.