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Charles Arnoldi: ‘String Theory’
Where Lines Become Forms in Space
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by Jody Zellen







Throughout his 50+ year career, Venice-based artist Charles Arnoldi has filled canvases with criss-crossing lines, overlapping rectangles and trapezoids, in addition to more curvilinear, as well as stick-like shapes in a multitude of textures and colors. Arnoldi is still going strong at 80 years old. In an exhibition titled *String Theory* on view at Michael Kohn Gallery, recent paintings and sculptures continue his explorations into the possibilities within abstraction. For this series he used his body as an anchor point for voluminous curves that glide across the surface of the canvas. He also ventures out into three-dimensional space in three new Rebar sculptures from 2025-2026. Here, Arnoldi allows his lines to become forms in space. These pieces are both heavy and weightless simultaneously and a welcome addition to the more colorful paintings.

Citing references to string theory in physics and ideas from the book *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* by Yuval Noah Harari about humans’ ability to imagine things that do not physically exist, Arnoldi has created electrifying paintings that combine gesture and color in unique and innovative ways. To simplify is not always easy, but Arnoldi’s long career in abstraction has given him an intuitive understanding of the relationships between color and shape.

Each new work has a limited palette and the forms are restricted to arching lines that undulate across the composition. The paintings share a kinship with the late lyrical abstractions of his colleague Brice Marden. *Boost* (2019) is reminiscent of a flattened Calder mobile as Arnoldi fills the frame with curved charcoal lines that traverse the canvas in sweeping gestures as a kind of large-scale, Surrealist automatic drawing. Stronger lines cover lighter ones as Arnoldi builds up the composition, layering shapes filled with black and red over a background of swirling white, gray and red lines.

For *Thaw* (2017), thicker black and light gray brushstrokes are layered over numerous gray shapes made as repeated gestures. As the lines accumulate on the surface, they create shapes which Arnoldi fills in, suggesting depth on the two-dimensional surface. Likewise, *Time in Space* (2016) is comprised of flowing charcoal lines that energetically weave up and down across the canvas. Arnoldi again fills in selected intersections with

black paint to create a conversation between line and shape.

In *Quick Start* (2016), Arnoldi paints orange, red and yellow lines on linen. These giant scribbles feel both automatic and controlled, suggesting a map of a complicated walk or dance. As the lines transition from color to color, they appear to gain a dynamic energy. *Imposter* (2016) is also oil on linen and features white, yellow, brown, gray and black undulating lines that harmoniously span the 86 x 76 inch work.

Arnoldi's compositions appear at first to be a quick read, and could be dismissed as basic geometric abstractions. But the longer one looks, the more one sees, and the nuances of the gestures and the colors come to fruition. As the eye follows the movement of a single line, it is impossible not to become aware of the ways it changes colors, bumps into the edge of the canvas, or becomes a solid form. Arnoldi holds your attention and leaves you satisfied.

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