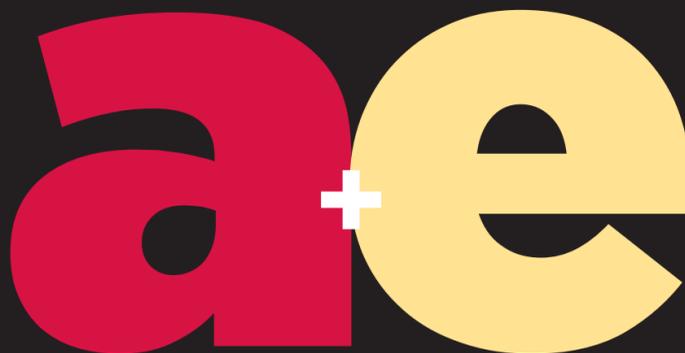




BRET GUSTAFSON

"Abstract Kansas City" tells the history of Kansas City abstraction through works by 32 artists. Sharon Patten (1943-1995) was known for heavily impastoed abstractions such as "Focus" (1989).



arts & entertainment



NERMAN MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

The exhibit features works by artists who have a biographical or geographical connection to Kansas City, including former Overland Park resident Jered Sprecher. Sprecher is creator of "Silent Hand" (2011).

**VISUAL ART | 'Abstract Kansas City'**

# A SHOW OF LOCAL STRENGTH

Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art gives its impressive collection of works by home-grown talent a worthy showcase.

By DANA SELF  
Special to The Star

**N**obody believes in you like your mama. And sometimes success comes with talent and a little nudge from someone who loves you.

At least that's what Jered Sprecher, assistant professor at the University of Tennessee and former Overland Park resident, might say. He is one of the 32 artists in the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art's "Abstract Kansas City" exhibition.

Sprecher's mother suggested to museum director Bruce Hartman that the work was worth a peek, and Hartman took notice.

Turns out Sprecher's mother was right.

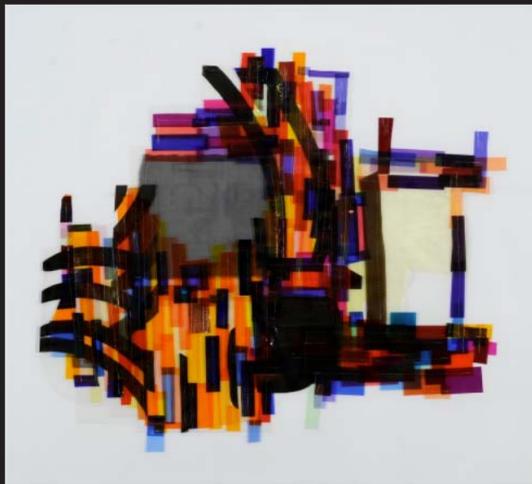
And while this isn't a story about a mother's pride, it is a story about love — for art, for students and for establishing a cultural legacy.

"Abstract Kansas City" is a love letter in the form of a museum exhibition honoring an unlikely contemporary art collection in an unlikely place: the middle of a former farm in Kansas.

It all started in 1981. What is now the dazzling collection of the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art at Johnson County Community College was at one time the dream of a small community college made up of a few buildings in a field.

Landon Kirchner, who was the

SEE EXHIBIT | F2



BRET GUSTAFSON

Rachel Hayes is known for her inventive use of materials, as seen in "Return to the Easy System" (2008), which incorporates color filters, acetate, fabric, and copper as well as paint.



BRET GUSTAFSON

Nebraska-born Dan Christensen, a 1964 alum of the Kansas City Art Institute, went on to have a successful career as a color-field painter. His "Cape Crozier" (c. 1978) is featured in "Abstract Kansas City."



BRET GUSTAFSON

A love of color runs through this show, as seen in works such as "Off Yellow" (2011), by leading American abstractionist Stanley Whitney.

**DANCE**

## Ballet balances old and new



KENNY JOHNSON

**Troupe's next season will include four KC premieres and several returning favorites.**

By ANDREA FOWLER  
The Kansas City Star

Following a season of perennial favorites and premieres in a brand-new performance hall is not an easy feat.

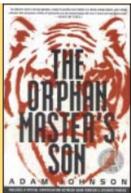
Yet the Kansas City Ballet's artistic director, William Whitener, has programmed a season of performances for 2012-13 that aims to meet the high standards Kansas City

dance fans have come to expect as the company settled into its new performance home, the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, and its new headquarters, the Bolender Center.

The next season, announced this weekend, includes four works the company will perform here for the first time, one of them a world premiere by choreographer Karole Armitage.

"The 2011-12 season at the

SEE BALLET | F4



### kim's cult

**T**he Korea of Adam Johnson's riveting novel "The Orphan Master's Son" is a difficult place to leave behind. | Books, 6-7

# EXHIBIT: Works range from bold to intimate

FROM F1

assistant dean of humanities and social sciences at the college, decided his students needed and deserved exposure to actual works of art. He established an art acquisition committee, and the members wisely resolved that the collection focus on contemporary art.

One of the visionary and guiding principals of the collection was that it be accessibly installed throughout the campus so that students could have a daily encounter with vital and authentic works of art.

The committee consulted, commissioned and purchased, looking to the artists in the community and beyond.

Fast forward to 1990, when Hartman became the director of the JCCC Gallery of Art, where he found a collection of 100 very strong works.

"I inherited a good collection and came into a situation where the school was looking at art with a critical eye and a seriousness of intent, which set the tone for future collecting. With the mandate that the collection be visible to students and visitors, the museum was a natural progression," Hartman says.

All along, the acquisition committee realized the importance of collecting the work of Kansas City artists and artists associated with Kansas City. One of the first works was "Galileo's Garden," a commission from Dale Eldred.

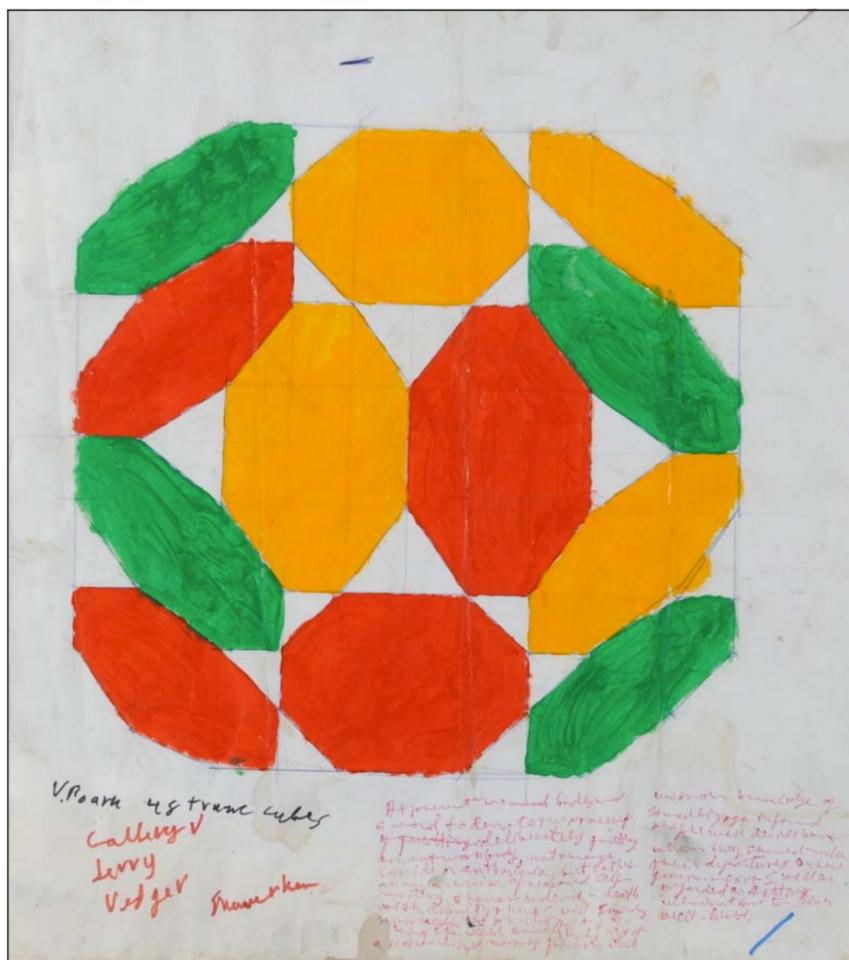
Through the years, Hartman has remained devoted to the art of his hometown. He adds, "With a sense of continuity, the members of that committee collected art that reflected the strength of the college's studio practice: ceramics, sculpture, photography and painting."

In 2011, when the collection exceeded 1,000 works of art, Hartman concluded it was the right time to further recognize the collecting efforts of the institution, and "Abstract Kansas City" was conceived.

It's fair to say that no other local collecting institution has devoted the same energy and attention to Kansas City artists. The exhibition — and the collection itself, of which a full 30 percent is devoted to Kansas City artists and/or artists with a Kansas City connection — is a phenomenon.

And as at any collecting institution, the exhibition also reflects the passion and interests of Hartman and patrons Marti and Tony Oppenheimer, who have been essential in the collecting process and who always recognized the importance of including Kansas City artists.

Some of the most commanding works in the exhibition suggest that the acquisition committee and these artists love



BRET GUSTAFSON



The exhibit showcases Kansas City abstractions from the past 50 years, including an untitled work by Vince Roark from 1985, above, and Wilbur Niewald's "Mountains II" (1961) at left.

color. James Brinsfield, Eric Sall, Lester Goldman, Nate Fors, Andrzej Zielinski, Kent Michael Smith, Larry Thomas, Stanley Whitney and Mary Wessel all rely on vivid, saturated color.

It's a heady visual experience, and Hartman's sensitive installation nurtures relationships between these artists who embrace abstraction as a vehicle with which to process the multiple ideas of modernity.

Many of the paintings are often wildly gestural, and yet there are delicate, ephemeral works here, some of which are narrative. Corrie Baldauf, Ke-Sook Lee and Anne Lindberg trend toward the intimate.

Baldauf's refined drawings are the most plainly autobiographical. Narrating personal anecdotes from her life, she pencils in diminutive stories along the sides of a large image of concentric circles. Vanishing into her short stories — "Mom

called" — is the central experience of the work, validating the minutiae of our daily living.

Lindberg's work is as intimate as Baldauf's, yet through a wordless graphite language.

Lee's delicate needlework emerges from the history of women's work, domesticity and childhood memories of her grandmothers sewing. Rachel Hayes' "Return to the Easy System" trades on fiber and stitching, but she manipulates copper wire and acetate rather

## ON EXHIBIT

"Abstract Kansas City" continues at the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Johnson County Community College, 12345 College Blvd., Overland Park, through Feb. 19. Hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday; 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Friday; noon-5 p.m. Sunday. Closed Monday. Admission is free. For more information: 913-469-3000 or nermanmuseum.org.

than thread and fabric.

Artists committed to drawing include the irrepressible Amy Myers, whose monumental and psychedelic abstract bubble drawings draw us in as much as they send us out to some unknowable place.

Garry Noland's tape panels, "Cripples," comprising 88 units, feel almost as linear and hand-drawn as Lindberg's graphite work. The staccato effect that emerges from his repeated yet slightly different panels suggests a hieroglyphic, indiscernible language.

Drawing with light in her "Worldscape" series, Mary Wessel works on light-sensitive photographic paper. A liquidy pink shape snakes across the work's surface radiating an energy field that seems confusing and disordered, yet soothing.

The exhibition's works span 50 years, starting in 1961 with an abstract Wilbur Niewald watercolor.

At 87, Niewald is the elder and elegant statesman of this wide-ranging exhibition. "Mountains II" is a field of crystalline blue paint strokes that still shimmer with clarity. This abstract landscape is a surprising precursor to the steady, realistic paintings that distinguish Niewald's oeuvre.

Hartman's thoughtful installation capitalizes on relationships between artists and styles. The triumvirate of Dan Christensen, Warren Rosser and Ron Slowinski vibrates with a subtle dynamism that characterizes their three paintings.

Christensen's painting, "Cape Crozier," is one of his finest and most haunting. A ghostlike white form hovers in a calm peach-colored background. This delicate apparition pulsates with movement, revealing the artist's tender yet graceful hand.

Hartman juxtaposes Christensen with one of the most quiet and least colorful of Rosser's paintings, "Play Continued." Articulated in shades of gray, the graceful ovals that are typical of his work include a white one that seems to be exiting the dreary painting to join the more sparkling Christensen.

Slowinski's equally restrained and ambiguously metaphysical "Untitled (Pollen Painting)" completes the triangle.

The giant abstractionists with sweeping gestures dominate the first gallery. Eric Sall, Andrzej Zielinski, James Brinsfield, Sharon Patten and Lester Goldman telegraph their passion for painting's formal processes, the act of putting paint to canvas to study spatial relationships, and they excavate the modern world's vast choices and ultimate ambiguities.

Amy Myers' and Sandy Winters' work straddles the visual distance between these artists and the more delicate and restrained work of Baldauf, Lee and Niewald, all of whom share that first gallery.

JCCC professor Larry Thomas' mixed media on canvas work, "The Problem With Curiosity," is one of the few recognizable images. A swirling vortex containing snakes, feathers and other things destabilizes the painting's elements, suggesting chaos.

Side by side with Lauren Mabry's earthenware cylinder, whose surface is beautifully articulated with glazes, and Nate Fors' carnivalesque and vividly green sculptural painting, Thomas' work seems to tether the three together.

Hartman's juxtaposition of Kansas City Art Institute alumni Stanley Whitney with younger artists Sprecher, Grant Miller, Kent Michael Smith and Matt Wycoff resonates with stylistic linkages that collapse time and distance.

Despite their varied media, generational differences and range of material application, the exhibition artists are linked through their devotion to systems of discovery and, of course, their Kansas City connections. Personal narrative, chaos, metaphysical ideas of the sublime and pure formal processes are the schema through which each artist deploys his or her own sense of self and place.

The exhibition is a vital tribute to 30 years of collecting and identifies the museum as Kansas City's most essential institution devoted to Kansas City artists' significant accomplishments.

Hartman concludes, "I walk through the galleries, look at the individual works of art, can see how each work fits into each artist's body of work, and think, this is what it's all about."

As love letters go, it's one of the best.

## VISUAL ART

### ART EVENTS

**CROSSROADS ARTS DISTRICT:** First Fridays in the Crossroads. 7-9 p.m. Feb. 3. 18th and Baltimore. www.kccrossroads.org

**EPPERSON AUDITORIUM, KCAI:** "Current Perspectives." Lecture series will feature presentation by Art Practical. 7 p.m. Feb. 2. Free. 45th and Warwick. www.kcai.edu (816-802-3423)

**KANSAS CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY-CENTRAL LIBRARY:** Robert Litan: "From Wichita to the Wailing Wall: The Art of David Israel Litan." Economist and senior executive at Kauffman Foundation will discuss art of his father. 6:30 p.m. Jan. 31. 14 W. 10th. www.kclibrary.org (816-701-3400)

### GALLERIES/MUSEUMS

**BELGER ARTS CENTER:** "The Mind's Eye." Landscapes by Wolf Kahn, Cary Esser, Jessica Brandt, Larry Schwarm and others (runs Feb. 3-April 6). "For Some Must Watch, While Some Must Sleep: So Runs the World Away" (through Feb. 3). 10 a.m.-9 p.m. First Friday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Wednesday-Friday, noon-4 p.m. Saturday. 2100 Walnut. www.belgerartscenter.org (816-474-3250)

**CARA AND CABEZAS CONTEMPORARY:** "Earth: Language and

Symbols." 6-9 p.m. First Friday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday and by appointment. Through March 10. 1714 Holmes. (816-332-6239)

**CARTER ART CENTER:** "Wide of the Mark" and "Small Worlds." First Friday reception, 6-9 p.m. Feb. 3 and March 2; artists lecture, 6 p.m. March 2; runs through March 3. 1-5 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, noon-3 p.m. Saturday. MCC-Penn Valley, 3200 Broadway. www.mccc.edu/pvart (816-604-4278)

**CITY ARTS PROJECT:** "Made and Connected New Work" by Garry Noland. Through Feb. 18. 2015 Campbell.

**GRAND ARTS:** Mariah Robertson. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Thursday-Friday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday. Through April 7. 1819 Grand. www.grandarts.com (816-421-6887)

**KEMPER AT THE CROSSROADS:** "Here's Your Hat, What's Your Hurry?" by Eric Fertman. Runs Feb. 3-July 28. 33 W. 19th. www.kemperart.org (816-753-5784)

**KEMPER MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART:** "(Un)Natural Histories" (through March 4). "The Big Reveal." Exhibition highlights new acquisitions to museum's permanent collection (through April 15). "The Map as Art" (through May 6). "Wilbur Niewald: The Studio Portrait" (through June 17). "Companion Pieces: Artist Circles from the

Permanent Collection" (through July 8). 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday, 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Friday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Sunday. 4420 Warwick. www.kemperart.org (816-753-5784)

**LEOPOLD GALLERY:** "From KC to the Flint Hills, and Back." Paseo Academy Group Show. 324 W. 63rd. www.leopoldgallery.com (816-333-3111)

**NELSON-ATKINS MUSEUM OF ART:** "José Guadalupe Posada: Voice of the Mexican Common Man" (through Feb. 12). "Landscapes East/Landscapes West: Representing Nature from Mount Fuji to Canyon de Chelly" (through Feb. 26). "Rodin: Sculptures from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation" (through April 1). "The Photographs of Brett Weston" (through April 1). "The Raft" video installation (through April 29). "On Nature" (through April). "Acts of Nature: Contemporary Decorative Arts" (through May 13). 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Wednesday, 10 a.m.-9 p.m. Thursday-Friday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday, noon-5 p.m. Sunday. 4525 Oak. www.nelson-atkins.org (816-751-1278)

**NERMAN MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART:** "a hole-in-the-wall country" by Rashawn Griffin. "Mound" by Allison Schulnik. "Abstract — Kansas City." 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday, Saturday, 10

a.m.-9 p.m. Friday, noon-5 p.m. Sunday. Through April 1. JCCC, 12345 College, Overland Park. www.nermanmuseum.org (913-469-3000)

**PARAGRAPH GALLERY:** "Black Thorns in the White Cube." Noon-5 p.m. Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Thursday. Through March 3. 23 E. 12th. www.charlottestreet.org (816-221-5115)

**SHERRY LEEDY CONTEMPORARY ART:** "Standards of Female Beauty Under Scrutiny." "Often. All that Remains" by Jane Deschner. "Below the Surface" by Steve Gorman and "I am an Indian First and an Artist Second" by Tom Jones. 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday. Through Feb. 25. 2004 Baltimore. www.sherryleedy.com (816-221-2626)

**STUDIOS INC. EXHIBITION SPACE:** Annual Group Exhibition featuring resident artists. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesday-Friday, noon-4 p.m. Saturday. Through Feb. 17. 1708 Campbell. www.thestudiosinc.org (816-994-7134)

**YOUNG WRITERS PLACE:** "Home: A Juried Exhibition" presented by P&M Artworks. Through March 9. 3607 Pennsylvania. www.p-m-artworks.com or www.writersplace.org (913-432-9499 or 816-753-1090)

## ERIC FERTMAN

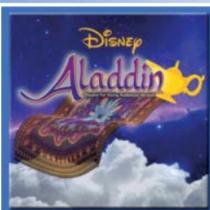


"Test Pattern (Blue 1)" (2010), by Eric Fertman, is part of the exhibit "Eric Fertman: Here's Your Hat, What's Your Hurry?" opening with a reception from 6 to 8 p.m. Friday at Kemper at the Crossroads.

FROM THE ARTIST AND SUSAN INGLETT GALLERY, NEW YORK

## Kauffman Center FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

STARLIGHT CHILDREN'S THEATRE Presents  
**Disney's Aladdin**  
Theatre for Young Audiences Version  
Muriel Kauffman Theatre  
February 3-5  
www.kauffmancenter.org



KANSAS CITY SYMPHONY Presents  
**Big Bad Voodoo Daddy**  
pops concert  
February 24-25  
www.kcsymphony.org



KAUFFMAN CENTER Presents  
**The Chieftains with Paddy Moloney**  
Helzberg Hall  
March 7, 7:30 p.m.  
www.kauffmancenter.org

