

Smart 'Exquisite Abstraction' show satisfies

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WHITE SPACE, the Inman Park gallery in Susan Bridges' carriage house, is one of those out-of-the-way places consistently worth going out of your way to visit, for the setting as well as the art.

Now, especially.

"Exquisite Abstraction," which features the work of six accomplished abstract painters based in Atlanta and New York, is a sensual, and sometimes spiritual, delight. Thoughtfully installed by guest curator John Otte, it christens a smart renovation of the 19th-century brick structure by Atlanta architects Brian Bell and David Yocum. Otte, who is Bridges' son, has arranged the paintings to highlight the [artists'](#) overlapping interests as well as their individuality. In the first gallery — a muted symphony of taupe, gray, putty, black and white — Fereydoon Family and Mark Sheinkman work with line, while Otte and Gary Stephan emphasize shape, plane and edge.

Family, an Emory University physics professor, merges his Persian roots, scientific pursuits and contemporary formal concerns in mesmeric paintings on canvas, vellum and board. He starts with calligraphic lines inked across the surface. Accentuated by the paint applied between them, the lines create the illusion of depth. The surface seems to ripple, suggesting folds of fabric. In contrast to the stately pace of Family's lines and folds, Sheinkman's feather-light white skeins on a dark-gray ground whip and spin like some manic sky-writer. In both cases, the compositions seem but a freeze-frame of a continuous motion, with cosmic implications.

Family's work particularly possess a spiritual aura. His pieces suggest a moment in an infinite rhythm, and the fact that each successive line is an inevitably futile attempt to replicate the one before it (which he calls "kinetic roughening") is a resonant metaphor for human fallibility.

Stephan, the best known of the group, demonstrates his aplomb in "A Useful Fiction." He layers and abuts quirky shapes that hug the edges of the canvas, punctuating white and gray with sharp passages of black. The painting has a flickering presence: Like a Rorschach image, you can read it like a canyon landscape or an aerial view.

Like his mentor Stephan, Otte manipulates planes and shapes in "NOLA (exquisite remix)," but he makes them literal by layering materials and using cutaways and texture to create depth. "NOLA" refers to New Orleans, whose architecture is suggested by the curvilinear stenciled pattern in the center and the arabesque of the edge of the top plane.

The pale colors that play peekaboo from behind the stencil make a segue into the next gallery, where Stephan, Julian Hatton and Erick Johnson brighten the old carriage stall with interesting and contrasting hues. Johnson, for example, takes a 1950s route, with aqua and orange applied in brushy strokes. Hatton, whose compositions glimmer with suggestions of early 20th-century artist Arthur Dove, prefers rich jewel tones of purple, mauve and green.

There's something uncomfortable about the scale of the Hatton and Johnson paintings, as if they are too big for their stretchers. To my mind, they would be more effective as larger pieces. Similarly, Sheinkman's works seem like details or sketches when compared with his larger, more complex paintings (not in this show). These quibbles, however, shouldn't deter anyone from what is sure to be a satisfying art experience.