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Martin Mullin, *Wave 11*, 2011

## 70 Years of Abstract Painting: Excerpts

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By Mario Naves

Excerpts is the subtitle to 70 Years of Abstract Painting, an exhibition of 40-some artists at Jason McCoy Gallery. As such, it serves as a convenient hedge against complaints about the patchwork selection of works on view. As an organizing conceit, Excerpts beats Hodgepodge or Airing Out The Storage Racks, both of which are closer to the truth, but that's not to say the exhibition doesn't beg interesting questions.

Any show purporting to explore abstraction, let alone 70 years of the stuff, has to contend with the genre's current marginal status. At this date, it's difficult to imagine that abstract painting was once a driving force of culture, a chief proponent of the avant-garde and, in the spacey heads of its earliest practitioners, a stimulus for social change.

Nowadays, "pictures of nothing" are one sideline of many, with no greater claim on public attention than other avenues of aesthetic pursuit. Probably lesser claim, given that the pleasures of abstraction have always been somewhat esoteric and are fast becoming removed, if not completely divorced, from a fast-paced, techno-intoxicated pop-wise culture.

Take, for instance, Helen Miranda Wilson's "Time Away," a diminutive painting of lustrously applied horizontal stripes. With no tangible image to latch onto, the viewer has to switch his proverbial gears and take in the picture on its own terms—through a sonorous array of color, fugitive light, steady if not unchangeable rhythms and an elusive sense of, not so much time away, as time passing. The picture is, in other words, anti-immediate. It functions at a different pace than Google, on which it takes .37 seconds to retrieve information on, yes, Helen Miranda Wilson.

Most of the paintings at McCoy center less on the experiential than on things, even if they aren't readily identifiable. Jackson Pollock and big brother Charles channel pictographs, albeit in dissimilar manners, and Paul Pagk and Al Held riff on isometric perspective. There are artists here without whom no survey of abstraction would be complete—not only the younger Pollock and Held, but also Hans Hofmann and John McLaughlin.

At its best, in the work of Gwenn Thomas, Sharon Horvath, Thomas Nozkowski, Martin Mullin and Jennifer Riley, 70 Years of Abstract Painting argues for abstraction as an ideal forum for intimacy and idiosyncrasy. Which may mean that the exhibition is more of an accurate gauge of the genre's 21st-century standing than we might, at first, realize.