

Thomas Erben Gallery



Installation view, west wall. (photo credit: Fernando Sandoval/MW)

Anna and Bernhard Blume, Eli Bornowsky, Mike Cloud,
Róza El-Hassan, Barry Gerson, Harriet Korman, Mehran Mohajer,
Dona Nelson, and Adrian Piper

Art as Consciousness

January 15 - February 21, 2026

Opens Thursday, January 15, 6-8:30 p.m.

The increased interest in spirituality, alternate experiences and consciousness seems to be a reaction to the breakdown of scientific materialism from which reality has been constructed since the Renaissance and which seems now incapable of addressing the current multiple and intersecting crises.

In its attempt to penetrate the ever smaller building blocks of our material reality, quantum physics, as most recently ascertained (see the 2022 Nobel Prize), posits that the "universe is not locally real"*. The previously established assumption that "consciousness arises from matter" is thus inverted to a new paradigm where consciousness, rather than matter, is the basis of everything.

From this point of view, reality is now understood as emanating out of an ever expanding field of creativity, confined by neither time nor space and exploring its own potential through individualized points of consciousness that pursue their own trajectories, contributing to the ever evolving richness of what there is.

Traditionally in art, this understanding has been hinted as “the intangible”, with its formal and material manifestation in time and space pointing towards creativity as a charge which is open and unfixed.

The works included in this show, executed in various mediums and over half a century, are seen as exemplary. They are partially drawn from the gallery’s program, which has explored art’s significance in its broadest sense as a reminiscence or connection to the all encompassing inner realm of consciousness.

It can only be hoped that this redefined understanding of reality will provide a new common basis, a shared understanding of our place in the world as well as of who we are in relation to each other.

I would like to thank Daniel Pinchbeck, whose essay on Monistic Idealism provided the intellectual framework for this exhibition.

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*In this context, “real” means that objects have definite properties independent of observation—an apple can be red even when no one is looking. “Local” means that objects can be influenced only by their surroundings and that any influence cannot travel faster than light. Investigations at the frontiers of quantum physics have found that these things cannot both be true. Instead the evidence shows that objects are not influenced solely by their surroundings, and they may also lack definite properties prior to measurement.

Scientific American, January 2023

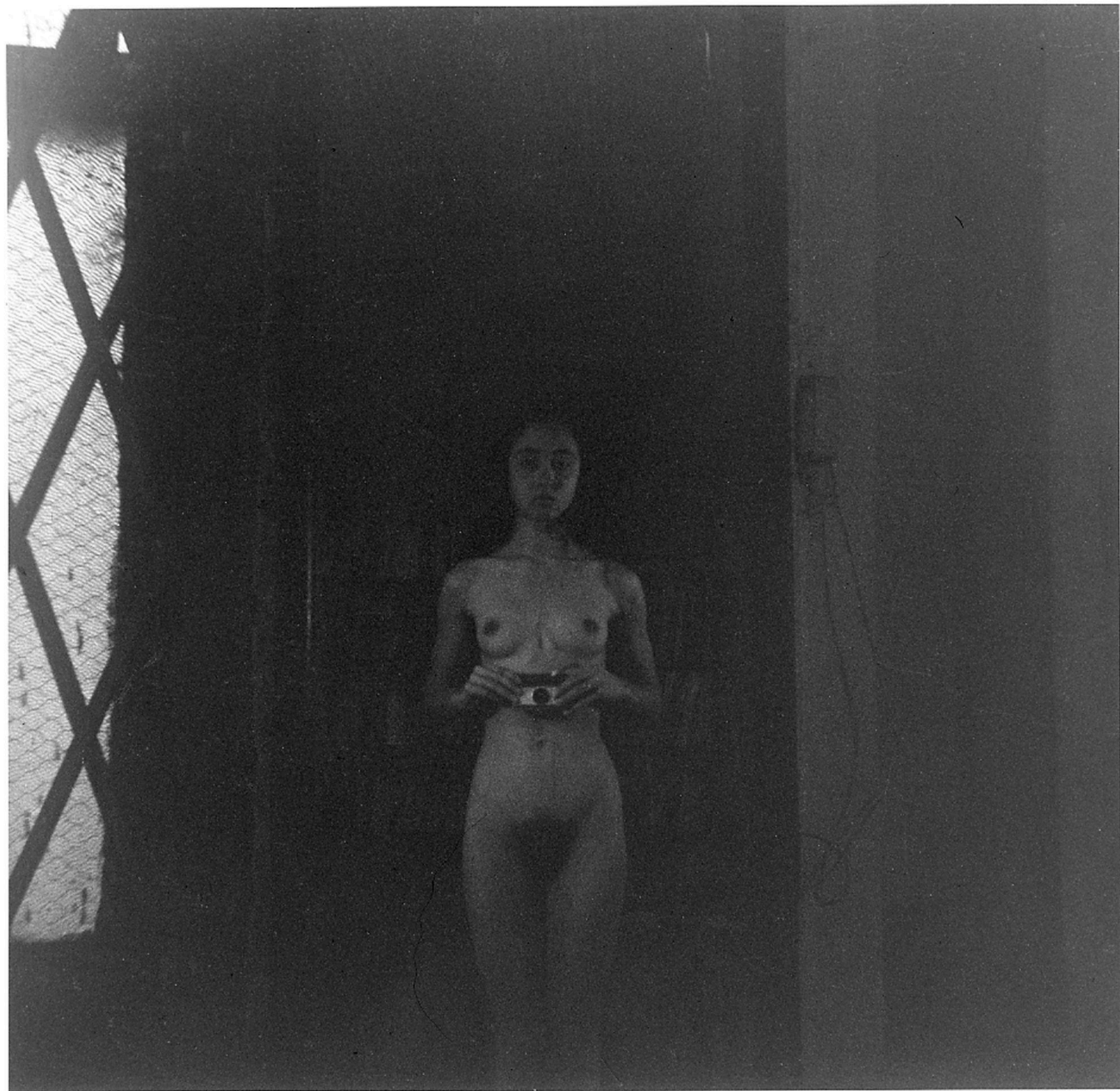


Barry Gerson

Translucent Appearances, 1975
Digitized 16mm Ektachrome film
22 minutes
Edition of 5 (+1 AP)



Installation view from entrance (photo: Fernando Sandoval/MW)



Adrian Piper

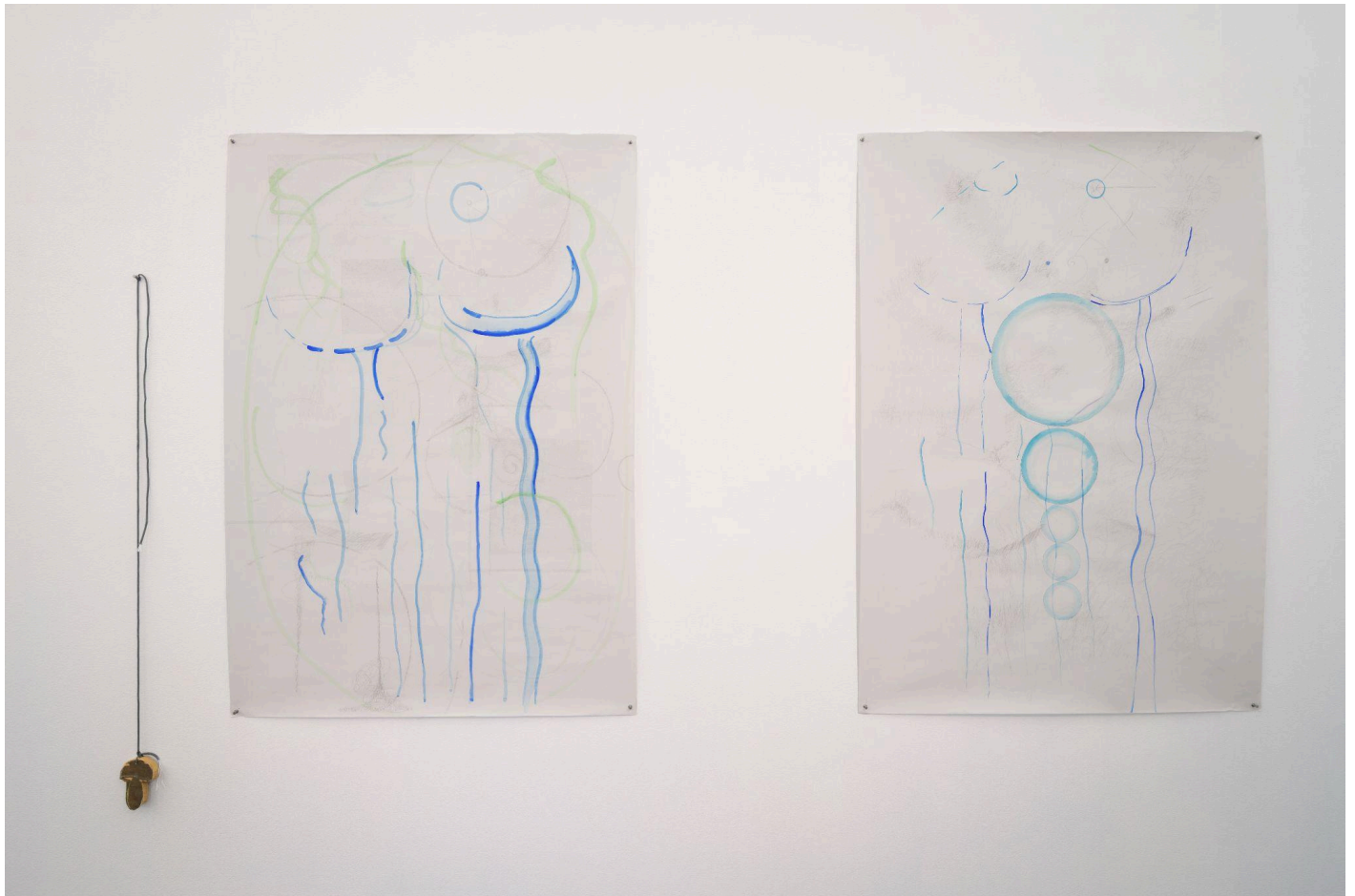
Food for the Spirit, 1971

Image no. 1 from set of 14

B/W silver gelatin print

14.5 x 15 in.

Edition 1/3



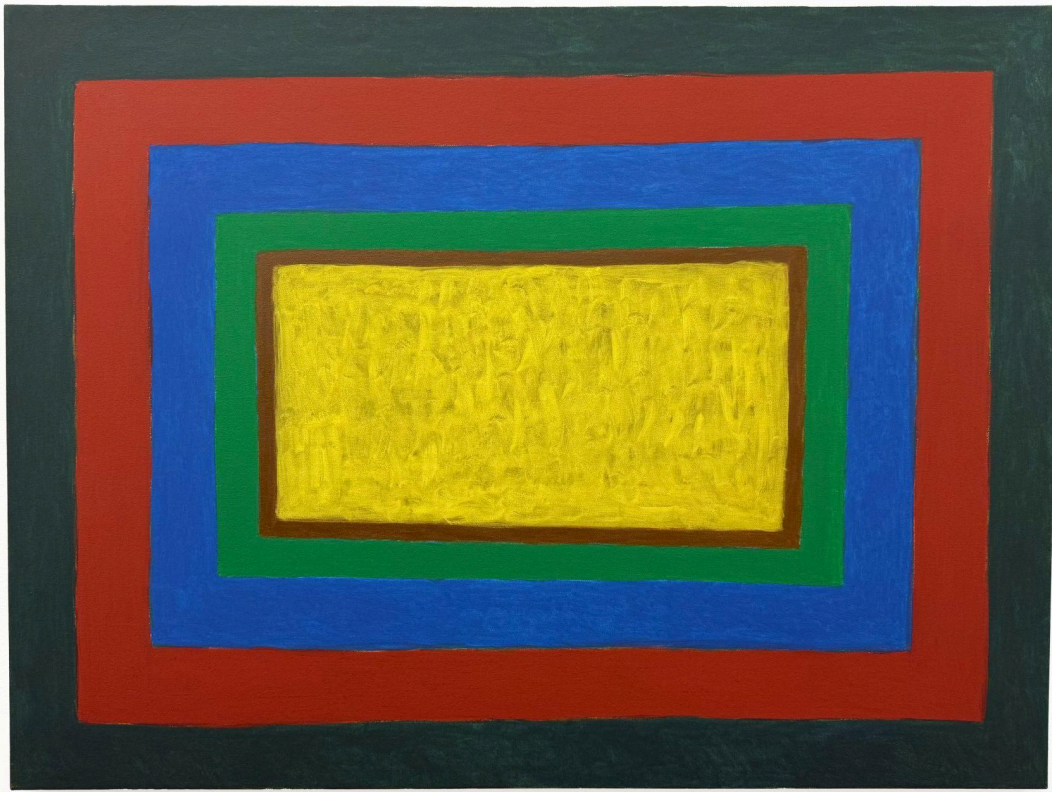
Róza El-Hassan

Untitled, 2025.

Pencil and gouache on paper

59 x 41 in. (photo: Fernando Sandoval/MW)

Roza El-Hassan, an artist (b. 1966, Budapest) of dual Hungarian/Syrian nationality, represented Hungary at the 1997 Venice Biennale. Her two pencil and watercolor on paperworks seismographically record psychic states, a hyper sensibility which is the result of the artist's biography. Amidst many other exhibitions, the **Kunstmuseum Basel** included her work recently in "Drawing Today".



Harriet Korman

Untitled, 2019
Oil on canvas
30 x 40 in.

Harriet Korman's *Untitled*, from 2019, is part of a group of paintings based on the same formal device: nesting rectangles. These grew out of Korman applying several layers of paint, continuously and attentively adjusting the relationship between the bands in terms of width and colors. Usually categorized as "geometric abstraction", these paintings aren't "geometric" at all. They are structures grown out of process, an observed and intuitive probing, which visually manifests an abstract mental state, a state of being or consciousness – simultaneously porous and defined.

Observe the quality of the center's yellow strokes over green. Already in a 1975 Art Forum review, Roberta Smith describes the singular quality of Korman's marks as [fluctuating] "... like breathing – between fragility and robustness."



Eli Bornowsky

Tiepolo, Coltrane, 2026

Egg tempera, gesso on wood panel

47.25 x 47.25 in.

In his paintings, Eli Bornowsky combines his own digital generative programs with traditional egg tempera on gessoed wood panels. The patterning here - better referred to as tiling - is based on a series of squares, triangles, and rhombs, which unfold (origami-like) through a program named by its three creators "Watanabe Ito Soma" while "substitution rules" partially interchange these elements. This creates an overall stable, though never repeating pattern (think of Islamic Geometry with an added element of disruption).

A program then "walks" randomly over the tiling, assigning color to each element. Subsequent wanderings - departing from different points - add saturation to each shape depending on how many times a tile has been hit.

Bornowsky etches the geometric tiling into the gesso surface by hand, and painting each tile, brushstroke by brushstroke with egg tempera, adds layers of visual interest, as do deviations from the assigned colors, depending on the artist's aesthetic decisions.

We experience here a work of rich complexity, which sits at the intersection of mathematical programming, craft and the artist's intuition.



Anna and Bernhard Blume

Magischer Determinismus, 1976

Set of four b/w photographs and printed text

14 x 11.75 in. each

(photo: Fernando Sandoval/MW)

Magic Determinism, is a 1974 photo sequence by the German artist couple Anna and Bernhard Blume (1936-2020 and 1937-2011). A human being and an object – a jug – are brought not only into a formal but also puzzling interrelation between the human's and object's consciousness. Though not widely known in the US, throughout the years, the Blumes' work has been the subject of many major institutional exhibitions (such as a 1989 MoMA Project or solo show at the Kunsthalle Basel in 1987).

Translated from German, the text reads:

"Magic Determinism" is the term for the situation of occasionally being a jug.

However, in that moment one's consciousness is reduced to that of being the jug. I would therefore be a jug without recognizing myself as such and would furthermore remain under the illusion – unlike the jug – to remain myself. But this is not like that. Bernhard Johannes Blume, 1976."



Mike Cloud

(M)ildly toxic, (F)ast drying speed, (B)rittle film, 2008

Oil on canvas with silver foil

50 x 50 in.

The works included in *Art and Consciousness* do not make use of the established symbolism usually associated with "Spiritual Art". Instead, this "charge" is pointed at through process as well as material and conceptual investigations.

As an example, the generative concept of Mike Cloud's *(M)ildly toxic, (F)ast drying speed, (B)rittle film, 2008*, is the properties of oil paint used to produce the painting. Rendered as partially intersecting, circular charts, a visual metaphor emerges for how the interlocking of systems creates interferences and partial breakdowns. Though not entirely unfamiliar, a reinvested and thus reinvigorated symbol emerges out of Cloud's chosen parameters and process.



Installation view, north / east wall. (photo: Fernando Sandoval/MW)



Installation view, east wall. (photo: Fernando Sandoval/MW)



Mehran Mohajer

Untitled from Tehran Undated, 2009

Color Negative, digital print

30 x 30 in.

Edition of 5(+2 AP)

Mehran Mohajer (b. 1964) lives and works in Tehran. Widely exhibited in Iran and within an Iranian context internationally, Mohajer lectures at the University in Tehran, and is also a translator as well as author. Pushing the boundaries of the visible towards the invisible, he locates his photography at the intersection of language and the image, with an eye focused on Persian classical literature.



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