



# CRITIC'S VIEW: Aesthetics of Color Beckon at Frieze New York 2018

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by Charles A. Riley II

The temperature soared above 90 degrees for the annual press preview on May 3 for the 2018 [Frieze New York](#) art fair on Randall's Island. For this reviewer, the balmy surprise prompted dictated a different approach to this international gathering, which draws both prestigious and scrappy galleries from Europe, Asia—including a strong contingent from Japan this year as well as India—South America and across the United States.

The sudden slice of summer suggested a survey of the application of one of the strongest tools in the artist's toolbox: the passionate aesthetics of *color*. Here are my picks of the top moments in the fair when it comes to this most unruly, dangerous and exciting force in art.

## David Hockney at Pace Gallery

The first vibrant example of color in action was right at the entrance to the fair, a single-artist exhibition of [David Hockney's](#) iPod works at the [Pace Gallery](#) booth. The centerpiece was an almost plangent self-portrait of a tiny and clearly aging Hockney in a vast studio surrounded by paint carts that he has rendered in primaries. As in so many 19th century self portraits in a studio, he is surrounded by his high-toned landscapes, a clear example of the artist surrounded by, if not overwhelmed by, color itself.

Among the many vertical still lifes on the walls—including a charming piece that returned to the artist's signature motif of a flower in a vase—the one that held my attention was *Tangerines*. The radiant core of different oranges, which appeared to be built concentrically on the screen, was a tribute to a master printer as well as to a confident colorist. The work, with its unruly squiggles, is strongly reminiscent of a still life of oranges by Matisse that was one of the highlights of the Matisse/Picasso show in 2003 at [MoMA](#).



"Tangerines" by David Hockney, 2010. iPad drawing printed on paper, Edition 15/15, 94 x 71.1 cm. Courtesy of Annely Juda Fine Art.

In addition to the Hockney exhibit at Pace, there is another piece by the artist in the booth of the [Offer Waterman](#) gallery from London, where an early oil on board painting titled *Erection* offers a decidedly different perspective on a familiar artist. Under the influence of Alan Davie, whose work he had seen in March of 1958, Hockney took a flyer on Abstract Expressionism in this work in a geological palette of browns and olives. It is as far from the iPod prints and the bright, cheery *Tangerines* as can be imagined, a superior example of the metamorphoses that artists' careers can negotiate.



"Erection" by David Hockney, 1959-60. Oil on board, 48 1/8 x 36 5/8 inches. Courtesy of Offer Waterman.

## Josef and Anni Albers at Alan Cristea Gallery

No investigation of color or color theory can be complete without considering the work of [Josef and Anni Albers](#), and the perfectly hung [Alan Cristea Gallery](#) booth includes works on paper by both husband and wife. This was not the boldest color moment in the fair by far, but Albers was the philosopher who taught a generation to remain wary of color and its tricks. "Color deceives continually," he admonished his Yale cohorts, who included so many of the great artists of later generations—from Richard Serra and Eva Hesse to Jennifer Bartlett and [Chuck Close](#) (and by extension, Peter Halley).

Albers was also a superb musician, and Anni was a weaver, so that their approach to a visual phenomenon on a two-dimensional plane was also shaped by their understanding of other media, and their complete grasp of the idea that color behaves differently in different mediums (glass, textiles, paint).

Alan Cristea Gallery is also a marvelous booth for a great black-and-white moment in the fair, a little "chapel" dedicated to the grainy prints of the sculptor Anthony Gormley.

Meanwhile, the natural complement to the Albers' works was a revelatory group of casein tempera and enamel paintings on canvas by the Italian artist Carla Accardi, the best of the Spotlight series of booths, shown by [Partners & Mucciaccia](#).



"Camino Real" by Anni Albers, 1967. Screenprint on Mohawk Superfine Bristol paper, 23 2/5 x 22 inches. Courtesy of Alan Cristea Gallery, London.

## Robert Motherwell and William Tillyer at Bernard Jacobson Gallery

It's a tossup whether the best thing about the [Bernard Jacobson Gallery](#) booth is the glorious offering of paintings by [Robert Motherwell](#) and others or the proprietor himself, who has just published an extraordinary and personal biography, *Robert Motherwell*. The book is subtitled *The Making of an American Giant*, and the chapter on Black Mountain College is fantastic.

Motherwell, the artist who coined the term "Abstract Expressionism," was, in at least one major work in this booth, a true example of the action painting he championed so eloquently in his writings and his teaching.

Probably the most significant painting in the fair is an early, messy, gestural, skeptical and utterly unforgettable exploration of the *Elegy to the Spanish Republic* matrix that Motherwell visited more than 200 times. A significant departure in this unique case is that the oblong form that dominates those compositions is a cloud of lovely blues. Blue happens to be Motherwell's most ingratiating color, and it sings its steady pitch through several works in the booth.

Another Motherwell in this booth incorporated elements of three major series—the Elegies, the Open paintings and the "Je t'aime" paintings—in one work that the artist repainted over the course of three decades.

Also on view at Bernard Jacobson Gallery is the work of the English artist [William Tillyer](#), which trilled between a grid of colored squares at its right side and an impasto-laden, color saturated abstraction from a still life of flowers in a vase on its left. The work made me think of the still life basis for so many Hans Hofmann paintings made in New York, including the ones his students would make. As much as I appreciated seeing Tillyer's work, it was the big, dark Motherwell that held my eye.



"A View No. 1" by Robert Motherwell, 1958. Oil on canvas, 81 1/10 x 104 inches. Courtesy of Barnard Jacobson Gallery.



"Large Blue Vase with Arrangement after a Painting by Jan Davidszoon de Heem" by William Tillyer, 2018. Acrylic on fabric and acrylic mesh, 70 9/10 x 70 9/10 inches. Courtesy of Bernard Jacobson Gallery.

## Peter Halley at Waddington Custot

In many ways, [Peter Halley](#) could be considered the Motherwell of the turn of the 21st century if you compare their writings, although the comparison to Frank Stella always seems inevitable. Halley uses color differently from so many of the artists who are identified with chromaticism, from Delaunay and Matisse through, to take an example under the tents, Hockney or Leon Polk Smith (at Lisson). The aggressive neon or metallic squares on their rude stucco surfaces invade the room, reminding us of the sheer vibratory potency of color to transform space.

Hung in a massed chorale, as in the [Waddington Custot](#) booth, they have a cumulative tendency to over-activate the rods and cones of the healthy eye. A slightly more sedate experience is offered by the archival works on paper, studies for each and every painting that Waddington Custot has, with admirable scholarly assiduousness, included in the exhibition.



“Dust” by Peter Halley, 2009. Acrylic, Day-Glo acrylic and Roll-a-Text on canvas, 80 x 57 inches. Courtesy of Waddington Custot.

## Eiji Uematsu at Gallery 38

Not all color has to blow the viewer away. There is room for subtlety in the spectrum, and this is why an exquisite installation of ceramic works by [Eiji Uematsu](#) at the [Gallery 38](#) booth is such a relief in some ways. “I feel clay. I see clay. Rainy days, sunny days, seasons changing, flowers blooming,” the artist writes in a quiet statement that perfectly complements the keyboard-like procession of vertical bars, divided in two and three tones, usually warm and cool, that turn a corner in the booth.

On the floor are the sandy, coarse sculptures that are the reminders of the “natural” color of his local clay, but the plaques are made with “cosmetic clay” applied to the surface and fired to their delicate pastel tones. Thankfully, for a moment the hubbub of Frieze faded away. I had a comparable sigh of relief on seeing an [Ann Truitt](#) drawing at the [Matthew Marks Gallery](#), a tiny slice of cerulean blue along a horizon of light pencil.



“Karuta” by Eiji Uematsu, 1986. Clay, 32 3/10 x 5 1/10 inches. Courtesy of Gallery 38.

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**BASIC FACTS:** Frieze New York 2018 is on view from May 4-6, 2018 on Randall's Island Park (ferry service from 35th Street and 90th Street), New York, NY. For details, visit [frieze.com](http://frieze.com)

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