

TUSSLE

FEBRUARY 2026

Dona Nelson and Joanne Greenbaum

By Lisa Taliano



Two shows up now, Dona Nelson at Canada Gallery and Joanne Greenbaum at Nino Mier Gallery, are powerful examples of abstract painting's protean nature for continual renewal. As dissimilar as the sensibilities of Dona Nelson and Joanne Greenbaum are in the singularity of their respective visions, their dynamic structures, which function as vehicles of pleasure, share a mode of construction that exhibits what it means to think abstractly through the fundamental act of painting. Abstraction here is not about extracting universal principles or ideas, it is an abstraction that sees the complicated condition of multiplicities in flux prior to fixed forms.

These paintings can be characterized by what Gilles Deleuze calls the Diagram. The idea of the diagram was originally inspired by the American philosopher and logician Charles Pierce. For Pierce, diagrammatic thinking is a form of reasoning that puts sensitivity at the center of the process. It depends on feelings, intuitions, and imagination for its development, and involves what he calls musement - a way of letting the mind wander without rules or purpose. This state of mind, Pierce believed, is at the root of all reason. Deleuze takes this idea of the diagram and develops it to encompass everything, connecting it to the production of nature/culture itself. The Diagram becomes linked to the "Abstract Machine", a central concept in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The abstract machine deals with "fluxes, fluids, functions, it churns up matter, form, energy, networks."¹

In Dona Nelson and Joanne Greenbaum's paintings, the process of capturing thinking through making is on full display. These paintings do not start out with a fixed plan; their structures actualize themselves in the process of their development. Rather than modelling work based on an idea, they are continually modulating forces into singularities. That is, they are reshaping the mold through the activity of modulation.



Dona Nelson, *Barney*, 2025, 100 ½ x 88 inches
(255.27 x 223.52 cm) Acrylic on canvas



Joanne Greenbaum, *Untitled*, 2024, Ink, oil, acrylic, flashe, and marker on canvas, 84 x 72 in

In these paintings, as in the activity of modulation, time plays as much of a role as spatiality. The temporal dimension is as important as the spatial in that the diagram belongs to the phenomenon of becoming. In QFT and as demonstrated in these paintings, time too is constituted by the iterative enfolding of matter, marking the different patterns of its making.

Joanne Greenbaum's paintings are assemblages of brightly colored, overlapping linear arrangements on variegated grounds. In works, like *Untitled* (2025), each competing layer is a differently colored, elongated, often sinuous, form that expands and contracts, sometimes swelling into an organic shape, as it meanders up and down and around the canvas. Color areas remain distinct, preserving boundaries while becoming entangled with neighboring forms. This discontinuity makes visible the painting's history and gives us an insight into the artist's process. In zero state gravity, from the position of the top layer, which is in front and present, we can peer down into the past, experiencing the multiplicity of times, while getting swept into the rhythmic flow of the loops and swirls, radiating out, and turning back in on themselves in perpetual motion.

Line is also important as a structuring mechanism in Dona Nelson's paintings at Canada. In her process, the lines are not drawn or painted. They accrue by default as the result of the artist gluing cheesecloth strips onto the canvas to prevent the colors from staining those areas, and to direct the flow of the paint. Once the strips are scraped or ripped off, they become linear networks that cut across and hold together diverse color fields. Consider how this works in *Saturday* (2025), where a network of circulating lines moves horizontally across three vertical fields of successive primary colors.

Whereas in Joanne Greenbaum's painting the heterogeneous parts maintain their separate areas, in Dona Nelson's they often become fused together, creating a stratigraphic composite that makes it difficult to decipher the sequence in which they were made. This is complicated by the "anexact" method she uses to construct the paintings when she forfeits control to the materials, freeing the agency of the paint, medium and canvas. Colors bleed into each other, layers disrupt readings, borders are always transgressed; materials interact with each other in unpredictable ways. The paintings emerge from dynamic, messy processes, embracing uncertainty and real-world irregularities. The space of the painting becomes one of agency not location, a space of agency where indeterminate material forces play a central role. There is something awe-inspiring and delightful, uncanny and comfortingly familiar about the space created by the iterative layering activity of the artist's physical materiality in interaction with the materiality of the paint and canvas. These Dionysian paintings have the capacity, as Nietzsche might say, to reconcile us with the rise and fall of being and the dissolution of the individual.

While Greenbaum is directing forces through lines on a surface, Nelson is capturing forces in the canvas by throwing, pouring and re-working paint. Both work incorporates the situatedness of the body in topological, spatio-temporal rhythms. Through affect and a haptic sense, the viewer is no longer outside looking in; we are inside the material produced space-time of the painting.

The vortical twists and turns in the gothic line of Joanne Greenbaum's work, like the thrown paint turned knotted fields on/in Dona Nelson's canvases, liberate the hand/body from the subordination of the eye and create purely manual paintings. In this process of thinking as doing, the eye has a hard time keeping up with the uncontrolled activity of the hand/body. The tension between the eye and the hand/body is always on the verge of creating what Deleuze refers to as a "catastrophe"². The introduction of chaos into the paintings results in a loss of the visual coordinates and the emergence of the haptic eye. This third eye takes on not only the function of sight, but the function of touch. As in Jackson Pollock's work, the visual orientation of the horizon is replaced by the tactile ground of the painting, we move around these canvases by virtue of this haptic sense, feeling the inorganic life of things and forces underneath sensations through rhythms and intensities. These abstract paintings are not solely about painting. They can also be seen as abstract machines in which material-discursivity, in which thinking and being, are fused. They are about our immersive participation in the production of worlds in their becoming.

[1] Deleuze, Gilles. Foucault. (Translated by Seán Hand. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 34.

[2] In Deleuze, the catastrophe in painting is when the line between chaos and the known world of clichés is breached: destroying our units of measure; our visual coordinates; the way in which we have been conditioned to understand and experience reality.



Dona Nelson, Untitled, 2025, Oil, ink, acrylic, and flashe on canvas, 90 x 70 in