



Detail, site-specific installation for the Art Preserve at the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI, 2021

291 GRAND ST | MAR 5 - APR 3, 2021

Michelle Grabner

James Cohan is pleased to present an exhibition of new works by Michelle Grabner, on view from March 5 through April 3 at 291 Grand Street. This is Grabner's third solo exhibition with the gallery.

Michelle Grabner is known for her broad perspective developed as teacher, writer and critic over the past 30 years. The site where it all comes together is the studio. Her artmaking is driven by a distinctive value in the productivity of work and takes place outside of dominant systems.

Central to the work is process. Grabner references Penelope's clever ploy of weaving by day and unweaving at night, which kept the suitors at bay in Homer's Ithaca. Like Penelope, Grabner finds a generative space for mending, healing and woolgathering within her unique system of de-weaving and filling in. Like Penelope, who used the coded language of shroud-making to bring about change, Grabner uncovers new dynamic relationships through her visionary practice of repetition. With a deep attention to abstract patterns and all the metaphors they conjure, Grabner pushes the limits of compositional structures to discover the tipping point between stability and precariousness; between continuance and wondrous difference.

For Grabner—and so many of us—the impulse to make the world whole is inspired by living in one that feels so broken. Following this impulse feels urgent at a moment when collectively we are questioning the systems that society has built for the purpose of keeping out difference. Grabner states, *“I have always been a painter who examines various power structures inherent in patterns and abstract arrangements. Because I believe that all forms are political, I have*

committed myself and 30 years of painting to re-articulating vernacular patterns in order to shift the unobserved into critical sight. This general overview has been foundational to my studio work since 1990.”

The paintings in Grabner’s new exhibition are the outcome of probing questions into the nature of difference. The artist asks, *“How much ‘difference’ can be introduced into a pattern field without collapsing into unreliability? Will referential and familiar patterns tip the compositions into capriciousness and disintegration? What organizational conceits can be developed to unify disparity?”*

The works are subtle. Secure white grids become wonky and individualistic. They radiate, vibrate and dissimulate. Colors emerge and dissipate. There is a defiance in how they evade easy reproduction, disregarding how images are disseminated in the digital age. Their quiet nature requires physical presence.

“In our culture, we are having trouble with interpretation,” Grabner notes. Her examination of difference defines a new distribution of power, one that *“has to be non-negotiable and clear in the pictures we make and the values we hold.”*

Michelle Grabner (b. 1962, Oshkosh, Wisconsin) received her MA in Art History and BFA in Painting and Drawing from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, and an MFA in Art Theory and Practice from Northwestern University. She is currently Senior Chair of the Department of Painting and Drawing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and was a Core Critic at Yale University in the Department of Painting and Printmaking from 2011 to 2014. She returned to Yale in 2020 as a Visiting Artist. A regular contributor to *Artforum*, her writing has also appeared in publications including *Art in America*, *Frieze*, *Modern Painters*, and *Art-Agenda*. Grabner co-curated the 2014 Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art along with Anthony Elms and Stuart Comer, and served as the inaugural artistic director of FRONT International, a triennial exhibition in Cleveland, OH and the vicinity that ran from July through September of 2018. She is also the founder and co-director of two non-profit art spaces in Wisconsin, The Suburban and The Poor Farm, with her husband, artist Brad Killam.

The John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, WI recently commissioned Grabner to create an artist-built environment for their new Art Preserve building. This public project is slated to open in June 2021. Grabner has been the subject of solo exhibitions at institutions including the Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland; Indianapolis Museum of Art, Hedreen Gallery at Seattle University; INOVA, The University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee; Ulrich Museum, Wichita; and University Galleries, Illinois State University. She has been included in major group exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Akron Art Museum; Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Tate St. Ives, UK; and Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland. Her work is included in the permanent collection of museums including the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MO; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; Dallas Museum of Art, TX; Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO; Indianapolis Museum of Art, IN; MUDAM, Luxemburg; Milwaukee Art Museum, WI; Madison Museum of Contemporary Art, WI; Knoxville Museum of Art, TN; Sheldon Museum of Art, Lincoln, NE; Daimler Contemporary, Berlin; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Grabner lives and works in Milwaukee.

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