

Smith, Roberta. "New York Art Galleries: What to See Right Now," *New York Times*, 10 April 2019.

The New York Times

New York Art Galleries: What to See Right Now

Mary Beth Edelson's "Great Goddess Cut-Outs"; John McLaughlin's trove of photographs; and Keiji Uematsu's first American solo show.

John McLaughlin

Through April 20. Susan Inglett Gallery, 522 West 24th Street, Manhattan, inglettgallery.com



Installation view of John McLaughlin's exhibition "Ascetic Approach" at Susan Inglett Gallery. Credit John McLaughlin and Susan Inglett, New York

What to make of the narrow frieze of black and white geometric designs wrapping around the display space of "Ascetic Approach" at the Susan Inglett Gallery? Are they drawings or photographs? Art or meta-art?

The exhibition qualifies as an accidental collaboration among John McLaughlin (1898-1976), the West Coast exemplar of Zen-like Minimalist painting; Felix Landau (1924-2003), the Los Angeles gallerist who represented McLaughlin for two decades; and David Platzker, whose Specific Object Inc. deals in books, periodicals, catalogs, multiples and ephemera pertaining to art since around 1960.

Mr. Platzker found the images, which are 8-inch-by-10-inch black and white photographs, in a thick three-ring binder included in a longtime art world fixture's estate, part of which he bought around 2008. McLaughlin's name is written on the prints, sometimes with measurements or dates, from the late-1940s to 1968. Mr. Platzker surmised that the images record the artist's paintings that entered Landau's stock. They trace his development from Cubist abstraction to grids, to the simplified geometries of his mature work, a progression Mr. Platzker amplifies by juxtaposing three photographs with their corresponding canvases, dated 1947, 1949 and 1965.

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Lined up here, the 99 images eliminate McLaughlin's carefully considered color choices, creating an alternative body of work, a "ghost" career in blacks, whites and grays, reducing his vision to its essentials. The result is a hypnotic meditation on the basics of composition, proportion and tone. As a next step, someone might convert the McLaughlin-Landau-Platzker collaboration into an abstract film, one picture of one painting at a time. *ROBERTA SMITH*