

PROFILE

B. AMORE

Paul Gruhler: Existential Encounter

Standing before Paul Gruhler's broad studio window overlooking the extensive landscape and Vermont's Mount Belvedere, which translates into "beautiful view," it is easy to imagine him beginning his studio day here at seven a.m. The morning ritual includes sipping espresso, reading from one of his favorite poets, and ruminating on the waiting work combined with the poetic expressions.

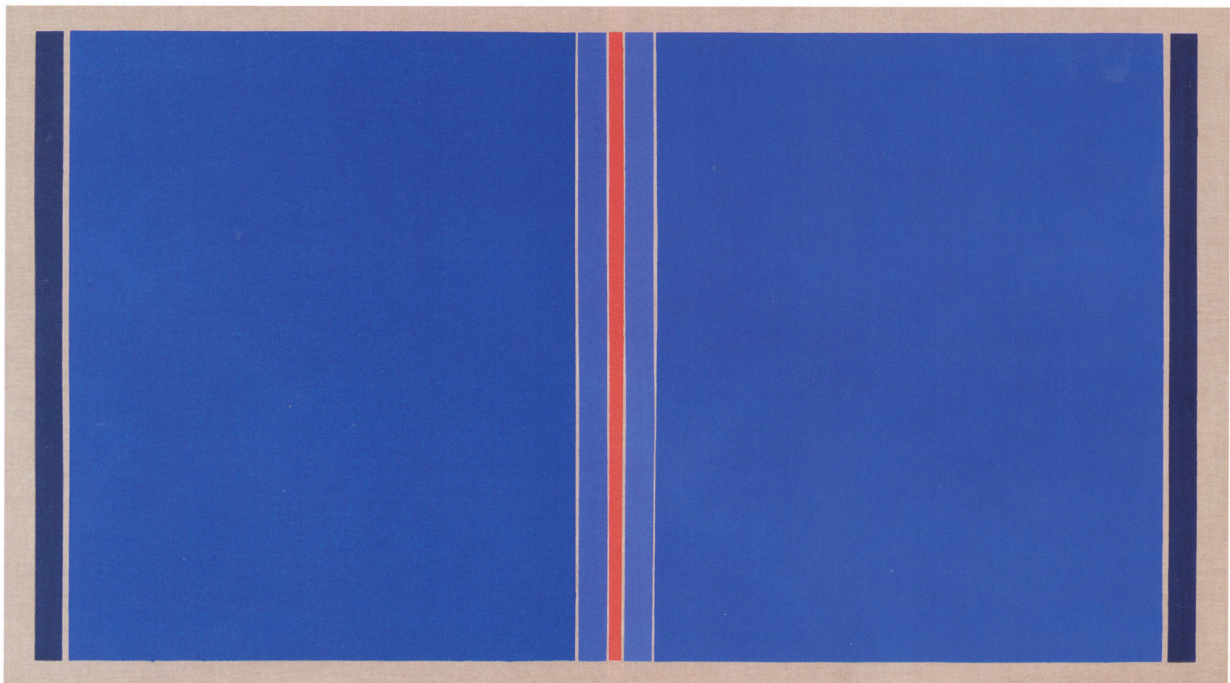
Gruhler's love of poetry started in high school with ee cummings and Robert Frost whom he heard read in person at the New School. His first trip to Vermont was to pay homage to Frost's grave in the Old Bennington Cemetery. Vermont poets Galway Kinnell, Gregory Djanikian, and Judith Chalmers are among his favorites. The meditative state thus induced by long practice assists him in viewing his work fresh, continuing his search for the emotions of the color relationships that are key to his works of geometric abstract expressionism.

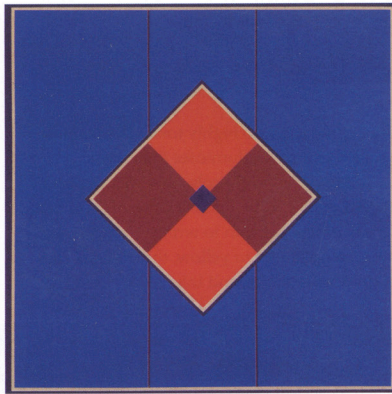
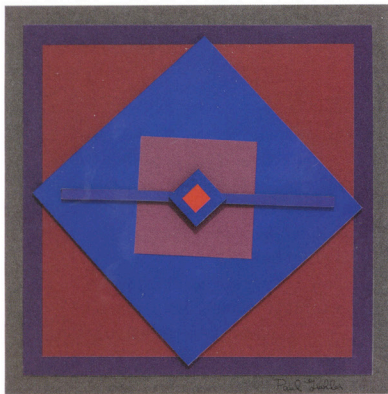
Gruhler is an artist who has educated himself through a passionate painting practice that has spanned 60 years. Born in Brooklyn and raised in Queens, New York City itself was the school that he attended. In 1962, he set up his own art studio on 28th Street, a hotbed of artists in downtown Manhattan. He was mentored and informally taught by three well-known artists—Michael Lekakis, a sculptor, and painters Harold Weston and Herb Aach—as he explored his chosen path of geometric abstraction. The impressions of Manhattan's energy and pulsating colors continue to inform his work which has been shown internationally.

Always curious and enterprising, Gruhler consciously chose a "day job" with American Airlines which allowed him to travel and visit museums and art centers throughout the United States, Europe, South America and the Far East. He was able to take samples of his

work and share them with curators. These visits resulted in exhibitions in Finland and other countries in Europe. He considers his travels to be an invaluable part of his education as he experienced the art and history of many diverse cultures.

Even when traveling, Gruhler would work every day in a sketchbook that was his constant companion. When it came time for him to settle down in one place, he chose Vermont where several friends lived. The exquisite natural





*I dwell in Possibility-
A fairer House than Prose-
More numerous of Windows-
Superior-for Doors-*

*Of Chambers as the Cedars-
Impregnable of Eye-
And for an Everlasting Roof
The Gambrels of the Sky-*

*Of Visitors-the fairest-
For Occupation-This-
The spreading wide my narrow Hands
To gather Paradise-*

—Emily Dickinson

Gruhler's profound knowledge of color carries the viewer on an inner journey and the works often seem to "float" in space.

beauty of Craftsbury drew him, and he shares a full life there with his wife, Jane Marlin, and has created an ideal working environment that supports his continuous practice.

Gruhler's studio walls are hung with large five-foot by six-foot canvases in varying hues of bright planes of color vibrating against each other. *Chelsea Series, #4* is composed of two large blue rectangles, separated by a narrow red-orange line. It exudes a powerful presence. Color is a living entity in Gruhler's work. "Abstract" is not an adequate term to describe it, as the force of each painting carries an emotional impact which brings to mind a quote of Mark Rothko's: "A painting is not a picture of an experience. It is an experience."

The sense of the painter's hand is clearly evident, with the texture of the canvas often showing through the thin veils of color that he applies with wide brushes. At times, it feels like looking at a screen illuminated from the back by light, as the substrate of white shines through the complex layers of individually mixed pigmented tones. Gruhler's profound knowledge of color carries the viewer on an inner journey and the works often seem to "float" in space.

Along adjacent walls are the most recent paintings from the series *Points of Reference* which are distinguished by diamond shapes. In 2018, he was captivated by the mosaic floors that he saw in Greek and Roman archaeological sites in Sicily. His sketches informed further exploration of the shapes in both collages and

paintings. *Points of Reference Series, #76* employs his familiar primary color juxtapositions yet with a dynamic deep blue diamond center that projects forth like an all-knowing eye. It reminds one of stained glass, filled with light and deep resonance.

On the broad studio tables, a series of collages in process are carefully laid out. Although Gruhler is open to experimentation, he clearly goes about introducing new possibilities in a careful fashion. The works begin as marker drawings in a notebook and evolve through the juxtaposition of carefully cut paper shapes that are layered in a 3-D fashion which gives them a living, pulsing energy. The shadows projected by the strong horizontal line and diamonds of *Points of Reference, #71* are an integral part of the piece. The viewer's eye is drawn to seeking the play between colors and shapes.

Gruhler talks of attempting to achieve in color and form what poets do with the search for the right word, the essence of meaning and refining of emotion. His hope is that "the viewer will be moved to a meditative space." His paintings travel full circle from the moving poetic inspirations to their evocations in pure, vibrating color, thereby offering an existential encounter, unique to each viewer.

B. Amore is an internationally exhibiting artist and writer. Her reviews appear in *Art New England*, *Sculpture magazine*, *Times Argus/Rutland Herald*, and *VIA*, among others.

Above, from left: *Points of Reference Series #71, 2022*, oil on canvas, 10 x 10". *Points of Reference Series #76, 2022*, oil on canvas, 30 x 30". Courtesy of the artist.

Opposite, top: Paul Gruhler in his Craftsbury, VT, studio in 2022. Photo: Paul Rogers.

Opposite, below: *Chelsea Series #4, 1978*, acrylic on canvas, 50 x 90". Courtesy of the artist.

In addition to his dedicated painting practice, Gruhler has supported other artists as an invited curator: *Vermont Collections*, celebrating the Helen Day Art Center's (now The Current) 20th anniversary, as well as *The Art of Vermont: The State Collections*, a traveling exhibit of the Vermont State House permanent collection. *Engage*, a show of Vermont artists with disabilities, has traveled throughout the state. His most recent exhibit was *Harmonics: 60 Years of Life in Art*, at the Highland Art Center in Greensboro. Gruhler's show for the Vermont Supreme Court Gallery, runs through July 5, 2022. A catalogue, *Paul Gruhler, Harmonics: 60 Years of Life in Art*, accompanies the exhibit.

Paul Gruhler
paulgruhler.com