

FRANK BOWLING

Emily Gray, 'Abstract art in Mechanical Hall' The Review,
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From Color & Form to Expression & Response: Abstract Art at the University of Delaware, Installation view, Photo Courtesy of the gallery.

In 2004, the Paul R. Jones Collection had a metamorphic effect on historic Mechanical Hall. With the help of a \$4.6 million budget, Mechanical Hall became a gallery committed to showcasing African American art.

14 years later, the gallery has expanded beyond the scope of the Paul R. Jones Collection. *From Color & Form to Expression & Response: Abstract Art at the University of Delaware* exemplifies this, exhibiting Frank Bowling, Floyd Coleman, Earl Hooks, Howardena Pindell and Jack Whitten alongside Lee Krasner and Sol LeWitt.

"Abstract art is the combination of the artist's intent and the viewer's reaction," Amanda T. Zehnder, the head curator of *From Color & Form to Expression & Response*, says.

Until Dec. 7, university students will have the unique opportunity to bring their own perspective and meaning to the works of artists such as Bowling, Coleman, Hooks, Pindell, Whitten, Krasner and LeWitt.

At the exhibition's reception this past Thursday, Zehnder explained to a crowd of university students, artists and Newark residents her intent to "help people find ways to understand [the art] they're seeing."

The exhibition is organized into distinct genres of abstraction, from works in mixed media to color field paintings. One room holds the works Zehnder describes as "amorphous, bio-morphic, messy," epitomized by the chaotic use of color in Frank Bowling's untitled paintings. Another room, according to Zehnder, exhibits "clean, pure abstraction."

By separating the exhibition in this way, Zehnder hopes to ease viewers into an appreciation of abstraction and make students less intimidated by abstract art.

While this exhibition design intended to aid viewer comprehension, Eric Tommer, a graduate student in the Department of Art and Design, had some reservations.

"It's an interesting show. I wonder if there were other ways to divide up space instead of compartmentalizing," Tommer says. "But, the collection itself had a lot of interesting work, and I liked hearing the artists and curator give their input."

Those who attended Thursday's reception had the privilege of listening to artists' perspectives. The exhibition features the work of two artists within the university community.

Dennis Beach received his Master of Fine Arts from the

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university in 2005. Now, his sculpture, entitled “*Curl #3*” is featured prominently in the center of Mechanical Hall. Beach says he is attracted to a vibrant color palette, which brings the audience in and “inspires movement” around the piece. This medium facilitates a connection between art and viewer, striking at the heart of the exhibition’s intention.

Robert Straight, a professor emeritus in the Department of Art and Design, also contributed two pieces to the exhibition: “*P-490*” and “*P-489*.” These works attempt to show the viewer “the other side of a painting” and feature empty space and geometric patterns that evoke images of crabapple trees and a childhood toy, respectively.

“I don’t expect any kind of reaction [from the viewer], ” Straight says. “I make the piece and hopefully someone will connect with it, but I know everyone won’t. The viewer has certain responsibilities, if you see something you’re interested in but don’t know what it is, you can do some research.”

With subject matter and artistic intent less evident, Zehnder hopes all will take the opportunity to view this exhibition and “feel welcome to embrace what they’re experiencing.”