
Journal Santa Fe

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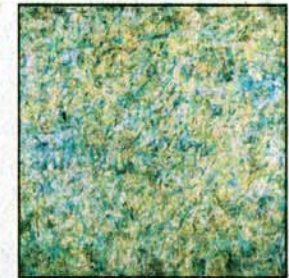
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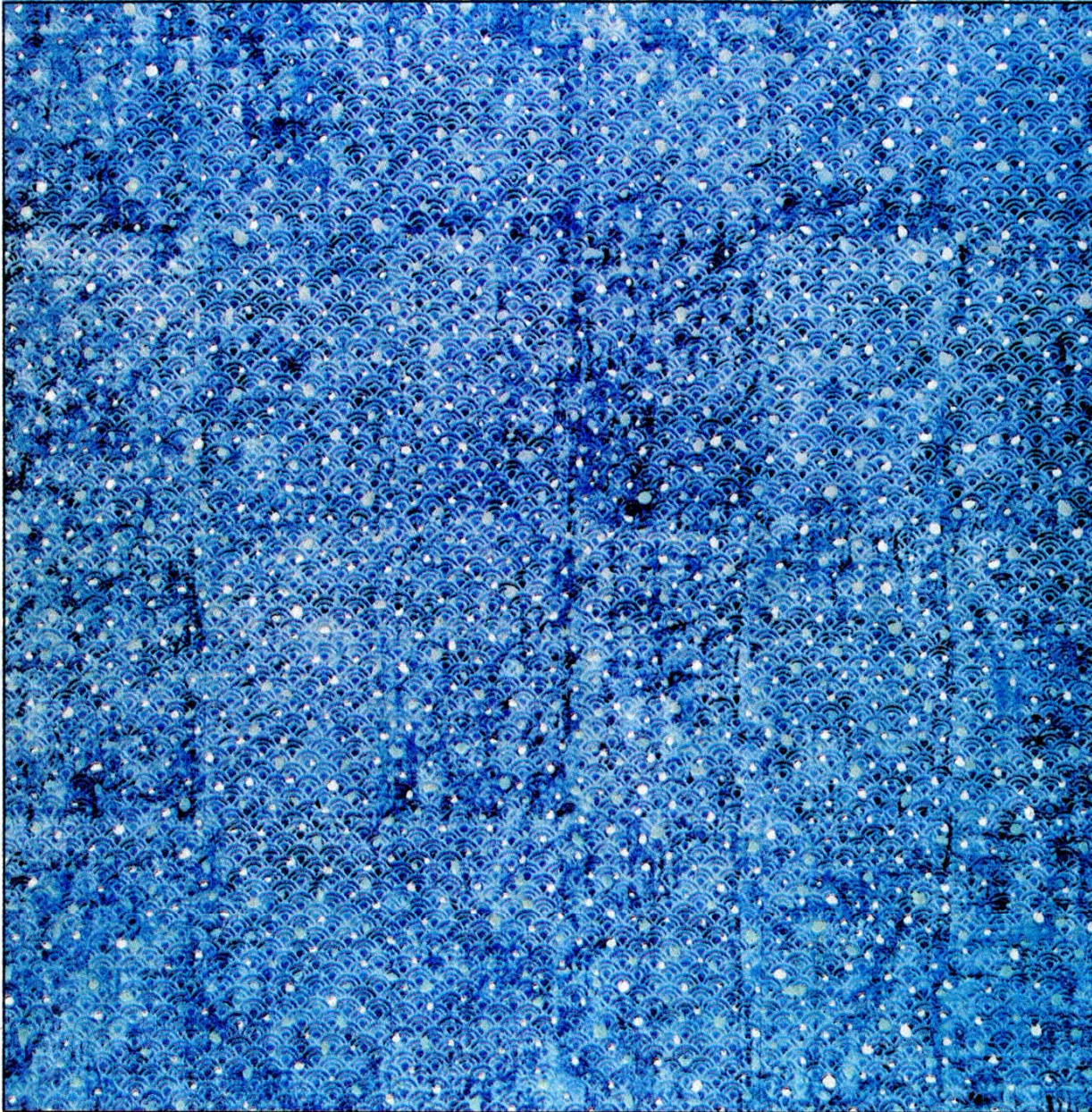
GALLERY GUIDE

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Brad Ellis' abstracts use underlying patterns in quest to depict the birth of an idea



COURTESY LEWALLEN CONTEMPORARY

ABOVE: "Moroccan Night" is a 2009 encaustic and collage on canvas by Brad Ellis. **TOP RIGHT:** "Bamboo Boogie Woogie" is a 2009 encaustic and collage on canvas by Brad Ellis.

BY KATE MCGRAW
For the Journal

Brad Ellis could draw better than anyone in his Tulsa, Okla., elementary school by the time he was in the third grade. By the time he was in college, he was drawing illustrations and political cartoons for the newspaper. He assumed as he had at 8 that he had a drawing career ahead of him. Still, he persevered in art classes — it couldn't hurt — at the University of Tulsa, a small liberal arts school with a good reputation.

Good thing he did.

"I ran into a professor who really encouraged the abstract process," Ellis, now 50, told the **Journal**. "He encouraged the abstract way of looking at art. And the light just came on for me. It's just been my passion ever since."

Ellis' latest batch of abstract paintings opens in a one-man show today at LewAllen Contemporary on West Palace Avenue.

First solo

"It's my first solo show in Santa Fe and my first solo at LewAllen," Ellis said. "I'm really excited. They've been such a good gallery to work with that I'm very gratified that they've given me a solo show. I'm very pleased with the work I'm bringing, too."

Named "Cool Artist of the Year" in 2008 by Brilliant Magazine, Ellis agreed that at midlife he's coming into his own. "I feel like in the last three years I've really started to hit my stride," he said.

His latest work generally starts with paper collage and then encaustic, a process that he admitted can be dangerous — "Even in winter I have all the studio windows open and the fans going" — but that he loves. "One reason I

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If you go

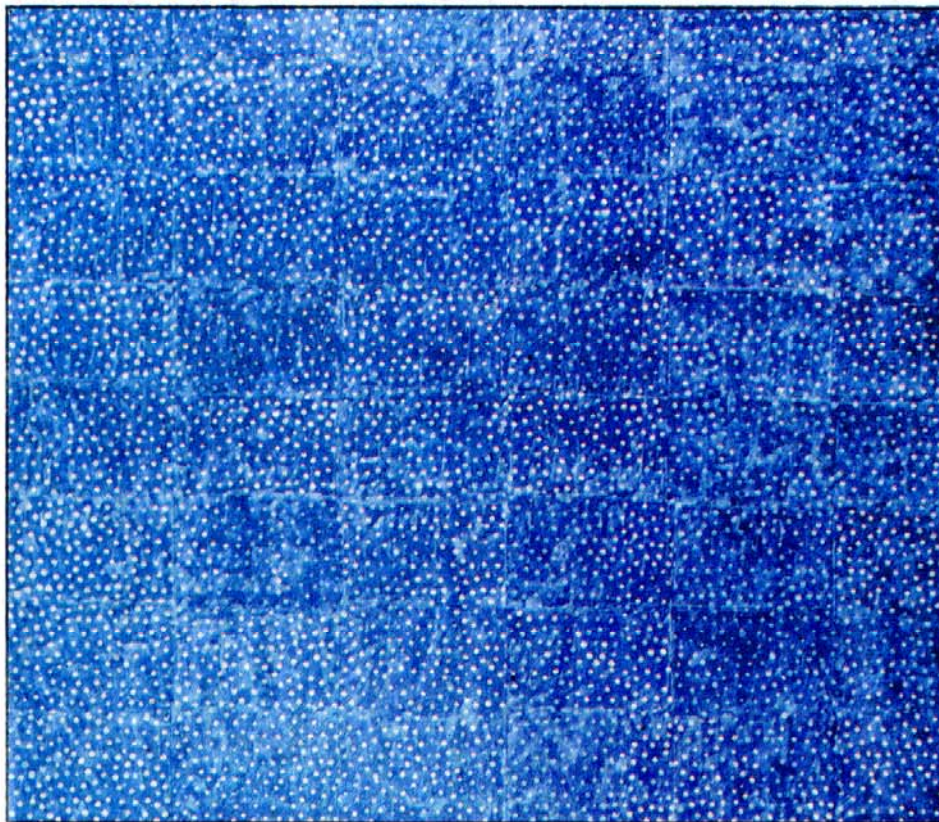
WHAT: "Pattern, Rhythm & Process," solo show by Brad Ellis

WHEN: Today through April 26; reception 5:30-7:30 p.m. today

WHERE: LewAllen Contemporary, 129 West Palace Ave.

CONTACT: (505) 988-8997

Abstracts Aim To Capture Emergence of Ideas



"Pearl Drops 09-01" is a 2009 encaustic and collage on canvas by Brad Ellis.

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love it so much is that there's no other paint that looks like it," he said.

"Several years ago, I began using encaustic paint and that opened up for me a whole new way of thinking about the act of making pictures," he said. "The working process involved with encaustic is a labor-intensive endeavor but one that can render exciting results. The paint is heated into a liquid state, applied to the surface and then fused with a heat source for proper bonding. The paint can be mixed and applied in a very transparent or opaque manner, resulting in a glasslike smoothness or a rough, heavily textured surface. As well, encaustic may also be combined with oil paint and collage materials. There are so many different possibilities with this medium that each new painting is a fascinating experience of discovery."

He works with encaustic and collage and oil paint to create his layered abstracts, some of them with what looks like a running commentary in the ground. "I lay down

a collage-type ground," he said. "It's just a kind of back-and-forth thing."

Paint for paint's sake

"I've always subscribed to the theory of 'paint for paint's sake' by celebrating the physical qualities of the medium," Ellis said. His great goal is to represent the patterns, rhythms and processes of thought and communication. In some works, a harmonious composition of horizontal lines gains mystery from glimpses of collage text beneath his calligraphic brushstrokes. Horizontal lines represent to Ellis "thought process — how we receive and channel information."

His paintings, he said, are "an attempt to capture that moment before thoughts become written or spoken ... that period when ideas are still formulating and gaining momentum."

Each of the new works includes paper collage elements that provide an underlying pattern for each painting. Ellis then paints over the collaged surface, using the

ancient encaustic medium, along with acrylic and oil paints. The gestural marks represent the rhythm portion of the work. The process element is added by the fusing, burning, melting and re-application of the wax-based encaustic.

'Something beautiful'

The Dallas-based Ellis earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Tulsa and did graduate work at the University of Oklahoma and special encaustic studies at Southern Methodist University. His work is shown in several galleries, including LewAllen Contemporary, and hangs in many corporate and private collections, including AT&T, Arthur Anderson, Southwestern Bell, Southwest Airlines, Sabre, GTE, Ernst & Young, EDS, Charles Schwab, Motorola, Neiman Marcus and Brierly & Partners.

"I just love the action and process of creating," the artist said. "Whether it's painting or gardening or anything, I just love making something beautiful."