

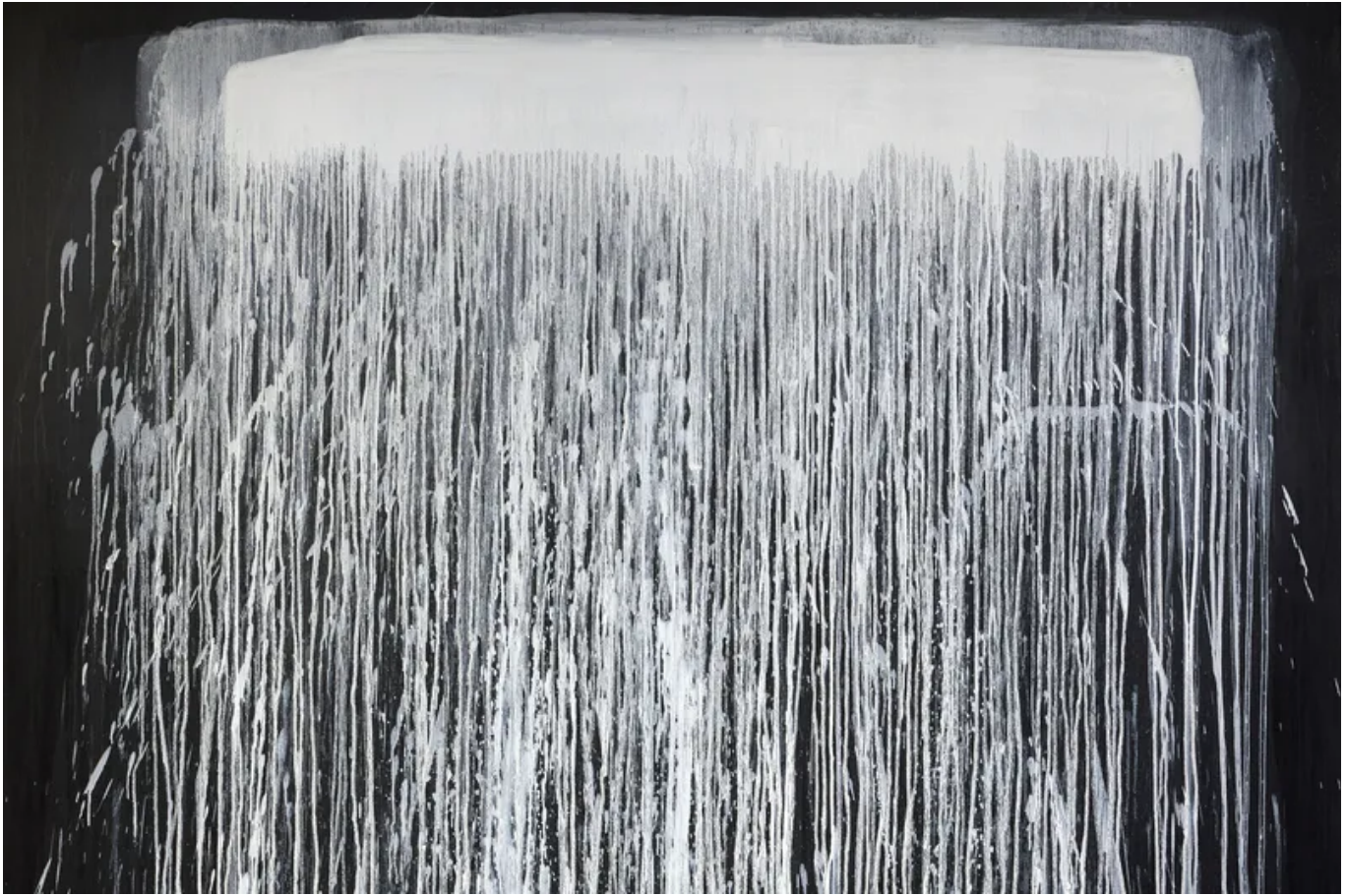


ARTS & CULTURE



Gravity, nature, and paint: See Pat Steir's revolutionary works

Steir would cut school to see the art at PMA. Her work returns to Philly this spring with a Locks Gallery show.



"Paris Waterfall," Pat Steir, 1990. Oil on canvas.

Courtesy of the Locks Gallery

by Rita Giordano

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In the 1980s, after years of painting and printmaking, the artist Pat Steir changed course, and changed American art forever.

Rather than painting in controlled brushstrokes, she began dripping, pouring, and splashing paint on canvases. Gravity and nature, and even the paint itself, would create art with her and, in some ways, almost magically on their own. Yet it remained personal, often lyrical, inviting the viewer to create their own connection with what they see.

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These paintings were influenced by her interest in Chinese painting and Eastern philosophy. But also important to her artistic development were her creative friendships with abstract expressionist Agnes Martin, who told her to create from her heart; and avant-garde composer John Cage, who encouraged her to find beauty in the elements of chance and surprise.

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Regarded as among America's most influential contemporary artists, Steir lives in New York City and has had her paintings exhibited in galleries all over the world. Her art is in the collections of major museums including the Philadelphia Museum of Art. She was also commissioned by the Barnes Foundation.

Born in Newark in 1938, Steir was discouraged from making art by her father, who would have liked to be an artist but had too many children to support, she said in an interview for the Smithsonian Institution.

The family lived in a number of towns, moving to South Jersey by the time Steir was a teen.

“I would leave school, or never arrive, and go to [the Philadelphia Museum of Art],” she said in the interview. “I did it so often, sitting on the floor, spreading my books out on the floor, looking at the artwork, eating apples, that after a while the guards didn't even chase me away. They just said, ‘There's that kid again.’ ”

She ended up attending Pratt Institute in Brooklyn (which gave her an honorary doctorate decades later), working many jobs, and becoming an artist despite all the barriers.

As art critic Carter Ratcliff observes in his essay *Pat Steir: Paradox and Freedom* written for the Locks Gallery exhibit, the artist’s work embraces both control and chaos.

“By uniting opposites,” Ratcliff writes, “Steir gives us a sense of the fullness — the interconnected oneness — of all that is.”

“Pat Steir: Snow and Waterfall” runs from March 31 to May 13 at Locks Gallery, 600 S. Washington Square, Phila., (215) 629-1000 or <https://www.locksgallery.com/>

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