

# ARTFORUM

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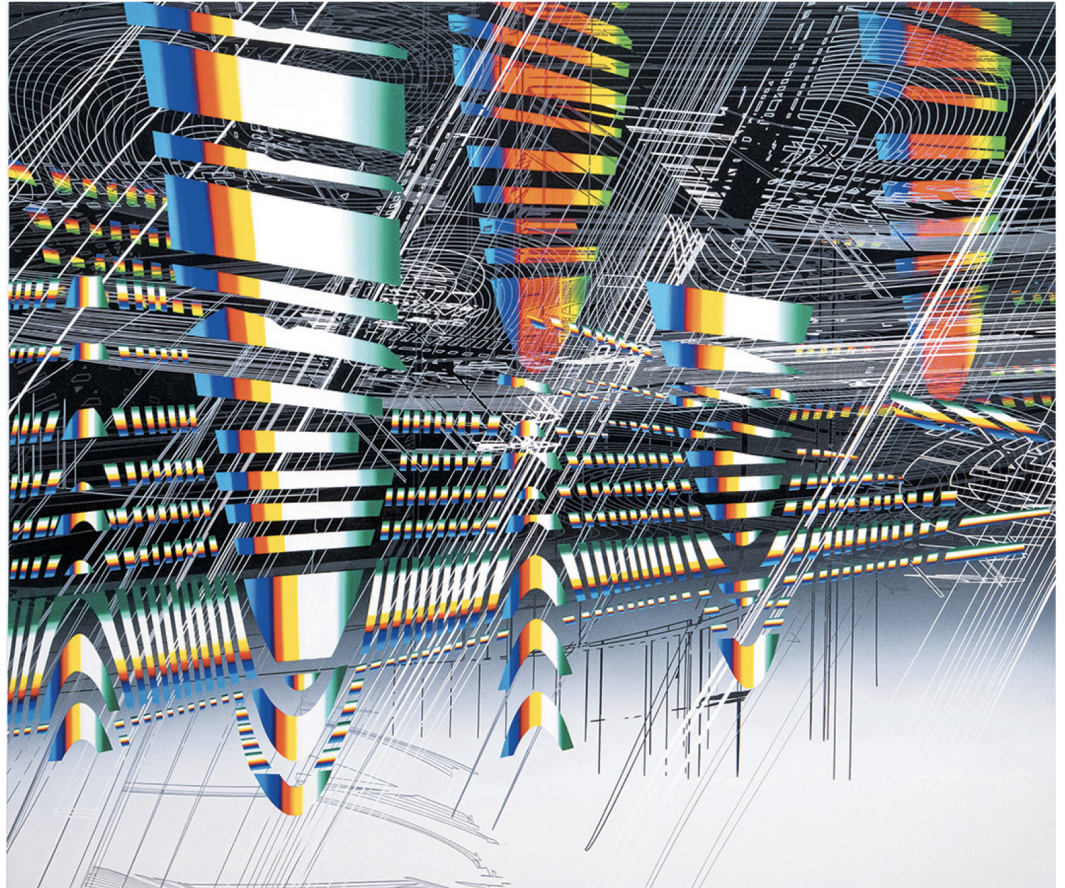
Annabel Osberg on Linda Besemer - Artforum International



list view

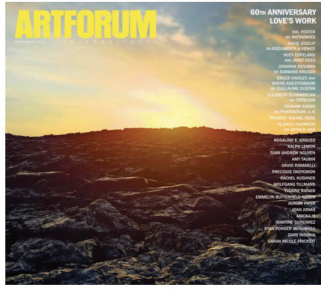


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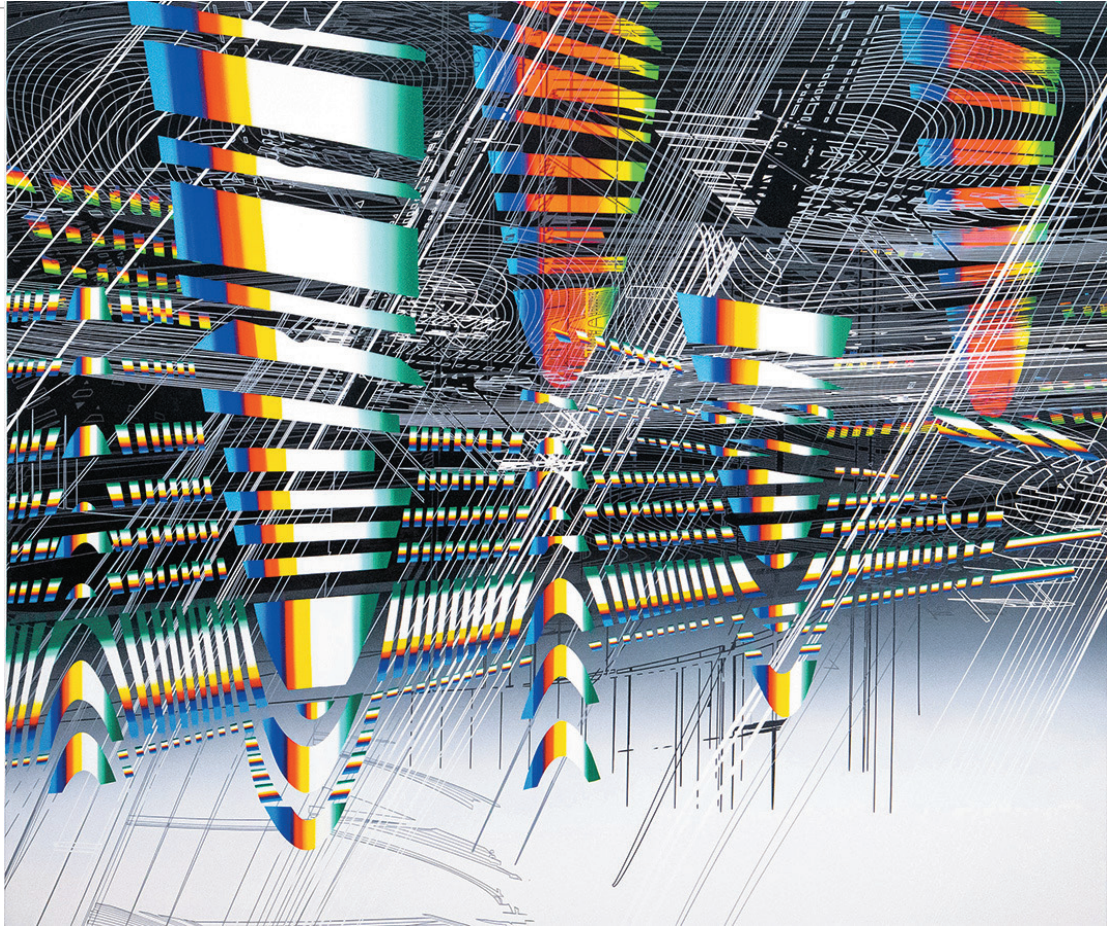


Linda Besemer, *Kablooey*, 2021, acrylic on canvas, 74 × 86".

list view



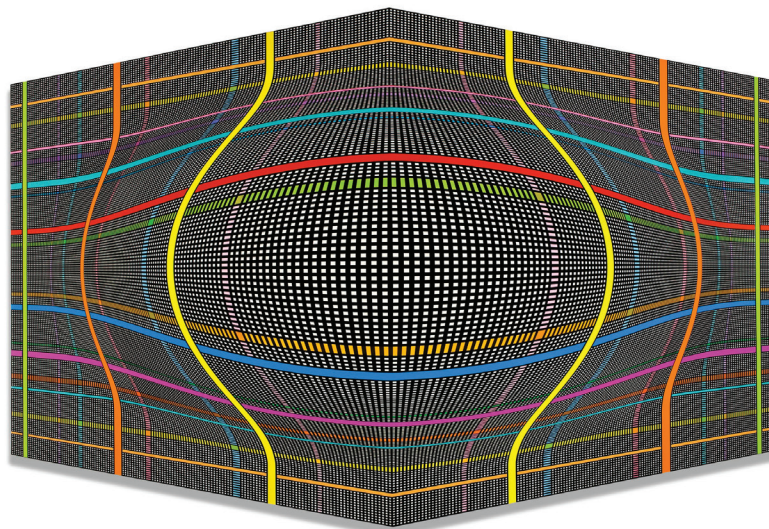
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Linda Besemer, *Kablooey*, 2021, acrylic on canvas, 74 × 86".

## Linda Besemer

CAROLYN CAMPAGNA KLEEFELD CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM

Abstract Painter Linda Besemer's monumental lozenge-shaped panel *Big Corner Bulge*, 2008, ensnares the eye from yards away with its precisely delineated mesh web, culminating in a central convexity appearing physically protuberant, as though enlarged by some invisible lens. Yielding varying effects depending on one's distance and angle, the work performs its optical magic even for those standing just inches away from its flat surface. When the painting is viewed head on, its titular intumescence shudders, momentarily receding only to balloon once again, inducing mirages of chromatic waves. Indeed, this bizarre bulbousness refused to be ignored, tamed, or idly grasped.



Linda Besemer, *Big Corner Bulge*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 84 × 120".

A similarly defiant indeterminacy permeated the other twenty-two constituents of Besemer's three-decade survey, whose amalgamated title, *StrokeFoldRollSheetSlabGlitch*, denoted the fluidity with which the artist, who identifies as nonbinary and uses the pronouns she/they, switches back and forth among a unique array of sculptural painting techniques.



Having previously painted figurative imagery that hinted at her sadness at being a repressed lesbian, Besemer transitioned to abstraction in the 1980's, finding in it "a place, like no other place in culture, where I could overcome some of the inequities of language and subjectivity." Nevertheless, the painter became increasingly troubled by the pervasiveness of gender-coded narratives ascribed to abstract modalities. Thus, in 1993, Besemer ran a giant paint-loaded brush across a sheet of glass, allowed the material to dry, then peeled off the skin and hung it up as "Detachable Stroke #1." this was the piece from which curator Kristina Newhouse traced the experiment lineage of Besemer's mature oeuvre. Metaphorically collapsing traditional binaries of figure/ground, surface/stretcher, feminine/masculine, that single swish of grayish acrylic became a self-contained work with no need for complement or support. Nearly thirty years later, it still looked like a wet, irreverent mark freshly enacted on a pristine white wall. The piece is disorienting, making one feel as though

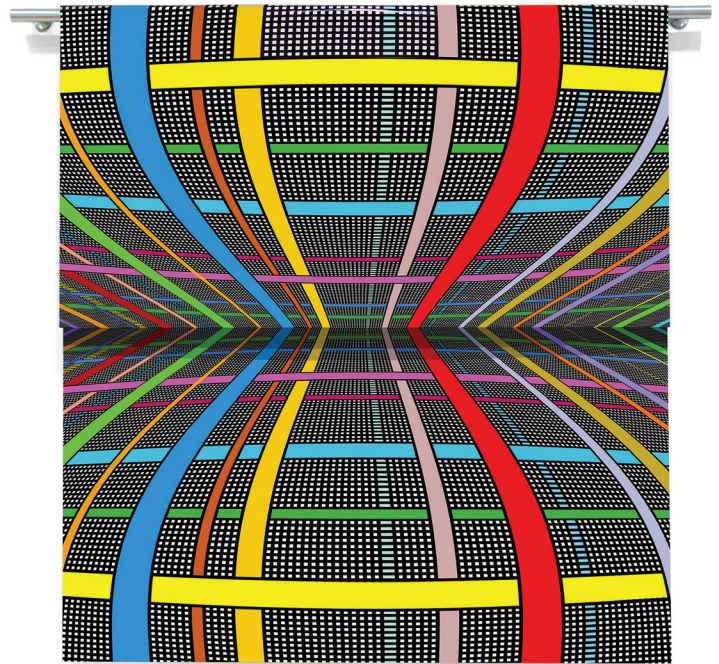
Linda Besemer, *Detachable Stroke #1*, 1993, acrylic paint, 36 × 12".

one has stepped inside a painting that is in the process of being either created or dismantled.

From this point Besemer concocted more ways to subvert the conventions of painting while destabilizing the viewer's perceptons, queering cananos of geometric abstraction as well as customary frameworks for understanding and organizing spatiality. Some works take the form of layered sanded slabs of pure paint; others are pliable, double-sided laminae of acrylic draped over bars, rolled up, or affixed to aluminum cleats. The eccentric topographies resulting from these methods suggest various things, such as biomorphic forms and geographical places—often all at once. Echoing wave interactions on water, the rippling divoted surface of *Red-Purple Slab*, 2009, coalesces into a psychedelic mandala with a medial virid eye.

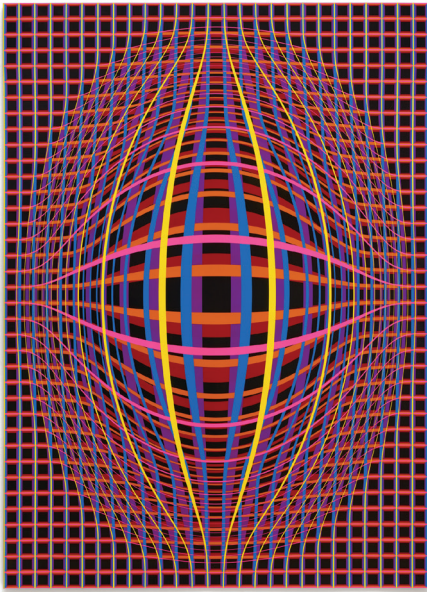


Linda Besemer, *Red-Purple Slab*, 2009, sculpted acrylic paint, 36 × 9".

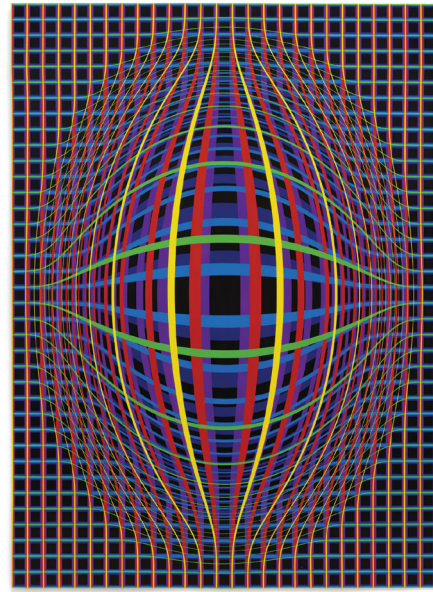


Linda Besemer, *Double Bulge #3*, 2013, acrylic paint over aluminum rod, 36 × 9".

The folded-over sheets of paint comprising pieces including *Double Bulge Fold #3*, 2013, have fittingly been compared to towels and blankets; but their planar gridirons also resemble converging maps, or conveyor belts ready to suck you in. Symbolizing ruptures in Cartesian grids the hernial focal points of a pair of 2006 paintings—*Red Spatial Bulge Sheet* and *Blue Spatial Bulge Sheet*—collaterally recall slash wounds, reptilian slit pupils, and Judy Chicago's flora labia.



Linda Besemer, *Red Spatial Bulge*, 2009,  
acrylic paint on aluminum cleat, 60" × 44".



Linda Besemer, *Blue Spatial Bulge*, 2009,  
acrylic paint on aluminum cleat, 60" × 44".

Inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's theories of nonhierarchical "rhizomatic" spaces, Besemer gradually left behind compositional centrality in favor of repetitive networks of sinusoidal ribbons and swells implying endless extensions beyond arbitrary pictorial boundaries. This all-over exuberance reached a fever pitch in 2013 when the artist embarked on their ongoing "Glitch" series, based on corrupted 3D-modeling files in Maya, the computer program they used to generate templates for previous bodies of work. In reproduction, paintings such as *Kablooey*, 2021, and *D+G Space*, 2019, could easily be mistaken for digital art, but in the flesh they are experiential, filling one's field of vision. They are also unabashedly haptic, overlaid with raised textures and brushstrokes. The works evoke sensations of hurtling through riotous cyberspaces where rainbow shields and undulating scirms of prismatic striations merge with scrambled architectures of zebrine black and white.

By reveling in the optical splendor of computer errors, Besemer suggests possibilities beyond the strictures of digital realms, where worlds are contrived from binary codes and bound by sterile principles at odds with lived experience. The jumbled hallucinogenic dazzle of the artist's paintings jars us into a heightened awareness of our own embodied existence, insisting that reality is far more intricate and dynamic than the systems we impose upon it in the name of order.

— *Annabel Osberg*