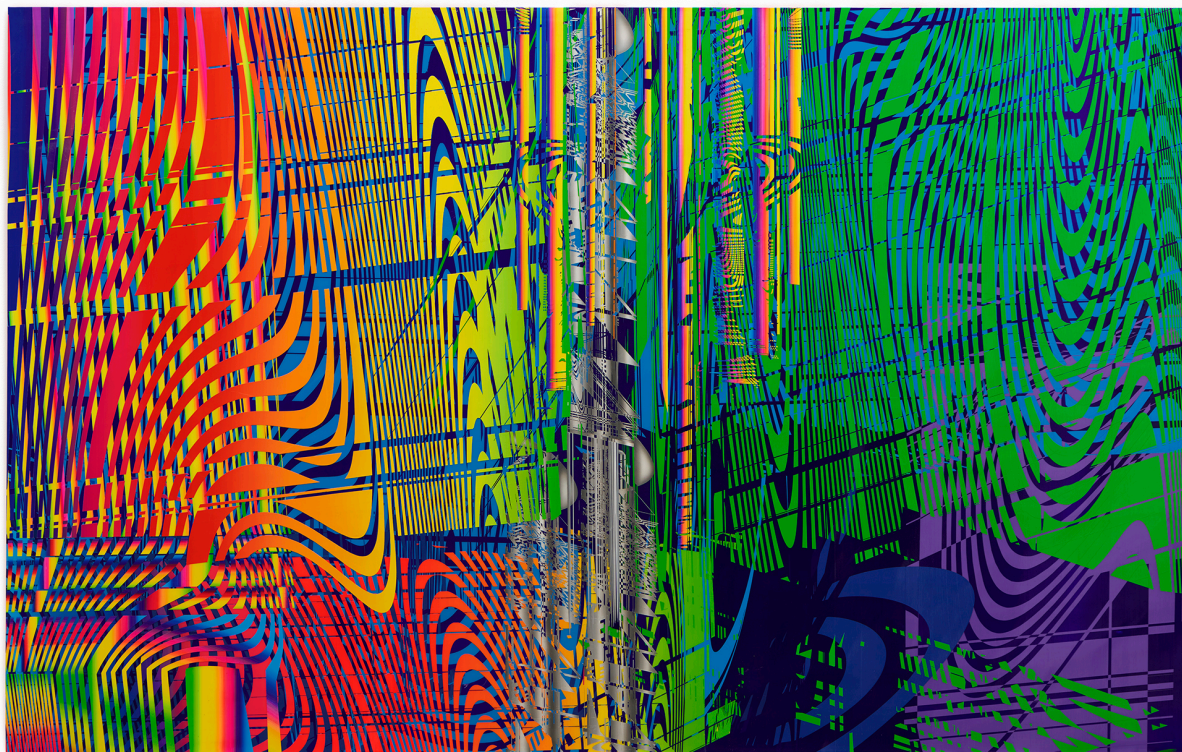


## Review: Five pandemic-postponed art shows worth seeing right now



Linda Besemer, "Tony's Painting," 2013, acrylic (Tatiana Mata)

BY CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT | ART CRITIC

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COVID-19 is not over, despite the political posturing of anti-government commentators and the absurd claims of some cosseted celebrities. Risk in Los Angeles County is currently low, according to the CDC's [COVID Data Tracker](#), but hundreds were hospitalized in the last week. Things are definitely in flux, a fact represented by the jumble of requirements that art spaces have in place for visiting. One museum will require advance reservations and proof of vaccination, another will wave a drop-in through the front door, no questions asked and mask optional. It's confusing.

Exhibitions postponed over the last few years are opening up in abundance, however, making for a suddenly crowded field. Recently, I donned my N95 respirator and caught up with several of them around town. Here are five that I saw:

## All paint, no canvas

In 1993, painter Linda Besemer made a brushstroke that sent her on a path she has explored in her work for nearly three decades. At the Carolyn Campagna Kleefeld Contemporary Art Museum at Cal State Long Beach, 23 paintings, plus an informative selection of studies and sketches, offer a concise and absorbing survey of the Los Angeles-based artist's career.

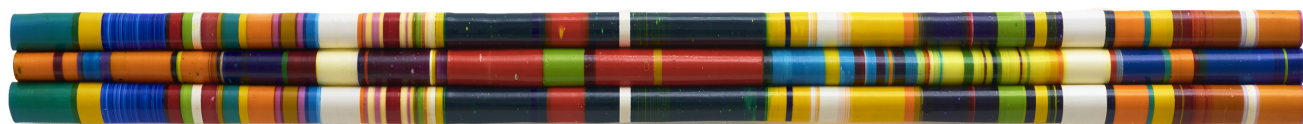
What made that 1993 brushstroke unusual is hinted at in the title of the work, which opens the show. "Detachable Stroke #1" is all paint, no canvas. No support undergirds Besemer's brushstroke, 3 feet tall and 10 inches wide. Instead, a detached slather of acrylic paint hangs directly on the wall.



Linda Besemer, "Detachable Stroke #1, Acrylic Paint, 1993

the slather looks a bit like it escaped from Roy Lichtenstein's famous 1965 paintings of Abstract Expressionist brushstrokes, which he derived from a comic book illustration. But hers is not a picture. It's a three-dimensional object — a Pop Art sign materialized, as it were. Besemer's paint mark appears to be black, white and gray, but look closely and a full color spectrum is embedded within it.

This is painting as paint, nothing more, which opened up a surprisingly complex set of considerations. The show, organized by former Kleefeld curator Kristina Newhouse, includes geometric and organic patterns of vivid color in loose sheets of paint that drape over rods, fold back on themselves, get carved up, slide off the wall and onto the floor and more. Optical illusions abound, further confounding the physical materiality of paint.



Linda Besemer, *Sophie's Neuroses*, Acrylic paint wrapped around rods, 6 x 48 inches, 1997

Besemer often composes her visually intense pictures with computer programs, sometimes inserting random digital noise into Utopian expectations for sleek mathematical perfection. (One painting is titled “Sophie’s Neurosis,” wittily putting binary choice in its place.) The abstract visual clatter of a work like “Tony’s Painting,” all linear swoops and layered curls like a flat-screen TV on the fritz, jams the circuits. It caps her work’s larger point: Identity has been a productive subject for art since the 1990s, but asserting identity is not an answer. Instead, these confounding paintings insist, identity is a question.