

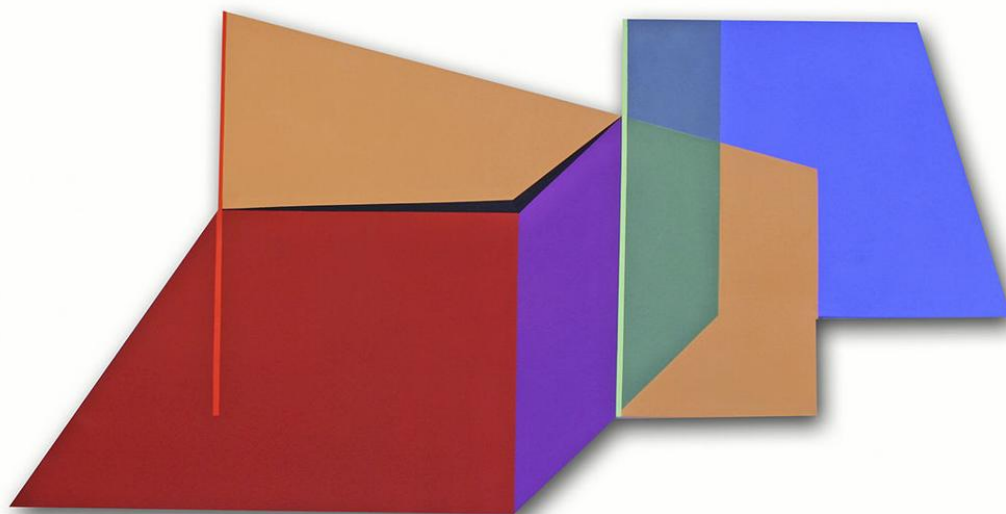
SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN

ART

Find your niche: "Alcoves 20/20"

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Mokha Laget, *Borderline #2* (2018), acrylic and clay paint on shaped canvas

When the New Mexico Museum of Art opened to the public as the Art Gallery of the Museum of New Mexico on Nov. 24, 1917, its mission was to provide the contemporary artists of the day with a venue for showing their work. Regional artists could put their names on a list and their

work would be exhibited in one of several ground-floor niche galleries, or alcoves. The open-door policy persisted for decades until curated shows took over completely in the 1950s. *Alcoves 20/20*, which opens on Friday, Aug. 9, pays homage to the museum's original vision by showcasing the work of 30 New Mexico-based artists. (The artists' work appears in six rotations featuring five artists at a time, spanning a year in total.)

"I really think that this continues the museum's engagement with living artists," said Merry Scully, the museum's head of curatorial affairs and curator of contemporary art. "People forget that we were founded as a contemporary museum."

Alcoves 20/20 isn't the first time the museum has revived its alcove shows. They were mounted sporadically in the decades following the 1950s. But a revival in 2012 was the first in 20 years. The idea was brought back again in 2016 as a lead-up to the museum's 2017 centennial. In its 21st-century revivals, the museum has showcased the work of 80 regional artists. "For each of the artists, it's a small one-person show that's part of a group show, that's part of a really long group show," Scully said.

The first rotation of *Alcoves 20/20*, which runs through Oct. 13, includes work by sculptor Stuart Arends, painters Mokha Laget and Diane Marsh, sculptor/painter Dan Namingha, and mixed-media artist Emi Ozawa.

Scully's purview is broad. There is no set theme for the exhibition, but there are correspondences between the work of all five artists this year in their use of a strong, graphic sense of color and the Minimalist quality to their work. Throughout the rotations, Scully includes new and recent work by artists at various stages in their careers. Approximately five works by each artist are included.

"It needs to be good work, not just the kind of work I'm partial to," she said. "I want to make sure that there's a variety of media, and I like to be able to show artists who aren't just from the immediate vicinity. Because of the rapid turnaround, a lot of times I look for artists that have a body of work in progress or already done. We can consider some of them emerging, but they still have to have a substantial body of work and a serious practice."

In advance of the exhibition, Scully travels to the artists' studios and visits gallery exhibits with an eye not just for who to include in alcove shows but for other exhibits, as well. Scully hasn't completed the schedule for the remaining Alcoves shows. "I have the first two rotations set," she said. "I have a group of artists outside of Santa Fe and Albuquerque, and I'm going to hit the road to go visit them so that I can get the rest of the shows curated."

The second rotation will include work by sculptor and installation artist Jen Pack, painter Daniel McCoy Jr., and multimedia artists Marietta Patricia Leis, Heather McGill, and Sarah Stolar. It opens on Oct. 19.

Mokha Laget

Shaped canvases have a history dating back to the 1930s, with the work of artist Abraham Joel Tobias. Shaped canvases, in which the contours of a typical rectangular canvas are altered, sometimes considerably, are a direct challenge to traditional painting and aim to bridge a gap between painting and sculpture. Few artists are as adept in exploring the form as Mokha Laget, who was born in Algeria and now resides in Santa Fe. She is a painter of color field abstractions. Using geometry, Laget juxtaposes solid colors that intersect and jump from the surface of a composition and into the space around it. Where the planes of color overlap, the tones change and take on the appearance of opaque glass. Laget is a former studio assistant to prominent Washington Color School painter Gene Davis. She shows several of her recent shaped canvases, including *Borderline #2* from 2018, parts of which seem to recede from the viewer while other parts jump out — giving it a quality akin to a three-dimensional object, though the entire composition exists on a two-dimensional plane.

▼ *Alcoves 20/20 #1*

▼ Reception 5:30 p.m. Friday, Aug. 9; through Oct. 13

▼ Conversation with the artists 5:30 p.m. Aug. 23

▼ New Mexico Museum of Art, 107 W. Palace Ave., 505-476-5072, nmartmuseum.org