

# Art Orbiter

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Interviews

## Tamar Zinn at Kathryn Markel Fine Arts

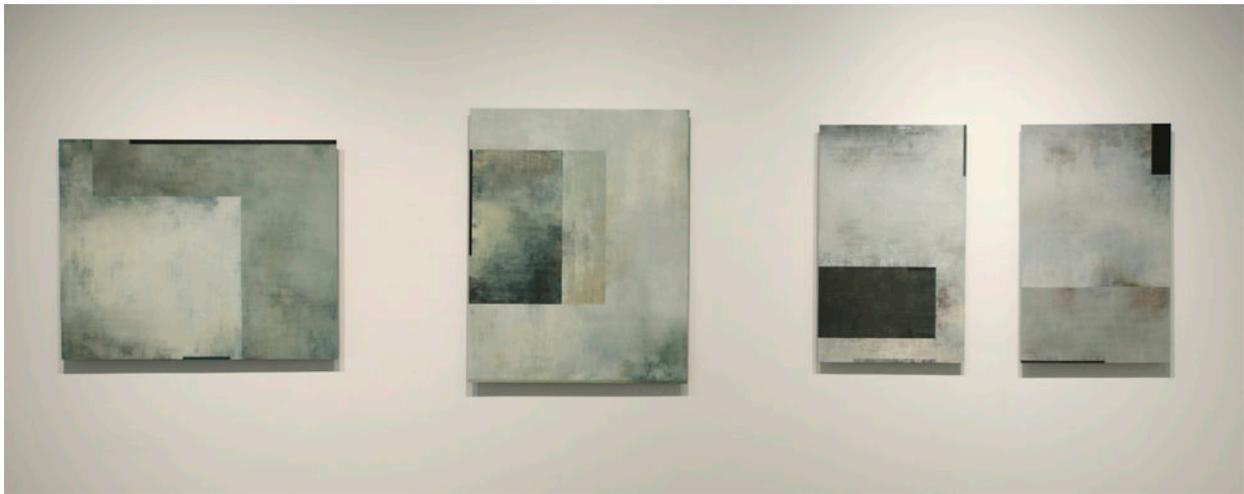
May 1, 2016 [No Comments](#)



### What about this exhibition is unique for you?

I feel as if I have arrived at a particularly satisfying place with this body of work. Most important is that it marks the weaving together of several elements that have been present in my work over the years. Before I turned to abstraction, the focus of my work for a very long time was invented landscape imagery. There were periodic forays into abstraction, but I kept returning to the landscape, which was where I felt centered. When I fully embraced abstraction about fifteen years ago, it was because I needed to take risks by entering into what for me was foreign turf. But those early abstractions often referenced light and in that way were linked to my previous work. The interest in luminosity gradually faded as I intensified my focus on structure and geometry. It was as if I could only understand how I wanted to work with structure by first eliminating overt associations with the natural world. With this current series, luminosity has re-entered the work in a way I find very exciting, and it is now juxtaposed with a pared down but rigorous geometry.

Additionally, in this work I also see many of the preoccupations that were present in my paintings very early on—the need for structure, the importance of information along the edges, playing with spatial ambiguity, and consistently incorporating removal into my process. So it is the integration of intention, process, and composition that makes this series very meaningful, in a way that wasn't accessible to me in previous bodies of work.



**Can you tell us how you name your work? In this exhibit, all of the work shares the same name and is numbered. Where did “At the still point” come from?**

Many years ago, I realized that if I tried to come up with a unique title for each piece I would never have enough time to paint! I also didn't want the titles to be a distraction from the experience of looking at the work.

Since I generally work in series, my search is for a word or short phrase that best reflects the focus of the series. The series title often comes to mind soon after the body of work has started to coalesce. In some instances, the title makes reference to another artist: Sonia Series – Sonia Delaunay; Loretta's View – Loretta Pettway; Broadway Series – Mondrian. In other bodies of work, the title reflects the importance of music and movement (Arabesque), or quiet (Fermata Lunga).

But for this current series, At the still point, the title came about through a different process and it is particularly rich with meaning. Although I had already completed 5 or 6 paintings, I was stumped in terms of a title. That led me to invite an artist friend for a studio visit, and after a lengthy conversation about my intentions and process, she suggested a few lines from T.S. Eliot's *Burnt Norton*. I knew immediately that the text mirrored my thoughts about these paintings. There are so many ways to unpack the meaning! The 'still point' is that moment when all is possible, when everything comes alive, when the painting finds its purpose. It is that moment when I am embracing both ambiguity and certainty, or neither. Going back to the text: 'At the still point, there the dance is.'

“At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,  
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.”  
T.S. Eliot, “Burnt Norton”



*At the still point 5*, 2015 oil on dibond, 26 x 16”

**Can you tell us how you go about constructing the paintings? What steps you normally take and how do you call it finished?**

In this body of work, intention and process became entwined. First, let me make clear that while a particular vocabulary has emerged for this series, my process is largely intuitive—I follow each painting wherever it leads me, with no preconceived endpoint, no preplanned composition. I arrived at an understanding of this work only after I had been at it for quite a while.

I paint on dibond, an aluminum composite. I apply several layers of primer to build up a weave-like surface, followed by additional layers of either black or white under-painting. I continue working the entire surface as an undefined field, adding thin layers of nearly random (but often saturated) colors until I sense the general direction of the palette—warm or cool, yellows or rose, blues or greens. The paint layers are brushed on, then often scraped and sanded to reveal glimpses of what is underneath.

The focus for quite some time is on the field, what I think of as atmosphere. At some point, when the surface is wet, I begin my search for the geometry of the painting by scraping off a thin rectangle along an edge, or establishing an extended vertical or horizontal across the field. But those initial attempts at finding the geometry can feel quite haphazard and often fail. It is also extremely important to me that the structure emerges through a process of removal—which involves taking risks as well as revealing what lies beneath the surface. Establishing those emphatic moments along the edges, the ones that read as black, can be particularly terrifying.

I keep going as long as the painting continues to irritate me; I often don't know what is off about it, only that it hasn't yet arrived. Both the geometry and field are modified repeatedly over many painting sessions, until the moment when, as if by magic, everything seems to have found its place. That magic is the moment of the 'still point'—for me, it embodies tension and complexity along with quiet, clarity along with uncertainty.



*At the still point 22, 2016 oil on dibond, 24 x 30"*

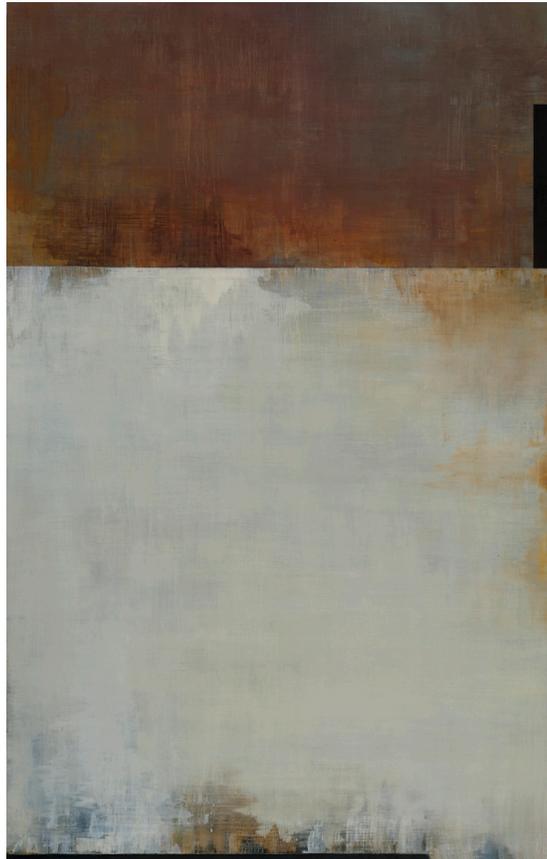
**How did you first come to show with Kathryn Markel Gallery?  
Can you tell me about your relationship with Kathryn as artist to dealer?**

Kathy Markel and I go back quite a ways. Perhaps five or six years after I graduated from college, in a burst of uncharacteristic audacity, I brought some watercolors up to her gallery on 57th Street. To my amazement, she took several pieces on consignment. Even more amazing, she started selling them! And since we have been working together for many decades, Kathy is deeply aware of the history of my work. She has been supportive through all the twists and turns as my work has evolved— and I think that pretty much says everything about the strength of this artist-dealer relationship.



## **Do you do studio work that you do not exhibit?**

Absolutely! I go through periods where I do extended explorations (both works on paper and paintings) that take me in directions that are initially engaging, but then after a while I run out of steam. So even though there are often good pieces that I continue to live with in the studio, I'm not able to develop those particular directions into coherent bodies of work. At other times, I have done paintings that feel successful, but not fully my work—they feel a bit alien to me. But even though I don't plan to exhibit this work, I keep it around because it will offer me clues down the road. Years later, I may see things emerge in new body of work that had its roots in the series I abandoned.



*At the still point 20*, 2016 oil on dibond, 36 x 23"

## **Is there anything you'd like to add?**

While I'm certain that I'm going to continue with this direction—that I have more to say—I can't predict where the work will take me. The last painting I finished before the show went up (*At the still point 23*) has some provocative moments in it that could hint at some changes...or not. Will the saturated colors in the underlayers become more visible? Will the interplay between the structure and the field shift away from the edges? Will the geometry become more complex? Will the scale of the paintings change? I'm eager to keep going and see what emerges.



*At the still point 23*, 2016 oil on dibond, 30 x 38"

**Tamar Zinn** on view at **Kathryn Markel Fine Arts** through May 7th, 2016

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