

PATTERN AND PAINTING BY JOHN GIBSON

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For 20 years I have been making paintings of balls. I don't work from observation; everything I paint is invented. The balls are wrapped with patterns I've found in mathematical textbooks, art museums, toy stores and tag sales. Choosing the right pattern is really important. It's crucial to the question of how the balls turn in space and to how you get from one ball to another. The patterns are the way the paintings move. Here are some examples of four of the designs I've found the most compelling and sustaining with some background information on each one.

Fig. I

Usually I work out patterns by collaging designs onto soccer and bowling balls. This is the way I created a design inspired by a series of Maori forms. (Fig 2) What attracted me to this design was its forward and backward rhythm, which seemed to reflect the swelling and contracting of the ball itself. What I also liked about the design is that it made the ball seem as if it was really flat and really round at the same time. If I paint them correctly, the stripes wrap around the form of the ball enhancing its volume, its roundness. Those same stripes can also be read as flat--like an exotic wallpaper--as if they were independent of the ball's form entirely. I'm always looking for this simultaneous rounding and flattening of form.

Unlike the Maori inspired design, the geodesic pattern (fig 3) is one that completes itself around the entire ball. I first saw this pattern in a mathematics textbook and recreated



Fig. 2

it on a toy soccer ball in the studio. I am constantly surprised by how few patterns can actually fit around a ball. The visual effect is very different from the Maori ball, the rhythm here is much more constant. Where the Maori is linear and flowing the geodesic is jumpy and electric. The former is legato, the latter staccato. The geodesic pattern is also different in that there is no negative space. Each part of the pattern is exactly equal to every other part, which allows the viewer to visually reassemble the triangles in different combinations. Sometimes I look at these balls and I see pentagons. Sometimes I see diamonds and sometimes I just see the triangles.

An important aspect of both of these designs is that they don't recall any familiar balls that I know of. They are in no way reminiscent of a soccer or baseball and therefore avoid those associations of scale and narrative. I'm not a storyteller. These paintings are about form.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Stripes are perhaps the most familiar and most “ball-like” design that I use. The important difference between the stripes and the previous two designs is that the striped pattern has a pole on either end of the sphere. These poles describe an imaginary axis that runs between them and these unseen lines, or forces, are an important feature of these striped paintings. In multiple ball arrangements (figs 4 and 5) the axes can be pointed in different directions making for a dynamic contrast within the painting. Another nice quality of the striped design is how much it changes in the reflection on the floor plane.



Fig. 5

Most recently I have returned to dots. There are a limited number of regular patterns of dots that can be wrapped around a sphere. In this respect they are similar to the geodesic pattern but there are important differences. The dots are not fastened to each other and appear to float in measured but flexible relationships. Sometimes they appear to lift away from the ball as if they were an independent constellation. For this reason, and because I have colored them differently, they pulse in and out of space.



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

Last year a woodworker made me a wonderful ball – a real one – about 36” high. You can see it in my studio in figure 1. I painted the geodesic pattern over the whole thing but afterwards felt oddly disappointed. After so many years of painting an illusion, what could have been disappointing about working with the “real thing”? For me, the wooden ball lacked the tensions between opposites that the paintings possessed. I missed being confused. I was also reminded of a painter’s fundamental impulse towards opposing forces of all kinds: not just round versus flat but object versus illusion, certainty versus something I can never really know. The best patterns have been the ones that make those issues explicit in the paintings and become, like the ball itself, familiar and mysterious at the same time.



Fig. 8

INDEX OF WORK

- Fig. 1 Studio shot, Northampton, 11/06
- Fig. 2 [Stephen #21](#) 18x12” 2002 Oil/Panel Private Collection
- Fig. 3 [Ronald #39](#) 22x21” 2002 Oil/Panel Private Collection
- Fig. 4 [Center](#) 48x53” 2006 watercolor/Paper Courtesy/artist
- Fig. 5 [Striped Pile](#) 65x64” 2006 Oil/Linen /Panel Private Collection
- Fig. 6 [Hancock](#) 45x52” 2006 watercolor/Paper Courtesy/Artist
- Fig. 7 [Eastern](#) 65x64” 2006 Oil/Linen/Panel Courtesy/artist
- Fig. 8 [Phillips](#) 52x46” 2006 Watercolor/Paper Courtesy/artist
- Fig. 9 [First Ball off Center](#) 32x31” 2006 Oil/Linen/Panel Courtesy/artist



Fig. 9

JOHN GIBSON

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Born Northampton, Massachusetts, 1958

EDUCATION

1980 B.F.A. Rhode Island School of Design

1982 M.F.A Yale University

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2006 Gerald Peters Gallery, New York (Watercolors)

2006 Gerald Peters Gallery, Santa Fe

2005 Miller - Block Gallery, Boston

2004 Hampshire College, Amherst MA

2004 Gerald Peters Gallery, New York

2003 Gerald Peters Gallery, Santa Fe

2002 Gerald Peters Gallery, New York

2001 Miller Block Gallery, Boston

2001 Hodges Taylor Gallery, Charlotte N.C.

2001 Wendy Evans Fine Art, New York

2000 Gerald Peters Gallery, Santa Fe

1999 "Painting the Improbable" FMCC Johnstown, N.Y.

1998 Wendy Evans Fine Art, New York

1997 Miller Block Gallery, Boston

1996 Fine Arts Center, University of Mass., Amherst

1996 Rosen Gallery, Paris France

1995 Perspective Fine Art, New York

1995 Gerald Peters Gallery, Santa Fe

1994 Miller Block Gallery, Boston

1994 Perspective Fine Art, New York

1990 Allan Stone Gallery, New York

1989 Marcus Gallery, Boston

1988 Allan Stone Gallery, New York

1987 Marcus Gallery, Boston

SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Museum at the Rhode Island School of Design

Ackland Museum Chapel Hill, NC

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton Mass.

CORPORATE COLLECTIONS

Fidelity Investments

Mass Mutual

Brown and Wood-NY

Hallmark Corp.

Sherman and Sterling, NY

Wellington Mgmt.

BankNorth