New Talent: Six Rising Painters Exploring Landscape & Abstraction

Mary Zeran
Artist Statement

My relationship with fabric began in childhood. My mother made all of my clothes, and I spent hours with her in fabric stores selecting materials for new outfits. Together, we chose patterns, and I watched as she transformed those choices into something tangible. Those moments extended beyond sewing—they instilled in me an understanding of material as a vessel for creativity, identity, and care.

After my mother's passing, I lost the ability to create my earlier collage work. That rupture led me toward a more immediate and intuitive approach; one I have been exploring through a series of paintings for the past fourteen years. While I once cut these works apart, I've come to recognize a strength within them that allows each piece to stand on its own. At their core, they reflect my enduring connection to fabric, process, and color.

A pivotal influence came during a visit to the Seattle Art Museum, where I encountered an exhibition of Japanese textiles and discovered Shibori. Rooted in the 17th–19th centuries and traditionally rendered in indigo and white, Shibori was developed by working-class communities as a way to elevate everyday cloth through intricate, labor-intensive processes. Derived from the Japanese verb shiboru—to wring, squeeze, or press—the technique involves manipulating fabric through folding, stitching, binding, or knotting before dyeing to produce complex patterns.

While I initially approached Shibori as a tribute to my mother, I found its structure too prescriptive. I became more interested in the behavior of paint when it remains fluid, responsive, and in motion. This shift marked a departure from controlled pattern-making toward a practice rooted in instability, variation, and emergence.

I paint on transparent polyester film using fluid acrylics, allowing color to slide, pool, and collide across uneven surfaces. While the process suggests immediacy, it is highly exacting. Working in collaboration with fluid pigment, even subtle variations in viscosity can significantly alter the outcome. Each painting is developed through multiple passes, building layers until the composition resolves with clarity and tension.

Color is central to the work. I engage a full spectrum, focusing on the interaction between hues and their capacity to generate atmosphere, tension, and emotional resonance. The paintings operate as fields of movement, where color carries both structure and feeling.

Moving beyond fabric as material, this work approaches fabric as concept—fluid, responsive, and constructed through accumulation. Rooted in process and guided by intuition, the paintings explore transformation, control, and release, inviting a sustained visual and emotional engagement.

Mary Zeran
CV

BIOGRAPHY:
1964 Born in Iowa City, IA
Lives and works in Cedar Rapids, IA

EDUCATION:
1992 Professional Development, The University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI
1991 M.F.A., The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA
1988 B.F.A., The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:
2026 Upcoming Solo Show, Gilded Pear Gallery, Cedar Rapids, IA
2024 Unmoored, Gilded Pear Gallery, Cedar Rapids, IA
2022 The Ancient Healing Properties of Clay, Paper, Plastic, and Wood, Gilded Pear Gallery, Cedar Rapids, IA
Mapping the Intangible, Iowa Ceramics Center, Cedar Rapids, IA, curator Karin Rutkin
2021 Dance Party, Gilded Pear Gallery, Cedar Rapids, IA
Beauty Seeker II, Project Art, University of Iowa Hospital, Iowa City, IA
Happy Zone, Art Center Burlington, Burlington, IA
2020 Mission Happiness, Gilded Pear Gallery, Cedar Rapids, IA
Mary Zeran: 10 Years, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Cedar Rapids, IA
2019 Keeping the Bubble Happy, Gilded Pear Gallery, Cedar Rapids, IA
2018 Loud and Proud, Gilded Pear Gallery, Cedar Rapids, IA
Beauty Seeker, Gilded Pear Pop Up Gallery, US Bank, Iowa City, IA 2017
A Rainbow Colored Dream, Gilded Pear Gallery, Cedar Rapids, IA
2017 Lumpy Swoosh, Higher Art Gallery, Traverse City, MI
2016 KACHOW!, Gilded Pear Gallery, Cedar Rapids, IA
2015 Full Throttle Color, Gilded Pear Gallery, Cedar Rapids, IA
2014 La Tierra de Mi Corazón, New Work by Mary Zeran, Gilded Pear Gallery, Cedar Rapids, IA
JUICY! Black Hawk College, Moline, IL
Living With Forces of Nature: All Things Beautiful, Center for Faith and Life, Luther College, Decorah, IA
2013 Mary Zeran: Made In Many Different Ways, Gilded Pear Gallery, Cedar Rapids, IA

TWO AND THREE PERSON EXHIBITIONS:
2024 BOLD: Sharon Burns Knutson, Kimberlee Rocca, Mary Zeran, Gilded Pear Gallery, Cedar Rapids, IA, three person show.
2014 Spaces We Inhabit: Sculptures and Paintings by Alicia Forestall-Boehm, Emily Rutledge and Mary Zeran, Hairpin Arts Center, Logan Square, Chicago, IL, three person exhibit

2014-11 Drips and Daubs: Painters Zeran and Tollefson Explore Nature, Art Guild of Burlington, Burlington, IA, Maquoketa Art Experience, Maquoketa, IA, Lowe Art Center, Marion, IA, Simpson College, Indianola, IA

2013 Three Person Exhibit, Art in the Airport, Quad City Airport, Rock Island, IL

GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

2026 Startup Art Fair, Los Angeles, CA juror Bridgette Mayer, Liz Garvey, February 27 - March 1, 2026

2025 Dreamscapes and Inner Worlds!, Cape Cod Museum of Art, Dennis, MA, juror Joe Diggs, April 11 – June 29, 2025

Beyond the Object: Women Working in Abstraction, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Cedar Rapids, IA curator Julia Jesse

Depth: Layers in Translation, Taylor Art Gallery - Principal Financial, Des Moines, IA, curator Lauren Tucci

2024 Center for Contemporary Arts Nation Exhibition, Center for Contemporary Arts, Abilene, TX, juror Adela Andea, Volume 7, Memory of the Existing and the Imaginary, Contemporary Art Chronicle, San Francisco, San Miguel De Allende, MEX, Barcelona, ES

Stronger Together, Women UNITED ART MOVEMENT, Online, Juror Mona Leach, Creative Director of Women UNITED ART MOVEMENT

TRAHC's 36th Annual Juried Exhibition, Texarkana Regional Arts & Humanities Council, Texarkana, TX, juror Trina Harlow, Director of Undergraduate Studies in Art Education at the University of North Texas College of Visual Art and Design

Converge!, Bridgette Mayer Gallery, Philadelphia, PA, curator Dr. Brittany Webb, the Evelyn and Will Kaplan Curator of Twentieth Century Art and the John Rhoden Collection at Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts

Pots and Prints, Nancy Fyfe Cardozier Gallery, The University of Texas Permian Basin, Odessa, TX, juror Alex Gregory, Curator of Art for the Amarillo Museum of Art (AMoA)

Strictly Abstract, O'Hanlon Center, Mill Valley, CA, curator Anthony Meier

Grinding, Kinhart Gallery, Cedar Rapids, IA

2023 Fly Over Focus, Queen City Clay, Norwood, OH

By Design: Group Show, Gilded Pear Gallery, Cedar Rapids, IA

2021 Abstract Ideas: Abstract Art from the Collection, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Cedar Rapids, IA, curator Kate Kunau

2019 Up All Night, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Cedar Rapids, IA, curator Kate Kunau

DUMA Biennial, Dubuque Museum of Art, Dubuque, IA, curator Sarah Humphreville, Senior Curatorial Assistant at Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

Into the Blue, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Cedar Rapids, IA, curator Kate Kunau

2018 Beyond the Prairie: Midwestern Art from the Collection, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Cedar Rapids, IA, curator Kate Kunau

2016 Funkytown, Urbano, Berkely, CA, curator Kimberly Rowe, 17 person exhibition

Summer Invitational, Sherry Leedy Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO, twenty person exhibit

2015 The Iowa Artists Purchase Exhibition, EMC , Des Moines, IA, seven person exhibit

Pushed, Pulled, Shaped: Work that Reflects the Artists Spirit and Environment, Best Chicago Properties, Chicago, IL, three person exhibit
Midwest Summer: Light and Warmth, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Cedar Rapids, IA, curator Kate Kunau

2013 Contemporary Expressionism-The Creative Spirit, The San Diego Museum of Art Artists Guild, San Diego, CA, curator Derrick Cartwright
Some Assembly Required: Collage and Assemblage, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Cedar Rapids, IA, curator Sean Ulmer

2012 Lure of the Local, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Cedar Rapids, IA, curator Sean Ulmer

2011 What to Dip, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, Thailand

CORPORATE COLLECTIONS AND AWARDS:

US Cellular Center, 2% for the Arts, Cedar Rapids, IA
Canal One, Boston, MA
Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Cedar Rapids, IA
EMC, one of 7 artists selected for 2015 Sixth Biennial Art EMC Program, Des Moines, IA
First Bancorp, Southern Pines, NC
Grafix Corporate Collection, Cleveland, OH
Grant Thorton, Chicago, IL
Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
Human Services Building, Cedar Rapids, IA Kirkwood Community College, Cedar Rapids, IA Kirkwood Community College, Coralville, IA McCarter & English in Boston.
Manion, Gaynor & Manning, Miami, FL Marion Arts Council, Marion, IA
Newton Wellesley Hospital, Newton, MA People's United, Boston, MA
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
Raining Rose Corporate Collection, Cedar Rapids, IA
Reliant Medical Group, Westborough, MA
School of Art and Art History, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA Skogman, Cedar Rapids, IA
The Fallon Companies, Boston, MA
The University of Iowa Hospitals, The University of Iowa, Iowa City IA Southeast Iowa Community College, West Burlington, IA
Solomon McCown, Boston, MA
United Fire Group, Cedar Rapids, IA
United Fire Group, Los Angeles, CA
West Side Transport, Cedar Rapids, IA
Xilio Therapeutics, Waltham, MA

LECTURES:

2020 ArtBites Gallery Talk, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Cedar Rapids, IA

2018 Gallery Talk, Gilded Pear Gallery, Cedar Rapids, IA

2016 Gallery Talk, Gilded Pear Gallery, Cedar Rapids, IA

2015 Gallery Talk, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Cedar Rapids, IA
2014 Gallery Talk, Farnham Gallery, Simpson College, Indianola, IA
2013 Artist Talk, Marvin Cone Club, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Cedar Rapids, IA
2012 Gallery Talk, Maquoketa Arts Experience, Maquoketa, IA
2012 Cedar Rapids Opera Theatre Artist in Residence
2012 Gallery Talk, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Cedar Rapids, IA
2012 Gallery Talk, Art Bites, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Cedar Rapids, IA

VISITING ARTIST:

2013 Visiting Artist, Clinton Community College, Clinton, IA
2010 Visiting Artist, Creative Connections, Cedar Rapids Museums of Art, Cedar Rapids, IA

RESIDENCIES, COOPERATIVE GALLERIES, AND TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

1997 Co-founding Member, Soil, Seattle, WA
1992 Artist in Residence, Oregon School of Arts and Crafts, Portland, OR
1990-1991 Teaching Assistant, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, drawing
1989 Teaching Assistant, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, metalworking

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

2025 IX, Women United Art Magazine, Winter 2025
2024 Kinheart Studio Welcoming Space for Artist in CR, Diana Nollen, The Gazette, May 20,
2022 The Ancient Healing Properties of Clay, Paper, Plastic, and Wood, Dennis Green, Jazz 88.3 KCCK Culture Crawl, Nov 27, 2022
2021 Dance Party, Dennis Green, Jazz 88.3 KCCK Culture Crawl, Dec 4, 2021
2020 Mary Zeran Opens First Solo Show at Cedar Rapids, The Gazette, Sept 10, 2020
2018 Advise and Select, Ann Landi, Vasari21, July 29, 2018
Art and Life with Mary Zeran, Boston Voyager, July 2018
Boston City Guide, The Boston Arts & Culture Weekly Review, July 30, 2018
Really Flat Sculptures, Dennis Green, Jazz 88.3 KCCK Culture Crawl, Dec 5, 2018
2016 Eastern Iowa Health Center Holds Grand Opening Celebration, by Samantha Myers, 2016 Eastern Iowa Health Center Undergoes Renovation, by KCRG-TV9, Oct 13, 2016
Assembling An Artful Home, Katie Mills Giorgio, The Gazette, April 24, 2016
2015 Full Throttle Color, Culture Crawl, Cedar Rapids, IA, December 3, 2015
Full Throttle Color, Hoopla, Cedar Rapids, IA, December 3, 2015
Midwest Summer: Light and Warmth, The Gazette, Cedar Rapids, IA, July 21, 2015
2014 Artist Mary Zeran Set to Unveil Latest Collage, RCreader, Quad City, IA, November 19, 2014 2014 Mary Zeran at Luther College, Christopher Byrne, Kolaj Magazine, Montreal, Canada, April 22, 2014
All Things Beautiful: Mixed Media Collages by Mary Zeran on display April 2 - May 25, Decorah Newspapers, Decorah, IA, April 1, 2014
The Cedar Rapids Museum of Art-Some Assembly Required Collage and Assemblage, The Daily Palette, Iowa City, IA, January 20, 2014

Farnham to Showcase Work of Dena Tollefson and Mary Zeran, Simpson College News Center, Indianola, IA, January 17, 2014

2013 Some Assembly Required At Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Kolaj Magazine, Montreal, Canada, October 19, 2013

2012 Paint the Music!, Operahhh! Newsletter of the Cedar Rapids Opera Theatre, Cedar Rapids, IA, December 2012

Note-Worthy Art, Artist Mary Zeran 'Paints the Music' , Michael Bierne, Cedar Rapids NE Life, Cedar Rapids, IA, December 2012

Painters Dena Tollefson Mary Zeran, Art Talks with Bruce Carter WVIK Augustana