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Aaron Parazette at Dunn and Brown

by Laura Lark

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The shaped canvas in contemporary painting has always irritated me. Simply because, for the most part, it seems to cry, "look! I'm making painting interesting and current and trying to make it matter in a world that doesn't really care about painting that much!"

It's easy to forgive the pioneers of this practice in post-war modern art, especially in select pieces by [Frank Stella](#) and [Ellsworth Kelly](#), where every once in a while the altered construction of the canvas coincides in an essential and spatial manner with the contents within.

Stella's success with this practice was spotty, though, and often when I look at these pieces I can only appreciate them for their novelty. But considering the zeitgeist, I tend to be forgiving. [Culottes](#) seemed like a good idea at the time, too.



Frank Stella, *Mas o Menos*, 1964
metallic powder in acrylic emulsion on canvas
300 x 418 cm



Elizabeth Murray *Stirring Still*, 1997
Oil on canvas on wood, 92 x 115 x 7

his previous attempts to the "New Coke" in an old blog post), as his compositions seem to have become more symbiotic with the shapes of his canvas. However, like nearly every artist I've seen in [Leo Koenig's Projekte](#) (obviously a space with a great deal of purpose—it's not just a gallery; it's a PROJEKTE!) Bogin's work screams bad-boy hot-shot immaturity—more an attempt to shock or electrify than to say anything substantial.

I lose patience, however, with painters who've indulged in this practice in recent decades. [Elizabeth Murray](#)'s work is always energetic and whimsical, and it's easy to see why it's a natural impulse for her to want to break away from the traditional format, since she also works in ceramics and installation. But there doesn't seem to be much point in her making canvases in the shape of coffee cups and saucers. There's a paper cut-out/jigsaw puzzle-piece element to these works, but the shape doesn't add much to these endeavors as painting. Like those rubber adhesive mod-looking flower things you can stick on the floor of the bathtub: wackier than the conventional narrow strips, but not worth paying much attention to after a couple of trips to the shower.

In a similar yet more grating fashion, [Greg Bogin](#) puts a rounded spin on the conventional geometric canvas. But I've recently become more tolerant of his work (I think I likened

So that's where I've stood on the subject of the canvas of shape: a nice stab at novelty, with little point. Having recently seen [Aaron Parazette's](#) *Snow White Tan* in the project space at [Dunn and Brown Contemporary](#) in Dallas, however, I stand corrected. [Full disclosure: Parazette is a Glasstire board member.]

Parazette's work has always been playful, tinged with an irony that served as a sly wink to the viewer. The meticulously crafted and precise "graphic splash" paintings; his "text" paintings crammed with jumbled and incomprehensible surfer lingo; this artist's works whimsically and generously invites the viewer to ponder the