

Chronogram

"Three Major Summer Exhibitions Exploring Abstraction, Color, and Innovation at CCS Bard"

by Brian K. Mahoney

July 7, 2026



Uman in her Albany studio. Credit: Katharina Poblotski

This summer, the Hessel Museum of Art at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College opens a trio of ambitious exhibitions that explore abstraction from strikingly different angles. The shows, which opened on June 27, examine the legacies of a pioneering gallerist, a contemporary painter whose work defies easy categorization, and a Navajo/Diné weaver whose practice links ancestral knowledge to the digital age. Together, they offer a compelling look at artists who have expanded the possibilities of color, form, and visual language across generations.

The marquee presentation, "Betty Parsons: An Expanded World," is the first major retrospective to examine Betty Parsons (1900–1982) as both artist and gallerist. Parsons is often remembered

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as the visionary dealer who helped launch the careers of figures like Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, and Barnett Newman. Yet she maintained an active artistic practice throughout her life, producing paintings, sculptures, and works on paper that have often been overshadowed by her influence on others.



Canary Islands, Betty Parsons, 1932, graphite and gouache on paper

Organized by Kelly Taxter with artist Amy Sillman, the exhibition gathers roughly 80 works spanning six decades. Alongside Parsons's own art, the show revisits the history of the Betty Parsons Gallery, which championed artists who were frequently overlooked by the mainstream art world, including Agnes Martin, Robert Rauschenberg, Sonja Sekula, and Barbara Chase-Riboud. The exhibition argues that Parsons's restless search for new artistic voices was inseparable from her own creative practice, revealing a figure whose impact on American art extended far beyond the gallery walls.

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Opening concurrently is "Uman: In Between," the most comprehensive survey to date of the work of the artist known simply as Uman. Featuring more than 100 works, the exhibition traces two decades of creative evolution, from intimate early portraits and collages to the immersive, large-scale paintings that have established her as one of the most distinctive painters working today.



Transgender Day of Remembrance (installation view), Uman, 2019

Curated by Hessel Museum Artistic Director Lauren Cornell, the exhibition shifts attention away from the biographical narratives that often surround Uman's career and instead focuses on the artist's formal innovations. Drawing on memories of an East African childhood, Arabic calligraphic traditions, dreams, landscapes, and the natural world, Uman has developed a dense visual vocabulary of symbols, geometric forms, and vivid color relationships. The exhibition includes early works assembled from salvaged materials, paintings produced during a particularly prolific period in upstate New York during the pandemic, and two new site-specific murals created for the museum.

If Uman's work explores the expressive potential of painting, "Replica of a Chip: The Weaving Technology of Marilou Schultz" examines how traditional weaving can become a lens through

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which to understand contemporary technology. The exhibition marks the first survey of acclaimed Navajo/Diné weaver and mathematics educator Marilou Schultz, whose six-decade career has bridged Indigenous artistic traditions and the language of computer architecture.



Water, Tó, Marilou Schultz, 2023, wool. Photo: Thatcher Keats

Curated by Candice Hopkins, the exhibition follows Schultz from her beginnings learning to weave alongside her mother and grandmother to her later experiments with dyes, weaving techniques, and asymmetrical forms. A centerpiece of the show is her celebrated body of microchip-inspired textiles, which grew from a 1994 commission by Intel to create a woven replica of a Pentium processor. Schultz's weavings reveal unexpected parallels between textile structures and computer circuitry while also illuminating a lesser-known history: the role Navajo women played in semiconductor manufacturing during the twentieth century. Archival materials and family works by multiple generations of weavers place Schultz's innovations within a broader story of cultural transmission, resilience, and technical ingenuity.

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Viewed together, the three exhibitions form a conversation across media and generations. Whether through paint, woven fiber, or the cultivation of artistic communities, Parsons, Uman, and Schultz each demonstrate how abstraction remains a living language—one capable of

carrying personal histories, cultural memory, and new ways of seeing the world.

All three exhibitions opened on June 27 at the Hessel Museum of Art. "Betty Parsons: An Expanded World" remains on view through October 18, while "Uman: In Between" and "Replica of a Chip: The Weaving Technology of Marilou Schultz" continue through November 29.

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