

# The Boston Globe

ART REVIEW

## John Guthrie's 'Evolution' brings together the unexpected

The Boston-based artist's new show at Bentley University's RSM Art Gallery lays out a range of his work.

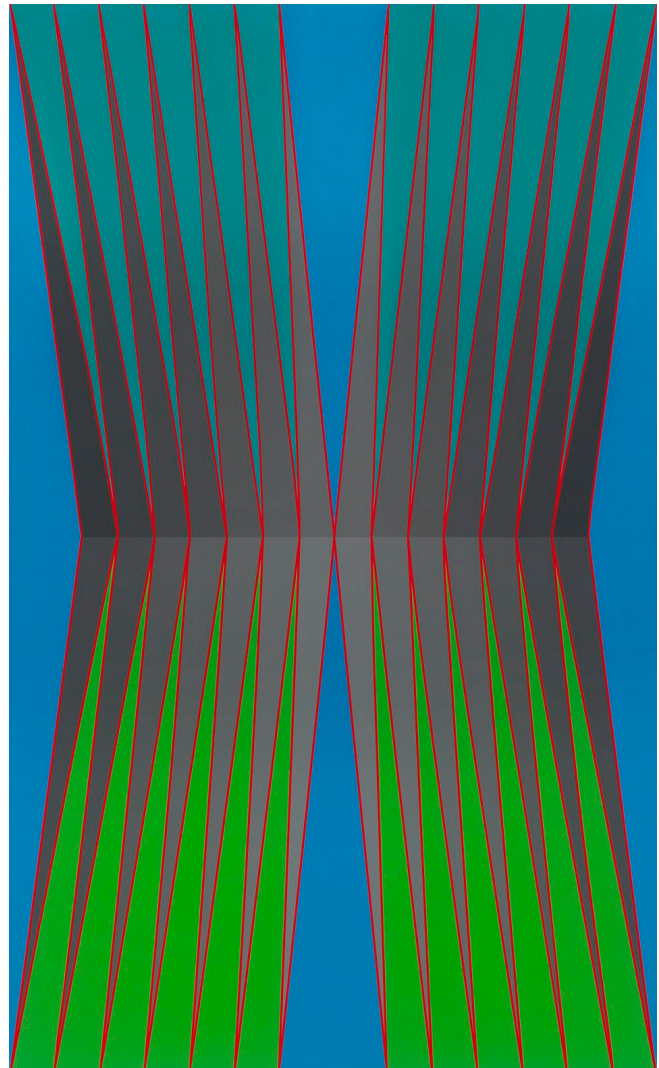
By **Cate McQuaid** Globe Correspondent, Updated July 4, 2023

WALTHAM — John Guthrie's paintings and drawings distill places in between and points of collision. The longtime Boston artist is a terrific colorist — one tone pings off the next and sparks a visual vibrato — so it's often a surprise when he works in black and white.

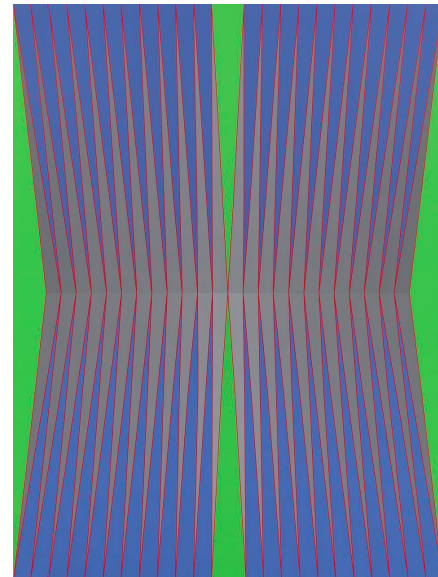
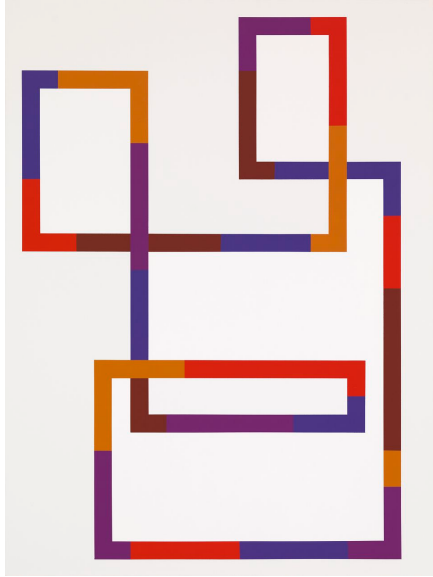
Color or black and white, the vibrato is what matters: the pulsing hum that arises when he brings two unexpected things into proximity. The periwinkle blue, lime green, red, and gray in "Ascension" hit my eyes the way a chorus of sopranos singing syncopated music might hit my ears: offbeat, caffeinated. Guthrie's "Black drawings" bring symbol, shape, and glyph together in awkward, lively forms.

He identifies as part of the [Queer Abstraction](#) movement, in which artists freed from the frank language of representation explore nuances outside traditional binaries. Guthrie's show "Evolution" at Bentley University's RSM Art Gallery lays out a range of his work.

Many titles allude to art history: "Ascension" conjures paintings of the risen Jesus from [Giotto](#) to [Rembrandt](#). But Guthrie uses abstraction to scramble the signals. He titles "Caduceus" for the [staff of Hermes](#), circled by a pair of serpents and topped by wings. You can make out the helix of twisting snakes in the zig-zag of the painting's stacked parallelograms. Each plane is a different, translucent color; each shows traces of the outline of the one below, in which we can see a pale staff, if that's what we're looking for. But this painting is also something entirely other — springy and thrumming with color shifts.



John Guthrie, "Blessed", 2023, acrylic on canvas. .WILL HOWCROFT



“Milo” has the slouch and swivel of the ancient Greek [Venus de Milo](#) sculpture, but Guthrie’s version is all geometry — straight white lines on a black background. The statue is iconic: a paragon of Western art representing the goddess of feminine beauty. The title and the form of this painting’s posture leave echoes of flesh and desire hanging in the air. By extruding just the stance, he erases almost all the loaded, codified, heteronormative context.

Representation is filled with cues that stem from consensus reality. In abstraction, associations are implied, not spelled out. Guthrie’s refreshing abstractions air out dusty rooms cluttered with old meanings. They don’t suggest new ones. Opening us up to what’s next is thrill enough.

**JOHN GUTHRIE: EVOLUTION**

At RSM Art Gallery, Bentley University Library, 175 Forest St., Waltham, through Sept. 15. 781-891-2233. [www.bentley.edu/library/art-gallery](http://www.bentley.edu/library/art-gallery)

Above (left to right): John Guthrie's, "Sublime," 2016, acrylic on canvas. STEWART CLEMENTS, "Milo," acrylic on canvas. WILL HOWCROFT, John Guthrie, "Caduceus," 2021, acrylic on canvas. WILL HOWCROFT, "Ascension," 2023, acrylic on canvas. JULIA FEATHERINGILL