

An abstract painting by Stephen Pusey titled 'Spilling Genesis'. The artwork is a dense, complex composition of swirling, layered brushstrokes in a rich palette of blues, purples, and pinks. The forms are organic and fluid, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall effect is one of vibrant energy and intricate detail.

STEPHEN PUSEY
SPILLING GENESIS

2025–2026 Exhibition

STEPHEN PUSEY *SPILLING GENESIS*

In 1986, Stephen Pusey (b. 1952) emigrated from London to New York City after being invited to exhibit his work at the prestigious P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in Long Island City. At the time, he was best known for the monumental figurative murals he created in London between 1977 and 1982, many of which were commissioned by local government. Alongside his studio practice, Pusey was deeply engaged in community work—a commitment that later led him to co-found the pioneering online art and discussion hub Plexus in 1996. By 2003, nearly two decades after his arrival in New York, Pusey had undergone a remarkable transformation—no small feat—moving from figurative painting into digital media, and ultimately into abstraction. Using large, fluid marks and gestural structures made with different sized brushes in acrylic paint, Pusey invented his own recognizable language. In the artist's words:

My works are constructed of a matrix of calligraphic gestures, which appear to flow in and out of space. I work without hesitation and autonomically. It is a process in which imagination, the subconscious, and critical judgment work in tandem.

Stephen Pusey's installation of seven large paintings at 499 Park Avenue takes the lobby's stripped-down, modernist architecture into consideration. On the white wall he has mounted four full-colored paintings swirling with calligraphic marks. For the black wall, he has chosen two grisaille paintings, and in the atrium, he has placed a large horizontal work, whose palette and calligraphic marks are distinct from the others.

While Pusey uses a similar approach in all of his works, he never repeats himself. Looking first at the paintings installed on the white marble wall, *Spilling Genesis*, *Until the End of the World*, *Pi*, and *Transformer* (all dated 2021), the viewer sees four distinct paintings. Executed with a vocabulary that is the result of drawing with a loaded brush, each incremental brushstroke is singular in color, structure, and density. Some marks are solid, others are semi-transparent. All exist in an indeterminate abstract space and both their imagery, and their titles evoke states of change and beginning: a number that cannot be expressed exactly for example (*Pi*), or a device that transfers electrical energy from one circuit to another while changing the voltage (*Transformer*), with *Until the End of the World* and *Spilling Genesis*, referencing origins and creation.



Spilling Genesis, 2021, acrylic on canvas, 72 x 96 inches



Phoenix, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 87 x 141 inches (detail)

STEPHEN PUSEY *SPILLING GENESIS*

In *Spilling Genesis*, circular bands receding into the depths of the largely blue, monochromatic surface convey movement and stillness. What do the bands signify? Are we supposed to read the blue symbolically? Pusey offers no clue. His paintings provoke speculation by the viewer, having them both look at, as well as reflect upon, what they are seeing. If there was a didactic impulse when Pusey made public murals, it is eliminated from his abstractions.

Like the other works in the exhibition, Pusey's two grisaille paintings, *Accelerator* and *Generator* (both dated 2023) are made with open brushstrokes. Because he is painting white on black, the fluid, expressive movements convey the paint's changing texture, while registering the pressure of the artist's hand and the movement of his arm and wrist. Everything is to be seen on the canvas. The marks stir up associations with rococo curves, asemic writing, calligraphic marks, and abstract graffiti, while remaining indecipherable.

Although these works show an awareness of Jackson Pollock's drip paintings and Mark Tobey's "white writing", Pusey's all-over abstractions reimagine the paintings of these predecessors by using the fluid, quick-drying medium of acrylic, a medium neither Pollock nor Tobey adopted, which allows him to layer his marks more precisely. Pusey's expansion of this visual language to include calligraphy and graffiti (an artform with which Pusey, an accomplished muralist, is quite familiar) further sets them apart from the tradition of Abstract Expressionism. His allusion to graffiti temporarily brings the gritty urban world of tagging inside the spotless lobby of a commercial building and this combination of high and low art creates something fresh, in every sense of the word.

The painting in the atrium is titled *Phoenix*, after the bird in Greek mythology that can be reborn out of the ashes of its previous incarnation. The painting's busy, visual turbulence evokes the phoenix being born again, but more importantly, within the context of Pusey's oeuvre, it underscores his intuitive process, where one mark generates another mark that is both unique and different—linear configurations giving birth to linear configurations. The viewer will notice that the calligraphic gestures in *Phoenix* are smaller and more entangled than ones we see in his other paintings. Working improvisationally while being self-critical, Pusey evokes an expansive world that both is dense and open, a place where viewers can get wonderfully lost in the looking.

- John Yau



Accelerator, 2023, acrylic on canvas, 80 x 86 inches

Cover: *Pi*, 2021, acrylic on canvas, 72 x 96 inches (detail)



499 PARK AVENUE / The Lobby Gallery

Park Avenue and 59th Street, New York, NY 10022

Gallery Hours: Monday - Friday, 8:00 AM - 6:00 PM

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

499 Park Avenue, through its exhibition program, actively contributes to the cultural community as an expression of ongoing commitment to excellence in the visual arts and architecture. We thank the artist Stephen Pusey for the loan of these paintings.

ORGANIZATION Jay Grimm & Kaitlyn Ward, Jay Grimm Art Advisory
ESSAY John Yau

ABOUT JOHN YAU

John Yau is an award winning poet, critic, curator, and publisher of Black Square Editions. He has published over 50 books of poetry, fiction, and art criticism. Yau served as arts editor for The Brooklyn Rail from 2006 to 2011 and since 2012 has contributed regularly to Hyperallergic, an online arts magazine. He is Professor Emeritus at Rutgers University.

ABOUT JAY GRIMM ART ADVISORY

Jay Grimm is an independent arts professional with more than 30 years experience in the New York gallery world. For more information about this exhibition program, please contact jay@jaygrimm.com



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