

CUBES
Matthew
Baumgardner



In Progress: *Cube #15*, 2013.

CUBES

Matthew Baumgardner

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December 2019 - March 2020

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Introduction & Acknowledgements

The Cubes occupy a unique place within the career of Matthew Baumgardner; they featured among his earliest works, and his earliest successes in the late 1970s and then did not reemerge until the establishment of the Travelers Rest studio in 2010. Stylistically, they unite the paradox between geometric order and organic line that gives tension and energy to Baumgardner's paintings.

In this exhibition and catalogue, Furman University students have brought together a selection of the Cubes and the Found Cubes, along with materials that reveal the layered processes and intricate craftsmanship embedded in these works.

It has been a privilege to work on this project. Among those who we wish to thank are Michael Brodeur, who arranged our first introduction; the Furman University Art Department and Furman University Libraries, who have co-sponsored the exhibition and opening reception; the Humanities Development Fund which provided critical funding for student and faculty fellows; Caroline Mills and Kathy Hamlin from the Furman University Libraries; Carolyn Day, Associate Professor of History, with whom we look forward to continuing our collaboration; Suresh Muthukrishnan, for his guidance and enthusiasm for incorporating new technologies into this project; Marta Lanier, Gabby Villigran, and Abby McElmurray from the Art Department for their assistance with the catalogue; Christopher Bridwell, Emmanuel McCord, and Travis Robinson from Furman's Facilities Department, for their assistance and care in moving artworks; Noelle Rice, Curatorial Assistant at the Columbia Museum of Art; Lila Baumgardner, who shared her stories with our class; and the students of ART 281: Caroline Bass, Beth Fraser, Sam Hayes, Leah Hess, Eliza Kate Leiter, Elizabeth Mangone, Annie Reigel, and Grayson Sloop for their hard work and dedication. And none of this would have been possible without the tireless efforts and generosity of Riley Murphy, to whom we owe a debt of gratitude.

Sarah Archino and Jeffrey Makala, 2019

Color and Texture in *Cube #12*

by Emily Newcomer

Matt Baumgardner's cubes represent a culmination of the various styles he worked with throughout his career. As his style changed and developed, the materials, content and tone of his work shifted, however there persists an interest in geometric shapes and panels that is clearly present in the cubes from the 2010s.

Cube #12 was completed in August 2013 at Baumgardner's studio in Travelers Rest. Made with golden acrylic products, graphite, powder pigments, and gypsum on a gessoed wood block, Baumgardner created a smudged background with a blend of pink, tan, and purple earthy tones. To this, he introduced a range of blues and yellow onto the cube yet, with their muted undertones, he stayed consistent with the natural color palette. In other sections, he added areas of more vibrant color that reflect his earlier work of the 1980s.

Additionally, Baumgardner added a variety of shapes and marks to the surface of the cube. In a corner of the cube there is a bright green square with a grid and pearlescent bronze block in the middle square. The paint is built up in thick and uneven layers that he cut into with a graphite pencil to create indented designs that include a variety of geometric shapes mixed with abstract designs and patterns. The cube itself is replicated throughout the design with carved three-dimension cubes, squares, and grids. Among these geometric shapes are organic patterns of swirls, petals and eye forms.

While the cubes featured in the beginning and end of his career, they connect to the years



Figure 1. *Cube #12*, 2013

Figure 2. *Symi Series #15*, 1991

Figure 3. *Cube #12*, 2013

Figure 4. *Cube #12*, 2013

in between. In his signature mud paintings of the 1990s, many works shifted to a muted and natural color palette. The work on paper *Symi Series #15* (1991) was among Baumgardner's first mud paintings and he experimented here with carving details into the paint to create the indented texture. He created a background of layered purples and pink, blended for a smudged and hazy effect. A pale pink dominates the middle of the painting while the edges show the purples underneath. The colors converge and blend to produce a variety of shades throughout the piece. The shapes engraved into the paint are a range of round and curving shapes to rigid lines and points. Many of the lines reflect organic shapes connected to his love of nature, like wings or petals. Though completed during different decades, the continuity of stylistic elements displays Baumgardner's enduring technique and vision.





The Fluidity of Dimensionality

by Grayson Sloop

As a painter, Matthew Baumgardner experimented with media throughout his career. But while his transition from the flat surface of a canvas to the three-dimensional complications of his sculptures might seem abrupt, the movement between canvas and cubes is fluid when we consider that Baumgardner aspired to create multiple experiences for his audience.

Layering and experience were central to Baumgardner's work. Even the paint medium he used was not flat oil or acrylic, but a mixture called "mud." His mud was a thick gypsum getting its color from

Golden Acrylics and powder pigments. The thickness of the mud meant Baumgardner's process took a great deal of time as he layered each color on top of the last to create depth and vibrancy. Using a pencil, Baumgardner would also carve into each layer of the still wet mud. Once the layers dried he would either sand down and expose what had been covered, or leave it hidden. The process of excavation that concealed or revealed his carvings was itself important to him because it contributed to the experience he desired.

Baumgardner saw the work as a whole

experience, and, thus, these layers were essential to create the atmosphere he desired. This also harkens to the nature of cubes. By design, a maximum of three of the six possible are visible to a viewer. To see another side, one facet must be sacrificed. Baumgardner did not see this as a drawback, rather, it was an opportunity to produce multiple different experiences. This is really the crux of Baumgardner's style. Even with his paintings, he was interested in the shifting experiences of the viewer as he carved into the mud or covered the canvas with another layer.

Continuity can also be found in the forms he painted and repeated, particularly in the grid and the cubic shape. Baumgardner's *Windows in the Sky* series demonstrates his use of structured and clear grids, which came to replace his earlier, abstract compositional framework. Over time, he emphasized these squares, building them up through layers of paint to project from the flat surface of the painting. We can see the effect in *Scientific Prayer #17*, which illustrates the grid-like style and this increasing interest in dimensionality, as the pearlescent small squares actually stand off the canvas. The viewer's perception of the work shifts as they change position, creating an enhanced experience that incorporates light and movement. With the addition of phosphorescent paint, light becomes an active component through subtle reflections in daylight and a faint glowing effect in the dark. This approach is visible on *Cube #1*, which contains the same grid of nine and layering of small squares across all six surfaces; the effect is then amplified as the cube is rotated through space. Rather than dividing Baumgardner's work into two-dimensional and three-dimensional surfaces, it is perhaps best to follow his fluidity between them, as he crafted art with multiple layers to create multiple experiences for the audience - the pinnacle of his unique style.



Figure 5. *Cube #1*, 2010
Figure 6. *Scientific Prayer*
#17, 2018

The Grid & the Glyphs

by Caroline Bass

The grid is used by artists as a self-generating organizational device composed of intersecting lines; as the grid is formed, it creates the artwork itself. Historically, the grid has been interpreted as inherently impervious to language and hostile to narrative because of its static quality.¹ However, when an artist simultaneously works with, and fights against, the grid, it results in a meaningful tension. There exists a tradition of modernist artists who incorporated and resisted the grid in this work. In particular, Baumgardner's grids were directly influenced by Paul Klee, as both artists played with the tension and structure created through the implementation of a grid with intuitively derived drawings.

In countless works, Baumgardner used a grid armature on which to hang his organically expressive glyphs.² Baumgardner's *Cube #9* is particularly illustrative of the connection between the grid and the glyphs. The two forms are not as distant as they may first appear, as he composed his grids using intuitive mathematics, a process by which he intuitively found the relationship between the scale of the glyphs on the plane, either overlaid or inlaid the squares with geometrical precision, and finished with a layer of pearlescence. Underneath the rigid structure of the grid lies the contrastingly organic, "primitive simplicity" of glyphs carved into thick, atmospheric layers of mud.³ By combining these two aspects, he adds back a sense of order to the intrinsically disordered nature of the glyphs.

Although Klee's style does not fit neatly in one category, grids and fantastical imagery feature throughout his work. In *Marjamshausen*, he painted an "unforeseen landscape" with an arrangement of rough blocks

1 Rosalind E. Krauss, *The originality of the avant-garde and other modernist myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 158.

2 Matt Baumgardner, *Unpublished Papers*.

3 Matt Baumgardner, *Unpublished Papers*.

of color which create a grid.⁴ However, the hand drawn, imprecise geometry of the rectangles and triangles creates a sense of disorder because it lacks the precision of an exact grid. The imperfections of the shapes result in the child-like whimsy of the unknown structure. In the end, these two competing stylistic devices are cohesive, much like Baumgardner's work, because of the stability created by the ultimate structure that it forms.

Both artists convey meaning through the process of combining the grid and organic drawings. In *Marjamshausen*, Klee deliberately does not close off the intersecting points and does not follow a consistent vanishing point, instead embracing the movement of a drawn line "that sets itself in motion" and in doing so,

4 Robert Kudielka and Bridget Riley, *Paul Klee: The Nature of Creation, Works 1914-1940* (London: Hayward Gallery, 2002), 53.

he creates an imaginative "intermediary realm."⁵ Similarly, Baumgardner's creation process results in *noumena*, which are things that exist only through intellectual intuition.⁶ His work gives no concrete knowledge, but the existence is inferred from the experience of viewing it.

In this way, the grid binds both artists' spiritual drawings to another imaginative continuum. Baumgardner explained through a Klee quote, "we used to represent things visible on Earth...now we reveal the reality of visible things, and thereby the belief that visible reality is merely an isolated phenomenon outnumbered by other realities."⁷

5 Kudielka and Riley, *Paul Klee: The Nature of Creation, Works 1914-1940*, 54.

6 Matt Baumgardner, *Unpublished Papers*.

7 Paul Klee, quoted in Matt Baumgardner, *Unpublished Papers*.



Figure 7. *Cube #9*, 2011

Figure 8. Paul Klee, *Marjamshausen*, 1928

Baumgardner's Cubes and Abstract Expressionism

by Elizabeth Mangone



Baumgardner's *Cube #15* is a riot of color and texture. Every side introduces a new element of intrigue, whether it be multi-color stripes, layered grids, or bright, gestural lines running over and through the surface. Baumgardner's style is forcefully tactile; on each facet, he builds up layers of paint and incised line-work in a way that edges on sculptural. Some areas of medium are layered and built up to almost an eighth of an inch thick, leaving deep crevices where Baumgardner has carved glyphs and shapes that are amplified by the cube's palette. On

one corner, a green square is bordered by a bright burst of purple, while nearby mint green and pink stripes wind a path up the side. There are layers of bright blue enveloping and overlapping some of the glyphs, starkly contrasting with the tan and orange tones that dominate the deepest layers of this cube. Baumgardner also uses extremely light greens, blues, pinks, and yellows to highlight certain drawings on the surface of the cube. The lightness gives these drawings in particular a sense of both importance and ephemerality. The gestural



quality to the glyph writing and drawing on the cube's surface activates every inch. There is no spot absent of movement, color, or line.

Many of the qualities highlighted in Baumgardner's *Cube #15* are also present in Gestural Abstraction, a type of Abstract Expressionism. The bold use of color, interwoven layers of pigment, and spontaneous gesture present in this cube characterize the gestural style of artists such as Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Franz Kline.

Pollock and de Kooning were both process-based colorists, a trait that Baumgardner shared. A work such as Pollock's *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)*, is a classic example of spontaneous and layered painting

process. The painting was a record of Pollock's movement more than a representation of any object or figure, and while Baumgardner's work is slightly more figurative, they share the fundamental elements of color and gestural line. De Kooning's *Interchange* reveals another historical influence for Baumgardner's layered, heavily-worked surfaces. Like de Kooning, Baumgardner's work often involves layers that are never seen by viewers, but which he considered a significant, ghostly presence. While the color palettes of *Cube #15* and *Interchange* are completely different, they both use areas of white (or near-white) to make colors bolder, and complementary color pairs such as blue and orange.

Furthermore, de Kooning and Baumgardner share a similar tactility, building up medium to create a surface of ridges, dips, and valleys. The result is a fully activated space; even potentially negative space has been engaged, akin to Kline's practice of painting the white fields in his black-and-white canvases. As there is no blank side on the cubes (except for the first large cube, *Old Block* of 1979), allowing them to be turned in any configuration, these activated surfaces extend beyond the viewer's gaze and into all three dimensions. Baumgardner's use of the cube form is in many ways in opposition to the gestural, spontaneous style of abstract expressionism, but as in much of his work, Baumgardner brings these opposing ideas together to create a balanced piece.



Figure 9. *Cube #15*, 2013

Figure 10. Willem de Kooning, *Interchange*, 1955

Figure 11. Jackson Pollock, *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)*, 1950

Figure 13. Franz Kline, *Orange Outline*, 1955

The Cubes in Context: Matt, Malevich, and Minimalism

by Beth Fraser



In this entry, I will situate Baumgardner's cube sculptures within the context of twentieth-century art history, exploring his inspiration and entanglement with geometric abstraction. Geometric abstraction is a form of abstract art depicting wholly geometric figures (triangles, circles, etc.) rather than images of the material world. For many geometric abstractionists, prioritization of shape over image disrupts traditional conceptions of space to explore the fundamental structure of reality. Geometric abstraction attempts to project a form onto the chaos of the world, simplifying the complexities of existence into basic forms. Perhaps the square best fulfills this organizational impulse through an elementary framework of simplicity and stability.

Kazimir Malevich's 1915 *Black Square* may

be the most famous square of the twentieth-century. *Black Square* is exactly what it sounds like, but Malevich saturated this unassuming painting with meaning, using it to demonstrate "a new art of a new age" in which painting is "an end in itself" rather than a mere conduit for the representation of objects.¹ Malevich called this new art Suprematism. Despite its apparent simplicity, *Black Square* is pivotal to modern art history, marking the shift from abstract to nonrepresentational art and suggesting that pure geometric forms could project absolute spiritual reality. Baumgardner's cubes manifest a similar desire to understand the spiritual dimension of space through the fundamental unit of shape.

¹ "Minimalism," TATE, accessed November 8, 2019, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/minimalism>.

The abstract square expanded into three-dimensions with cubic minimalist sculptures. Like Malevich, Minimalist artists were concerned with exploring the essence of reality through geometric forms, emphasizing the physical experience of objects and the viewer's interpretive process. Baumgardner made *Chip off the Old Block* in 1978 and *Old Block* (his first large-scale cube) in 1979, less than a decade after the Minimalist zenith.

Although not visible on *Old Block*, an underlying pencil grid remains perceptible on *Cubes #1-4*. Baumgardner first began using an underlying grid in the 1970s to superimpose structure on the chaos of creative impulse. Baumgardner explored the intersection between lived reality and geometric form through intuitive mathematics, a concept reinforced after he met Donald Judd, an artist frequently associated with Minimalism. Baumgardner described intuitive mathematics as an unconscious human compulsion towards an inscribed natural order. This interest extends to the earliest works: in addition to the basic foundation of the cube, the concept of intuitive mathematics is manifested on *Old Block* through the indistinct etchings of numbers and formulas barely visible on all six sides.

The artist Sol LeWitt, associated with both minimalism and conceptualism, developed his *Cube* in 1979, the same year Baumgardner made *Old Block*. LeWitt wrote, "the most interesting characteristic of the cube is that it is relatively uninteresting. It is best used as a basic unit for any more elaborate function."² Baumgardner expressed a similar sentiment describing the grid as "an armature to hang my subconscious fractal thoughts and glyphs on."³ The cube is an elementary, almost elemental form, nearly spiritual in its simplicity, providing minimalist artists with the three-dimensional equivalent of blank canvas. Baumgardner utilizes the fundamental cuboid form to frame cosmic complexities through the essential reality of shape, thereby demonstrating the conceptual legacy of geometric abstraction.

² "Two Open Modular Cubes/Half-Off," Sol LeWitt, TATE, accessed November 8, 2019,

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/lewitt-two-open-modular-cubes-half-off-t01865>.

³ Matt Baumgardner, Unpublished Papers, 2011.

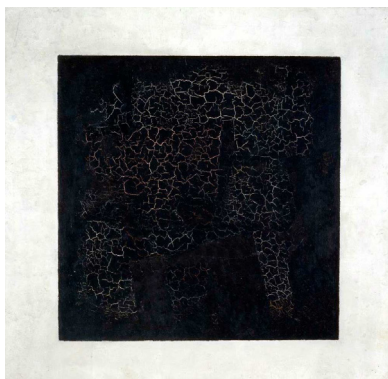
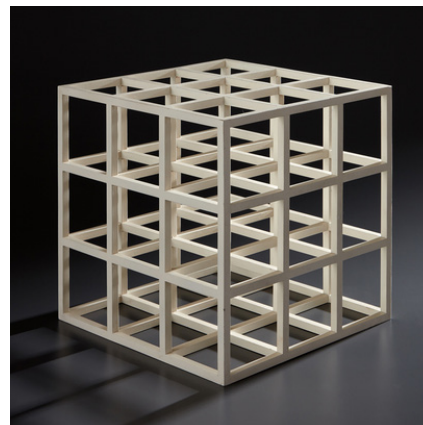


Figure 14. *Old Block*, 1979

Figure 15. Sol Le Witt, *Cube*, 1979

Figure 16. *Chip Off the Old Block*, 1978

Figure 17. Kasimir Malevich, *Black Square*, 1915



Spiritual Expressions in the Cubes

by Leah Hess

In approaching art as a spiritual practice, the artist consciously creates objects that are sacred and mystical. Matt Baumgardner referred to his work as "a transformative experience that resonates with my longings to channel universal and spiritual planes."¹ Through his art, Baumgardner transports the spirit in order to remind us all that we are perfect beings passing through a transient world.

Baumgardner's spirituality was deeply integrated with his love for nature; he felt connected to the four elements, which he incorporated into everyday life, whether he was tending to his garden, swimming in his pool, burning brush, or staring at the clouds. Skies feature throughout his work, often as boundless spaces that stretch beyond the frame. Similarly, *Cube #9* includes a majestic blue sky with white clouds speckled with grey flecks. No matter how the cube is turned, the sky on *Cube #9* is located at the top and the bottom of the cube with the implication that the sky is vast and infinite. The image on *Cube #9* effortlessly captivates the viewer and transports them into a



spiritual realm. Inside his studios (both in New York City and Travelers Rest), Baumgardner incorporated nature and its four elements into his work, connecting his art to both the natural and the supernatural world. This concept was best demonstrated in his 1990s series depicting eternal fire as emblem of temporal flux, constantly changing and transforming. Likewise, our lives are non-linear, we are always evolving and growing like fire.

Like many modern artists, Baumgardner found similarly



¹ "Matthew Clay Baumgardner," Matthew Clay Baumgardner Obituary, accessed November 12, 2019, (<https://www.thewoodmortuary.com/obituaries/Matthew-Baumgardner/#!/Obituary>.)

profound meaning in children's art. A devoted father, he was inspired by his four daughters and marveled at their innate artistic talents. More than just aesthetics, he subscribed to the idea that children's art is a matter of chance discovery, rather than intention. Like the automatic techniques used by artists like the Surrealists to bypass logical thought, children's art is built from an instinctive and innate feeling for design. Many of the glyphs and markings that run through his work, including *Cube #11*, appear randomly drawn, just as a child scribbles on a piece of paper. These unpremeditated marks, however, are part of a modernist history of artists trying to regain the purity and innocence of the child-like, and a way to recapture their intuitive flow and emotional connection.

Throughout his life, Baumgardner was deeply influenced by C.S. Lewis and would regularly incorporate his spiritual messages into his daily life. In one particular quote, Lewis stated that "the first demand any work of any art makes upon us is surrender. Look. Listen. Receive. Get yourself out of the way."² Baumgardner described how his "soul craves expression through poetic and timeless art that beckons the viewer to return time and again to find renewal and fresh experiences." Baumgardner surrendered himself to his artwork and encourages the viewer to do the same, to allow ourselves to be transformed by the experience. By letting go, we open our imaginations to new possibilities.

² C.S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1961)



Figure 18. *#154 Fire of the Child*, 1995

Figure 19. *Cube #9*, 2011

Figure 20. *Cube #11*, 2012

Figure 21. *Cube #11*, 2012



Precision and Imagination: Inside Matthew Clay Baumgardner's Studio

by Eliza Kate Leiter



Matthew Clay Baumgardner created an artist's haven for himself when he designed and built his studio in a tucked-away corner of Travelers Rest, South Carolina. While perhaps unassuming from the outside, even the studio's exterior suggests Baumgardner's desire to bring color into the world. The doors and window frames are painted marigold, which pops against the otherwise robin's egg blue facade. In front of the studio lies a pool and an expansive yard - both were precious spiritual sanctuaries where Baumgardner connected to nature. A meticulously planted row of four eucalyptus trees stands in front of the pool, one of his favorite plants. As I watch

the pale green eucalyptus stems dance in the sun, I have to agree.

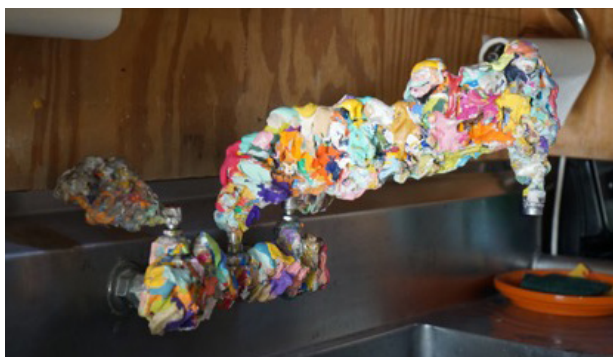
Inside the studio, precision is balanced with obvious signs of life and use - the utilitarian is combined with the playful and artistic throughout. It's a tension that appears in Baumgardner's work; just as so much of his art revolves around the utilization of a grid, his affinity for clean lines and order shines in his studio. The walls are unfinished plywood, giving the structure a sense of being an unfinished work, while also providing flexible workspace. One of the studio's walls is heavily adorned with pencil

lines, transforming the space itself into a grid. In the main studio space, the plywood walls are high, and on the floors are drop cloths and commercial paint cans that Baumgardner used to position his large canvases on the floor, where he preferred to work. In this large vacant space, Baumgardner was able to move his sprawling canvases around with freedom.

Baumgardner's tools, on the other hand, have been carefully chosen, organized and cared for. Various sized paint brushes and scrapers have been painstakingly arrayed in rows on one wall, each with a specific home designated by an evenly spaced nail. This wall also houses buckets of smaller bushes and pencils, which are categorized by lead weight. One set of shelves contains about fifty large tin cans that he sourced from the cafeteria of a nearby elementary school. Each can is filled with a hand mixed concoction of pigmented gypsum, which he called "mud," and features a healthy hand-smeared sample of the mud color on the front of each can.

Baumgardner's creativity peeks through many places in his home studio, but particularly his kitchen, where creative chaos and playfulness find a home amongst the rigid order of the studio's organization. Take, for example, the vintage portable Lady Kenmore dishwasher that Baumgardner transformed into a work of art by adding a multicolored grid and stripes in shades of the 1970s. The once-ordinary sink faucet has become an organic sculpture, encrusted with hundreds of layers of dried mud, scraped and added at the conclusion of Baumgardner's painting sessions. Each layer of petrified paint on the faucet screams "I was here!" as the colors jumble together. Upon seeing this, I can't help but draw the connection between this and the scrawled glyphs and rows of squares that mingle in Baumgardner's work, particularly on the sides of his cubes.

The studio's messy spaces of living and creation are delicately balanced with intense precision, in ways we can identify throughout his paintings. While my time at Baumgardner's studio ends sooner than I am ready for it to be, I feel lucky to have gotten this unique look into the mind of Matthew Clay Baumgardner.



Figures 22-25. Baumgardner's studio



One glance inside Matthew Baumgardner's live/work Travelers Rest studio will confirm his huge love of film. Indeed, in his daily planners from 2012, he left a slot on his daily docket to watch a movie. His daughter, Lila, fondly recalls days spent watching multiple movies with her father and sisters, along with his preference for certain favorites. With this in mind, it is worth considering the influence of Baumgardner's habitual viewing on his art. His writings suggest a particular fascination with dystopian fiction—a fascination that manifested quite often in his work.

In preparation for a 2011 Greenville County Museum of Art retrospective, Baumgardner created a list of his favorite movies- a list that included a notable amount of sci-fi and dystopian media, such as the *Matrix*

series, *Blade Runner*, 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, the *Star Wars* series, *Avatar*, *Terminator*, and many more. Deeper research into Baumgardner's portfolio and notebooks shows that he heavily identified with the themes and ideas expressed in these films, possibly because many of them

Cinematic Influence

by Annie Reigel

carry religious undertones. Baumgardner was a devout man, often setting aside time for prayer in his journals and even calling out directly to God. One entry from February 2010 reads “feeling oppressive weight must pray without ceasing.” Oppressive weight is nothing new in the world of dystopian fiction- almost every science fiction movie that Baumgardner noted as a favorite has the overarching theme of oppressed groups overcoming their oppressors, often with strong biblical undertones highlighting the protagonist as a christ figure. While Baumgardner’s style was not so directly narrative, his work suggests these themes.

Cube #8 takes on a more dystopian tone than the rest. One face in particular depicts an abstraction of what appears to be a massive crowd staring up at a screen. This can be connected to imagery from several different works of science fiction, including *The Matrix Reloaded* and *1984*. Additionally, the color palette used throughout the cube consists of bright reds and oranges over deep, natural earth colors, a palette frequently shared by works of dystopian fiction as a scorched-earth aesthetic. Even the structure of the cube invites futuristic interpretation: wrote Baumgardner about the nature of working on his cubes, “While I am working a cube, only three of the sides are visible to me at any given time; each rotation brings the experience of not knowing the other three sides, which frees me from control so I can get out of the way to be guided by the piece.” Surrender of control is yet another concept frequently explored in popular works of dystopian fiction, including such films as *The Giver* and *The Truman Show*.

Baumgardner enjoyed many types of film, to be sure, and he certainly allowed other genres to influence his work, but his affinity for futuristic sci-fi stands out. As an artist who drew inspiration from countless sources, his passion for film cannot be excluded from this network.



Figure 26. Baumgardner’s studio
Figure 27. *Cube #8*, 2011



Biography: Matthew Clay Baumgardner

by Sam Hayes

Figure 28. Baumgardner working in his studio
Figure 29. Baumgardner and his studio-mates in Brooklyn, New York, 1985
Figure 30. Baumgardner, 1991

Matthew Clay Baumgardner was born in Columbus, Ohio on February 5, 1955. The family relocated often throughout his childhood. Upon graduating from high school, he moved to Greenville, South Carolina where he began his formal training in art under mentors Carl Blair, Emery Bopp, and Darell Koons. In 1982, he graduated with an MFA in painting from UNC at Chapel Hill (where he worked with Peter Plagens). In between his undergraduate and graduate studies, he made his first ever cube for the juried competition, "Art in Miniature," at the Columbia Museum of Art in Columbia, South

Carolina, where it won Best in Show. At least three related cubes were created in 1978-9, but despite his success in this exhibition, it was nearly thirty years before he made his next cube.

In 1982, Matt moved to New York City where he began his professional art career in earnest. During this period, he married and raised four daughters before the marriage ended in divorce. The years in New York mark a significant portion of his artistic career, as his style evolved from more abstract expressionist works of the 1980s, to more reductive minimalism in the 1990s. In 1993, Baumgardner was awarded a national Visual Arts Fellowship in Painting by the National Endowment of the Arts to support his exploration of new painting medium, a pigmented gypsum compound he referred to as "mud."

Following his divorce, Baumgardner moved briefly to Maryland, and then settled in Travelers Rest, South Carolina in 2006. During this time of transition, Baumgardner was not actively painting, but in 2009 he determined to begin making art again. That year, he began construction on a property directly adjacent to his home that would become a custom studio, where he would work until his death on November 20, 2018.

Looking at Baumgardner's daily journals, three important elements are staples of these later years. Every day begins with a reminder to do his "readings," demonstrating his commitment to sobriety and spiritual development. Still, Baumgardner suffered from immense chronic pain and his journals attest to the deep impact of his deteriorating health. Throughout, however, Baumgardner's love for his family and friends endured. He was ecstatic whenever his daughters would visit, detailing in his writing when he made art for and with

them. Indeed, while the last few years of Baumgardner's life were complicated by his health, he welcomed visitors to his studio and was known to radiate love and joy to anyone he met. This warmth, vital presence, and spiritual devotion can be felt in his work.



BAUMGARDNER PHOTO FOR MAG ARTICLE 1991

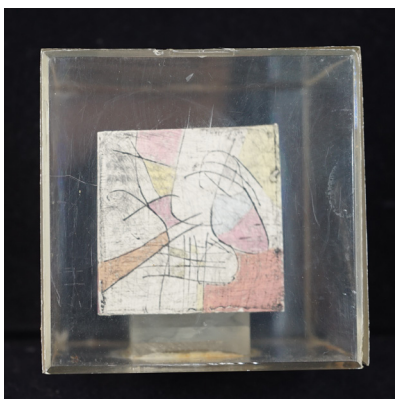
Exhibition Checklist



Chip off the Old Block, 1978
Mixed media on wood
 $3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ in.



Old Block, 1979
Mixed media on wood
12 x 12 x 12 in.



[Cube in case], 1979
Mixed media on wood,
mounted in acrylic case.
 $3\frac{3}{4} \times 3\frac{3}{4} \times 3\frac{3}{4}$ in.



The Door, 1986
Oil and acrylic on
gessoed Lenox rag
paper. 50 x 38 in.



Memory's Floor #32, 1999/2010
Mixed media on canvas over lauan
12 x 12 in.



Memory's Floor #33, 1998/2010
Mixed media on canvas over lauan
12 x 12 in.



Cube #1, 2010
Mixed media on wood
12 x 12 x 12 in.



Cube #8, 2011
Mixed media on wood
12 x 12 x 12 in.



Cube #9, 2011
Mixed media on wood
12 x 12 x 12 in.



Cube #10, 2012
Mixed media on wood
12 x 12 x 12 in.
Private Collection, Toronto, Canada



Found Cube #4, 2012
Mixed media on wood
 $3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ in.



Found Cube #7, 2012
Mixed media on wood
 $3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ in.



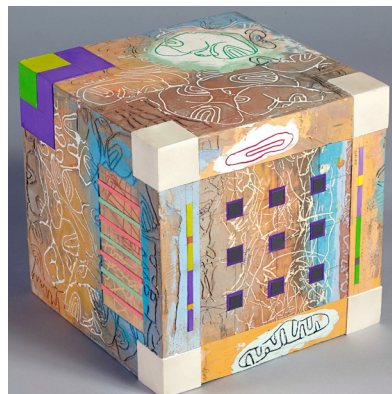
Found Cube #9, 2012
Mixed media on wood
 $3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ in.



Found Cube #12, 2012
Mixed media on wood
 $3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ in.



Cube #12, 2013
Mixed media on wood
12 x 12 x 12 in.



Cube #15, 2013
Mixed media on wood
12 x 12 x 12 in.



Found Cube #17, 2013
Mixed media on wood
 $3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ in.



Found Cube #20, 2013
Mixed media on wood
 $3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ in.



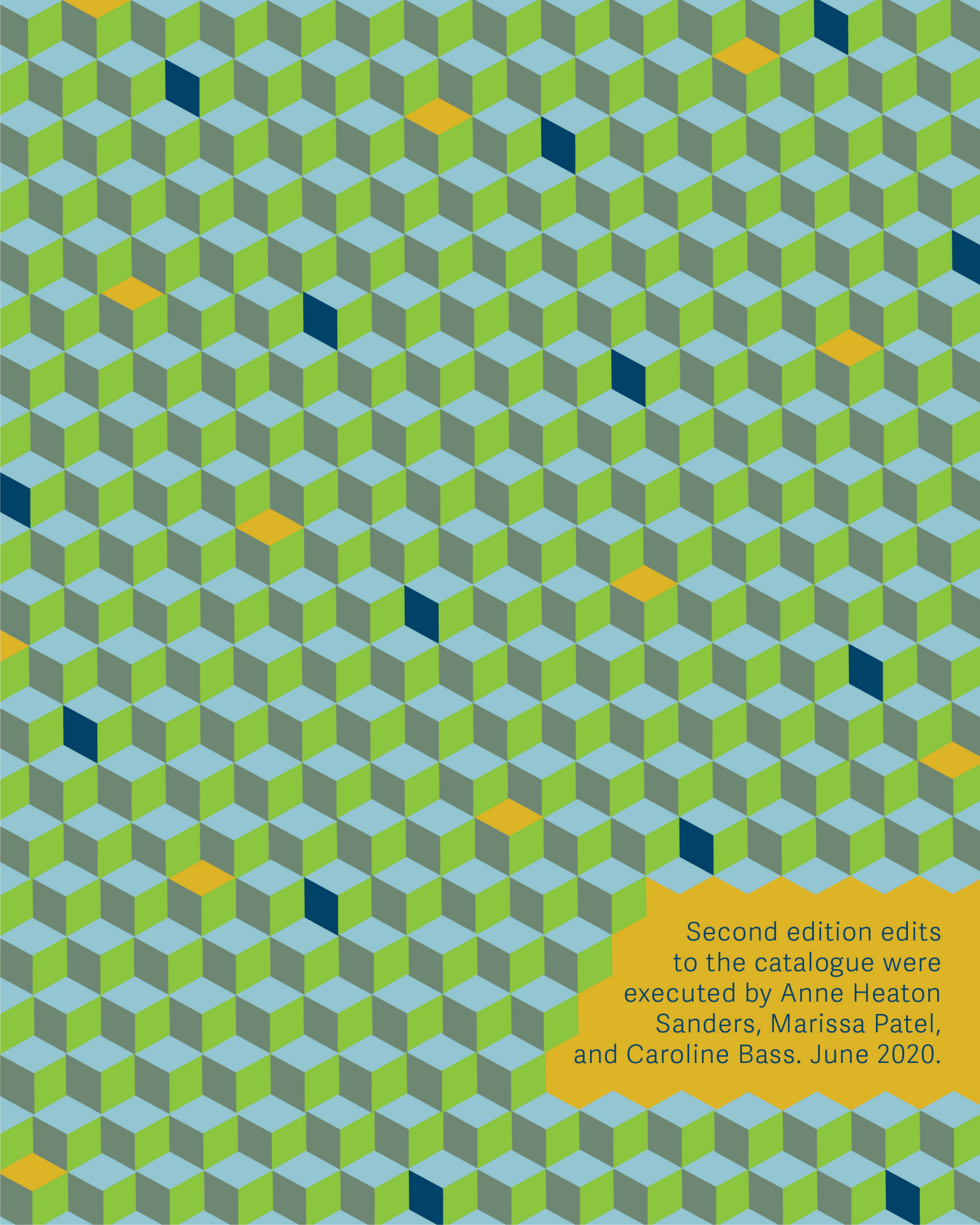
Found Cube #21, 2013
Mixed media on wood
 $3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ in.



Scientific Prayer #17, 2018
Mixed media on canvas over lauan
33 x 33 x 2 in.

The mixed media on the post-2010 cubes and paintings includes Golden Acrylic products, graphite, powder pigments, gypsum, and Lascaux varnish

*Chip off the Old Block, Old Block, [Cube in case] and
The Door* © Estate of Matthew Clay Baumgardner
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Second edition edits
to the catalogue were
executed by Anne Heaton
Sanders, Marissa Patel,
and Caroline Bass. June 2020.