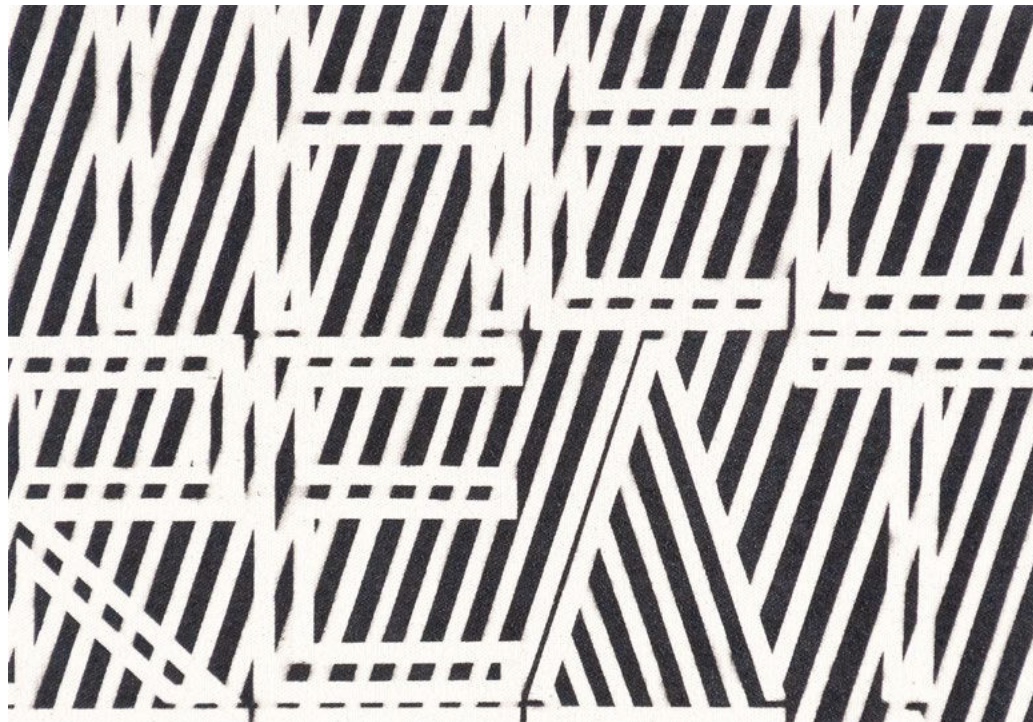


# John Phillip Abbott

## The Great Escape

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Press release



John Phillip Abbott  
*The Great Escape*, 2022 (detail)  
Courtesy of the artist and Xippas

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### Opening Saturday April 27, 2024 from 3 pm

Xippas Paris is pleased to announce the second solo exhibition of American painter John Phillip Abbott. Entitled “The Great Escape”, the exhibition takes over the gallery space from floor to ceiling. Visitors are invited to contemplate and decipher the works, standing or lying down.

“A nation of restless people, forever attempting to get somewhere or get away from somewhere: Kerouac, Cassady, Ginsberg, Kesey, and Robert Frank listening to Zen koans on speeding highway winds; Chuck Berry cruising along with “No particular place to go”; the reckless young motorcycle racers in Bruce Brown’s documentary *On Any Sunday* (1971) hand-grinding the gears of their motors to save a few ounces and add a some rpms; Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda in *Easy Rider* (1969) riding their choppers through a cinematic elegy for American roads now more bloody and hopeless than open; Wallace Berman, who appears briefly in the film when Hopper and Fonda stop at a New Mexico hippie commune, seen in Hopper’s 1964 photo sitting astride his Triumph. These cosmic pilgrims of the postwar American West, and the vast landscapes they relentlessly crisscrossed, may seem far removed from John Phillip Abbott’s canvases, which present a highly conceptualized painting practice that engages the legacy of radical abstraction (Simon Hantaï, Martin Barré, Sam Gilliam) and the distinct but equally conceptual mode of text-based painting (Christopher Wool, Ed Ruscha, Kay Rosen). Abbott further complicates his work by combining two disparate techniques: on one and the same painting he applies spray paint onto raw canvas and uses tape to create hard-edge geometric shapes, thus moving from the disembodied to the concrete.

The resulting compositions, imbedded with letters and words, pulsating with a mad circuitry (this show includes a painting titled *Large Ohm*) of pyramids, nested rectangles and lattice-like grids, inhabit a space somewhere between the conceptual geometry of early LeWitt and Bochner, and the quasi-psychedelic optics of Richard Anuszkiewicz and Bridget Riley. In some of his paintings Abbott inserts wavering dots of sprayed color that suggest the viewer is about to suffer a temporary loss of consciousness. The result is, as Catherine Millet aptly put it in her text for Abbott's 2020 Xippas exhibition, an "instability of the surface."

The title "The Great Escape" can be read as an homage to American counterculture's quest for easy freedom from all social, political and cultural constraints, an escape pursued through drugs, sex, music, New Age mysticism or in a life lived forever on the road (so often symbolized by men on motorcycles). It's also the title of a 1963 movie chiefly remembered for some glorious motorcycle stunts by Steve McQueen (who turns up in *On Any Sunday*). Abbott has often referred to a classic text from this era, Robert M. Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, as one of his inspirations and has used the title of Bruce Brown's surfing film, *The Endless Summer*, for many paintings. The ultimate Great Escape, however, may be the adventure of art itself, epitomized for Abbott in what he calls his "escapist painting process/methodology." Helpfully, the artist has installed some customized bean bags in the gallery directly under an unstretched canvas on the ceiling. The painting's official title is *ZenZen with Blue Grid* but it could just as easily have been titled *Sit back and enjoy the ride*. Nearly always good advice."

– Raphael Rubinstein

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John Phillip Abbott was born in Wisconsin (USA) in 1975. He currently lives and works in Albuquerque, New Mexico (USA).

Since his debut, John Phillip Abbott explores the complex relationship between text and image, blurring the boundaries between both. Initially inspired by personal experiences and past memories his diaristic words ("In the Pines" the title of Huddie Ledbetter's track, "Cosmos" the name of a soccer team) take on a more general meanings; they invite viewers to understand them as images as well as universal ideas.

The artist also pursues an endless experimentation with his numerous techniques. Combining the use of acrylic brush and spray paint, stencils and masking tapes, prepared and raw canvases, John Phillip Abbott constantly reinvents traditional ways of paintings and introduces unexpected shifts between graphic intention and process related accidents.

John Phillip Abbott 's work has been shown internationally and most recently at Gleichapel (Paris, France); COUNTY Gallery (Palm Beach, USA), Galerie Bertrand (Geneva, Switzerland), Pierogi (New York, USA) and Devening Projects (Chicago, USA). His works has been included in institutional shows such as This One's Optimistic: Pincusion at the New Britain Museum of American Art in New Britain, USA, as well as PRTY PPL at Circuit 12 in Dallas, USA.

Raphael Rubinstein is an art historian and critic. His most recent book is *Negative Work: The Turn to Provisionality in Contemporary Art* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2023). Other publications include *The Miraculous* (Paper Monument, 2014), *A Geniza* (Granary Books, 2015) and monographs on Shirley Jaffe (Flammarion, 2014) and Guillermo Kuitca (Lund Humphries, 2020). Curatorial projects include “Reinventing Abstraction: New York Painting in the 1980s” (Cheim & Read, 2013), “Under Erasure” (co-curated with Heather Bause Rubinstein, at Pierogi, 2018-19), “Schema: World as Diagram” (Marlborough, 2023, co-curated with Heather Bause Rubinstein). Since 2008 he has been Professor of Critical Studies at the University of Houston School of Art. He is a recipient of the award of Chevalier in the Order of Arts and Letters from the French government.