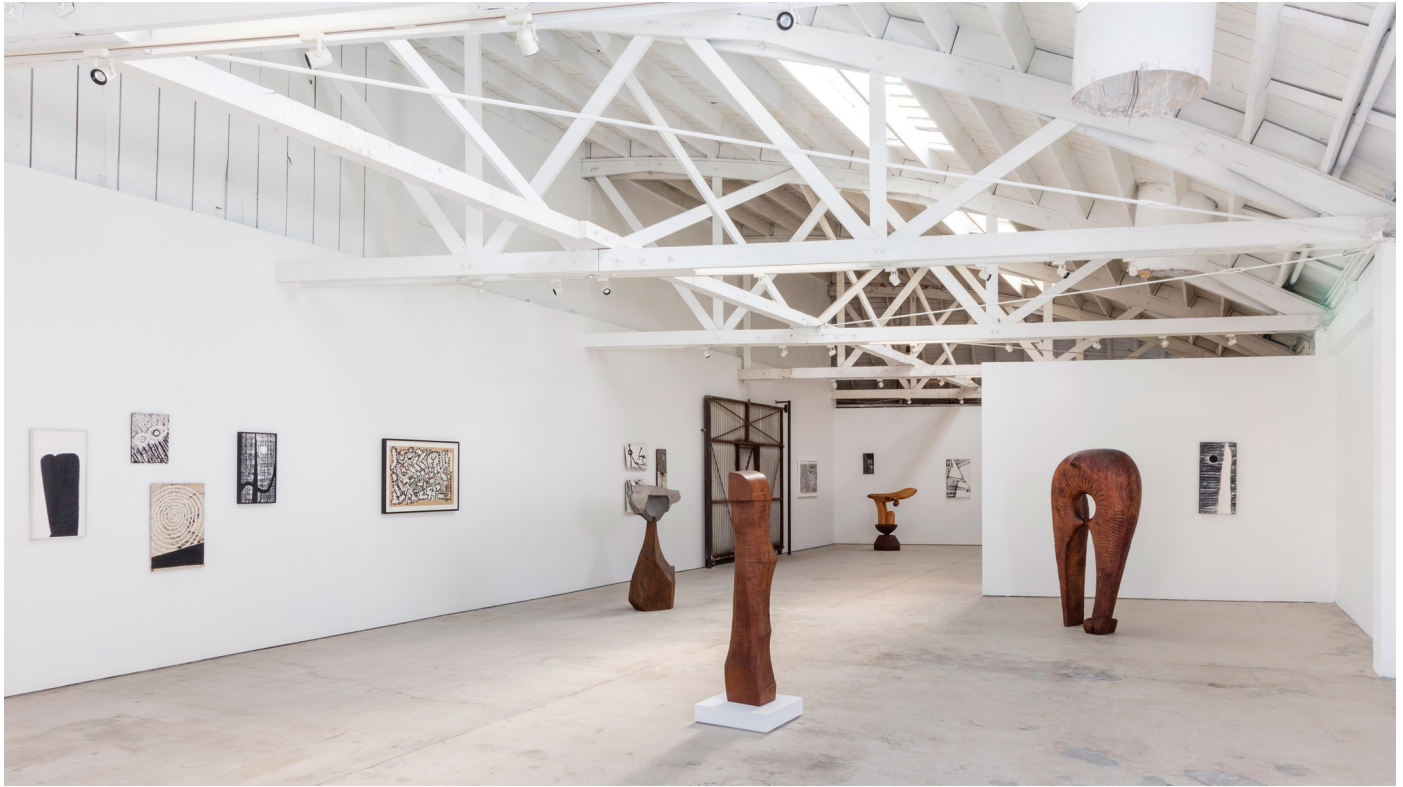


A New Place to Celebrate Cool California Design

By SU WU NOV. 12, 2015



An installation view of the Landing gallery's inaugural show, "J.B. Blunk: Painting, Drawing, Sculpture." Joshua White, courtesy of the Landing

Running a gallery can be “a little bit like an adoption agency,” says Gerard O’Brien. “You want to find the right home for these things because they have intrinsic value.” For more than a decade, his salon-style showroom, Reform Gallery, has been an insider resource for furniture by the post-G.I. Bill generation of West Coast artists, with pieces from the wire sculptor Ruth Asawa to the potter Doyle Lane. “California has always been this incredible place for makers,” O’Brien says, sitting on a loading dock in Paul Tuttle’s iconic leather “Z” chair, which was designed in Santa Barbara and produced in-state. “It was the land where you could come dream and make those

dreams come true.”

On Saturday, O’Brien’s dream expands with the opening of a stand-alone gallery, the Landing, and an inaugural exhibition of work by the artist J. B. Blunk, who O’Brien says “represents that heroic spirit of California” (even though “he came from Kansas, via Japan”). Despite informing California’s current design landscape — filled with thick stoneware vessels, knotty wood and plant-dyed fibers — many midcentury artisans are forgotten or underappreciated, says Sam Parker, the director of the Landing, which will focus on the history and legacy of California Modernism. “We’re not trying to be another emerging gallery,” he says.



From left: Blunk's eight-foot-tall "Mage" sculpture, 1983; his paintings, including this untitled acrylic from 1971, are

being shown for the first time at the Landing. From left: Joshua White; Daniel Dent

Blunk's paintings, which are shown publicly for the first time in this exhibition, were created concurrently with the artist's better known wood sculptures, in a hand-hewn [studio](#) in Inverness, Calif. "He would take breaks from sculpting with his chain saw to work on the paintings, many of which were painted directly onto wood scraps. The texture created by the chain-saw blade guides the composition," says the exhibition's co-curator, Blunk's daughter Mariah Nielson. "I think there has always been an interest in handcraft but it's particularly intense now," continues Nielson, who lives in London in a home renovated by her husband using salvaged materials, down to "the toilet seat."

With her casual elegance — derived from a childhood spent eating off Blunk's ceramics and stint as a model — Nielson personifies the very cool California design the Landing seeks to celebrate. To wit: "Living with things that are made thoughtfully," she says, "encourages thoughtful living."