

John Vincler, 'What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now: Julia Rommel,' *The New York Times*, February 16 2022

The New York Times

What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now

Feb. 16, 2022

LOWER EAST SIDE

Julia Rommel

Through March 5. Bureau, 178 Norfolk Street, Manhattan; 212-227-2783, bureau-inc.com.



A view of Julia Rommel's exhibition "Uncle" at Bureau. From left, "Life Boat," "Forgiveness," "Red Nude" and "Go Fish," all from 2021. Dario Lasagni

When I saw my first Julia Rommel exhibition at Bureau in 2019, I was taken with the anarchic joy of the New York-based artist's geometric abstractions, a mode that usually leaves me cold in its perfecting rigor. Unlike the pristine quality of Ellsworth Kelly or Carmen Herrera, Rommel's paintings are rough-hewed. Constellations of staples dot some of her surfaces or protrude from her edges, stretcher bars are teasingly exposed, patches of coarse linen remain unprimed or splattered with paint. Still, her judicious use of shape and vibrant eye for color keep up the family resemblance to the tradition.

The title of her exhibition, "Uncle," may refer to a family relation or to the exclamation a kid might yell to another as an arm is being bent in the wrong direction. Rommel's signature technique is to fold her surfaces as she works, distressing her cloth substrate, which makes her geometries pop with a sculptural quality that demands you come in for a closer look. Here you'll find minute details, like abstract expressionist flourishes of color in the space of less than a square inch in an otherwise color-blocked composition. Her work has evolved to include monochromatic sequences of vertical rectangles divided by precise, decisive folds, painted in either languidly expressive broad brush strokes, as in the magma of "Red Nude," or shown in pristine compositions, as in the deep green of "New Grip." A pleasurable ease radiates off these paintings, happily obliterating how difficult this is to pull off. *JOHN VINCLER*