“I’ve tried to show you what you see when you don’t know what you’re seeing. Anything, if you never saw it before, would be abstract.” Steir told BOMB Magazine in a 2003 interview about the spiritual underpinnings of her practice, the power of color, and relationship between text and image. “I’m walking a thin line between image and not image, between flat and deep space. I want to help the viewer see the picture. And the poetry of the title is part of the picture for me, it’s absolutely the same thing.”

Steir spoke with the Smithsonian Archives of American Art in 2008 for an oral history in which the artist reflected on, among other topics, her childhood, student days in New York, teaching, second wave feminism, and her influential friendships with artistic mentors and peers.

“The spiritual in my art is giving up control. My paintings are based on what I can do, and what I can do is not controlled... The control is in the weight of the paint, the temperature of the air, the movement of the air.” Steir explained to Interview Magazine in 2016 as she prepared for a survey at the Dominique Lévy Gallery in London. “I’m making art because I want you to look at that painting and I want it to affect you in some way, to change what you see, to change how you see it...[I want] the viewer to take it away to enhance, embrace, and elevate life.”

Steir was the subject of a feature documentary in 2019 from author and film-maker Veronica Gonzalez Peña, which was filmed over the course of three years and followed the artist as she worked in her studio and reflected on her career, inspirations, and process.

Lévy Gorvy debuted Steir’s first exhibition of new work in three years in 2016 exhibition. Kairos departed from earlier series but maintained the artist’s commitment to non-objective art that communicates between intention and chance.

Steir also completed a series of 11 seven-foot-tall paintings, an expansion of her Waterfall series, for The Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia in 2019.
Pat Steir (American, b. 1938)

*Very Quiet Silver Coast*, 1997-1998

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2022:102.1

“The spiritual in my art is giving up control. My paintings are based on what I can do, and what I can do is not controlled. So I give up control, and that’s the spiritual aspect of the work – taking what comes and relinquishing control. Although they look very controlled, they’re really not, because it’s all poured paint.” – Pat Steir, 2016

Pat Steir was one of the first women to gain recognition in the 1960s contemporary art world that was largely dominated by men. In the 1980s, the artist started to drip and fling paint onto her canvas, a technique inspired by “flung-ink” and “ink splash” painters throughout East Asian art history. *Very Quiet Silver Coast* marks a transition into Steir’s *Waterfall* series that began in 1998. The painting is titled for the Silver Coast in Portugal, which boasts both sandy beaches and mountain towns that feature spectacular caves and waterfalls.

*On view February 16 – May 28, 2023*
Pat Steir (American, b. 1938)

Summer Night, 2003
Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2020:88.1

Pat Steir considers herself a non-objective painter, disregarding the weighted terms of “abstract” and “abstraction.” Her nuanced appreciation of visual art and creativity makes her one of the most critically acclaimed painters of her generation. A diverse set of influences include her lifelong love of poetry; time as a professor at Parsons Institute of Design (now The New School), Princeton, and CalArts in the 1970s; the experimental compositions of musician John Cage; the pale grids of painter Agnes Martin; East Asian philosophy and religion; Japanese woodblock printmaking; and Chinese Literati painting.

The paint-flecked space of Summer Night expands on Steir’s celebrated Waterfall series, begun in the late 1980s, in which she developed her characteristic aesthetic: the pouring, splattering, and dripping of paint onto canvas. Steir resists comparisons to generations of Abstract Expressionist innovators through her resolute focus on medium and the element of chance. “I was trying to take my ego out of the art, my body out of the art,” she explained in 2018. Her idea “was not to paint but to let the paint itself make a picture. I want the paintings to express something in the will of nature...I was looking in color and paint for what makes the universe hang together.”

On view November 25, 2020 – February 28, 2021