



Left: Julia Bland, *Winter*, 2015. Linen, wool, canvas, velvet, ink, bleach, and oil paint, 87 x 85 x 3 in. Below: Martin Boyce, *Last Hours of Evening Light*, 2015. Painted aluminum, cement fondue, painted and stained steel, and brass wire, 90 x 116 x 47 cm.

frame's limits, to liberate the art dwelling within the functionality of craft. It's what one must do if, as the title of this compact gem of a show suggests, "...You Want to Be Free."

—Joyce Beckenstein

odd dance, a meditative partner leading an intellectual one through a delicate waltz, guiding the intuitive artist through her formal, graphic agenda with grace and ease. Bland relentlessly plays within these two extremes. If *Noon Ashes* sets intense color and vigorous shape to negotiating their roles within closed psychic space, *Spring Shadow* (2015) does the reverse. Here, the repeated loopy openings of a hand-painted, commercially crocheted curtain serve as a backdrop for painted triangles and insertions of linen and silk appliqués. Natural light, unlike *Noon Ashes'* painted light, penetrates this surface, putting in play another duality—this time an ephemeral one, with transient incarnations of abstraction casting shadows on the wall behind the suspended tapestry.

*Winter* (2015) conveys the temperature suggested by its title. Unlike the other tapestries, which combine many different collaged elements, this piece was woven as a single object; Bland then painted its surface in unremitting whites, grays, blacks, and woody browns. The tapestry itself is surrounded by a loom-like "frame" made from scraps of canvas twisted into rope and attached with thin, zigzagging threads of yarn. This "frame" pretends to be structural, but it's not. It's there to test the limits of the loom, the device that brought it into being. Like every other art vehicle or process, be it painting, bronze casting, printmaking, or digital art, the tool's functionality portends and, to a large extent, imposes finite outcomes. Bland challenges this inherent duality. Her creative impulse relentlessly pushes against the vehicle of its making, the

## NEW YORK

### Julia Bland On Stellar Rays

Keep an eye on Julia Bland. Her exhibition, "If You Want to Be Free," featured six large "tapestries" that are (more accurately stated) multimedia, textile-based constructions. Each one unfolds an intricate weave of complex dualities: simple geometric elements evolve into variegated compositions of seemingly mismatched swaths of material; a reverence for the traditions of drawing, painting, weaving, sewing, and sculpture gently shifts to allow irreverent trespasses across formal borders. Bland's search for new approaches to abstraction has led her to places such as Morocco where, in 2008, she studied Islamic art while on a Rhode Island School of Design fellowship. There, she found meandering arabesques ubiquitously commanding surfaces as diverse as mosaic floor tiles and intricately carved architectural façades—a smorgasbord of possibilities that clearly emboldened her to meander through art with an abandon of her own.

Bland's tapestries begin with drawings—those featured in this show consist of zigzag geometric elements traversing a grid. Two *Untitled* (2015) line "paintings," sparsely woven and

knotted compositions made from ink-dyed linen threads, further explore how Bland transforms basic plane geometry. Eventually her process explodes into visual complexities that, like Sufi meditations, defy quantification. *Noon Ashes* (2014), for example, consists of two large symmetrical abstract shapes configured from a variety of overlapping triangular forms. They dominate the composition, thereby granting it the architectonic strength it needs to sustain an animated universe of multimedia embellishments. In this respect, entering Bland's work is like entering a grand palace or mosque, sturdy sanctuaries providing symmetrical certainty for the dizzying arrays of abstract forms and stylized figurative motifs found within. *Noon Ashes* features a geometric grid reminiscent of a trellised wall, which serves as a visual frame for Bland's richly woven floral patterns mimicking luxuriant Jacquard upholstery. Though these fabric inserts boast the dense textures of manufactured cloth, they are hand-woven by Bland, who also reinvents her trompe l'oeil designs as delicately painted overlays.

Islamic art provides Bland with a platform on which to air both spiritual and intellectual voices. These dichotomies court each other in an