

sacred geometry

**MATTHEW CLAY BAUMGARDNER
SELECTED WORKS**

**April 1–October 1, 2025
Lenz Gallery**

THE GALLERIES AT FIRST PRESBYTERIAN
200 W. WASHINGTON STREET
GREENVILLE, SC 29601

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Sacred Geometry

SELECTED WORKS BY MATTHEW CLAY BAUMGARDNER displays the artist's exploration of the tensions that exist throughout our lives: light and darkness, intention and intuition, joy and sorrow, life and death. *Sacred Geometry* features artwork that leans into the light while displaying honesty about the darkness. Viewers will enjoy Baumgardner's precision and beauty, which is always accompanied by his whimsy and curiosity. You are invited to come and explore the tensions at play in your own life, and be encouraged that ultimately, the Light always wins.

This awareness of the duality of human existence is perhaps most noted in the artist's own life. Baumgardner wrestled with his faith and the reality of darkness throughout his life. He delighted in his four daughters. His studio in Travelers Rest, SC, bears framed artworks by his girls as well as handwritten notes to their dad. Baumgardner spent the latter years of his life living in that very studio. And Baumgardner's personal fight lives on through his artwork. The truth that Light ultimately wins is evident in much of his body of work. Baumgardner's expansive mind, one full of philosophy and beauty and wonder and curiosity, remains etched into the "mud" on his canvases and lights a path through our daily struggles to the beauty found in the greater whole. *Sacred Geometry* leads us through the last twenty years of his life as they remain in his work and shines a bright picture of the truth that God's angels do play all around us, that there are Windows in the Sky that create Places of Opening for us to engage with the divine, with our divine God, the Creator and Savior of the world.



*"Where the Angels Play," 2014, ©Estate of Matthew Baumgardner/Artists Rights Society
Photo by Tim Barnwell*

Artist Bio



Matthew Clay Baumgardner was born in Columbus, Ohio, on February 5, 1955. He moved to Greenville, South Carolina, in 1973 to begin his formal training in art at BJU under the mentorship of Carl Blair, Emery Bopp, and Darell Koons. In 1982, he graduated with an MFA in painting from UNC at Chapel Hill. Between his undergraduate and graduate studies, he submitted his first ever cube for the juried competition, “Art in Miniature,” at the Columbia Museum of Art in Columbia, South Carolina, where it won Best in Show. At least three related cubes were created in 1978-1979, but despite his success in this exhibition, it was nearly thirty years before he revisited his cube series. In 1983, Matt moved to New York City where he began his professional art career in earnest. He was awarded a national NEA fellowship in 1993 for his explorations in painting with pigmented gypsum, which he referred to as “mud.” In 2006, Baumgardner left New York, eventually settling in Travelers Rest, South Carolina, marking a period of transition during which Baumgardner was not actively painting. In 2009 he again devoted himself to “moving mud” and began construction on a custom studio, where he expanded his explorations of abstract painting, creating a body of work that included a return to the cube.

February 5, 1955–November 20, 2018

Artist’s Process

Layering and experience were central to Baumgardner’s work. Even the paint medium he used was not flat oil or acrylic, but a mixture called “mud.” His mud was a thick gypsum getting its color from Golden Acrylics or powder pigments. The thickness of the mud meant Baumgardner’s process took a great deal of time as he layered each color on top of the last to create depth and vibrancy. Using a pencil, Baumgardner would also carve into each layer of the still wet mud. Once the layers dried, he would either sand down and expose what had been covered, or leave it hidden. The choice to conceal or reveal his carvings were equally important to him because each choice contributes to the experience he desired.

Scan the QR code to see a video of Matt’s process making “Asemic Oracle #9” on display in the Lenz Gallery.



Level 1 – Works on Paper

MATT BAUMGARDNER, 2016 ARTIST STATEMENT - WORKS ON PAPER

Making works on paper has captivated me since childhood. I like the undaunted intimacy and nomadic portability of paper. The surface promotes both precise articulation and softer strokes plus experimentation with media, as conveyed by the diversity of the (exhibited) artwork. Whether a grid painting using pigmented gypsum, a detailed graphite abstract, a magical ocean view with collage elements or combinations thereof, the foundation of each piece is an intuitive architecture with glyph drawings, many hidden beneath subsequent layers. As I construct the work, these marks dance between fanciful and simple, lofty and humble, sacred and profane, still and kinetic, like the fractal impressions streaming through my subconscious. Each artwork takes flight as a noumenon capturing something from another plane seeking expression, informed by motifs and materials from nature to provide a glimpse into that realm. Absorbing each of these works on paper fulfills a number of different unspoken needs in me, and my hope is that they speak to you as well.

Level 3 – Selected Works

EARTH

Baumgardner's art pulls together the four elements: fire, water, air, and earth. Earth represents the beginning of life, like a seed taking root. Baumgardner regularly imbued natural forms with deeply spiritual qualities, explaining that his paintings were "captured, spiritual moments" and extensions of his layered, flowing thoughts. Matt's groundedness through an appreciation of the Earth and nature's cycles are highlighted within his earth paintings. His repeated geometric shapes add a sense of structure and stability to his works, while the patterns he creates incorporate a cyclical nature to his paintings which suggest the passage of time. His material use of pigmented gypsum, or "mud," which he blended with his hands, also gives a tactile process and result.

AIR

Air is ubiquitous, yet invisible. It is nearly impossible to represent the element so fundamental to our survival. Air, as Baumgardner represents it, is an atmosphere created by light and clouds. The haziness of the clouds, muted color palettes, and warm light in many of his works provide a sense of peace, complemented by his pearlescent grids. The reflection of physical light from the pearlescence gives a physical quality to air by embodying light and energy. As Baumgardner explains, the pearlescent elements "promote an internalized experience of the cosmos and yet at the same time an expansive one." Some of his works also contrast the light with the dark: the dualities of storms and the sunny sky. This contrast gives air a greater sense of life and movement—the natural world can be calm but also violent.

CUBES TEXT

Baumgardner began utilizing cubic geometries in the 1970s to superimpose structure on the chaos of his creative impulse. The cube form framed cosmic complexities through the essential reality of shape, building upon the conceptual legacy of geometric abstraction. Geometric abstraction is a form of abstract art which prioritizes shape over image to explore the fundamental structure of reality. Twentieth-century artists utilized basic square and cube forms to project stable structures onto the chaotic modern world. Kazimir Malevich's 1915 painting "Black Square" transformed modern art, marking the shift from abstract to nonrepresentational art and suggesting that pure geometric form could capture absolute spiritual reality. Baumgardner's cubes manifest a similar desire to understand the spiritual dimension of space through the basic unit of shape. Minimalist artists explicated the essence of reality through geometric form, emphasizing the physical experience of objects. Similarly, Baumgardner explored the intersection between lived existence and geometric form through intuitive mathematics—an unconscious human compulsion toward an inscribed natural order. The cube is an elementary, almost elemental form, nearly spiritual in its simplicity, providing the three-dimensional equivalent of blank canvas.



*"Scientific Prayer No. 17", ©Estate of Matthew Baumgardner/Artists Rights Society
Photo by Tim Barnwell*

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Special Thanks

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*Jay Bopp, curator, graphic designer,
art handler, and friend of the artist*

Kara Soper, independent art advisor

Chris Cantrell, exhibition graphics

*Riley Murphy, Personal Representative,
Estate of Matthew Baumgardner*

Acquisition Inquiries

Inquiries regarding the exhibited artwork or other available pieces may be directed to kara.blanken@gmail.com or baumgardnerart@gmail.com.



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One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days
of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to
inquire in his temple.

Psalm 27:4

Pursue His beauty.