# PATRON

ART / CULTURE / DESIGN



To interview Meg Cranston is to step into a world where color and form are not simply aesthetic choices but psychological, cultural, and historical arenas. Cranston experiments, tests, and sometimes even subverts established systems, whether it's color theory, social data, or the very structures that define visual hierarchy. Her canvases and installations are studies in perception, layering the familiar with the uncanny, and questioning our relationship to seemingly universal concepts. Cranston's work is an intricate balancing act—personal yet expansive, serious yet humorous, analytical yet deeply expressive. In her art, every color, every structure becomes a challenge to the ways we categorize,

codify, and ultimately see the world. We attempt to bring you closer into her world with this Q&A below:

**PATRON:** *You treat color not just as an aesthetic choice but almost as a subject itself. Could you speak about the process you go through in selecting colors and the psychological or cultural associations you feel each color brings to the work?*

**Meg Cranston (MC):** My process in selecting color is almost always rooted in a theory or program that I either adopt from an outside source or create myself. I like to test theories or what I call programs. I often use neutral or received programs (e.g., color theory) to generate unexpected results. Per color theory, the three primaries plus black and white should harmonize (be pleasing) in any combination. I've made paintings to test that theory. By limiting myself to three hues and mixing them randomly in various combinations, I have generated more unexpected novel colors than if I were operating purely from my preferences or by deliberately trying to create a color. It's exciting for me to mix a color I can't name. Is it grey or is it violet?

No artist chooses color purely intuitively. Instead, they have a lot of information (consciously or unconsciously) about how humans respond to color physiologically, emotionally, culturally, and politically. Artists understand the rhetoric of color – how it persuades. It doesn't take a genius to paint a bowl of fruit or, in Manet's case, a bunch of asparagus, but it does take ingenuity to figure out how to structure importance. Manet painted white asparagus because, in a witty way, he wanted the vegetable to be the brightest thing in the painting – to give it top billing. It would have been a very different painting if he had painted green asparagus.

Our experience of color is part physiological and, therefore, psychological /emotional, but it's also programmed culturally, historically, and politically. Girls often like pink not because they're girls but because they're human, and humans are attracted to warm colors, especially red and pink. It makes us feel good. Historically, pink was associated with nobility and calm control. Louis XV was often

depicted wearing pink as a symbol of his power. Only in the 19th century did wealth and masculinity in Western culture become associated with cooler, darker colors. But men still do wear pink. I've always found it funny that men wear pink while playing golf.



Meg Cranston
*23 Hours Straight*, 2024
Enamel on canvas
55 x 80 in

**PATRON:** Some of your work, like those involving charts or data visualizations, seems to toy with our cultural trust in information. Are you aiming to challenge how we perceive and value data, or is there a more personal narrative you're trying to reveal through this format?

**MC:** I've always thought data, particularly social science data, somewhat comical, so yes, I do toy with our trust in data and its ability to predict outcomes. I've also sometimes generated my own data and

predictions. I once made a work called *The Worst Years of My Life,* where I generated a system to define/record my bad years and predict future ones. It's been surprisingly accurate. It's owned by a psychiatrist who has it in her office.

Data has been currency in states since the earliest states in Mesopotamia. It's always been an economic driver, mainly to measure production and levy taxes. Despite its flaws, data drives our contemporary economy and culture. Of course, however, data is only as valuable as its inputs, and often, those inputs are suspect. AI, for example, can generate a cover letter in seconds, but the phrasing is usually cliché because it relies on available cover letters, which are generally achingly clawing.

In my current exhibition at Meliksetian | Briggs, I have a work titled *Organizational Chart.* One can find hundreds of examples of organizational charts on the internet based no doubt on various theories and data about effective organization. I like the ones that are especially Byzantine, with arrows pointing in every direction. It relates to art because many artworks, especially paintings, have a vertical hierarchal structure with a clear focal point, usually a figure.  I wanted to disrupt that with a fanciful horizontal organization without hierarchy. Who's the boss of this picture?
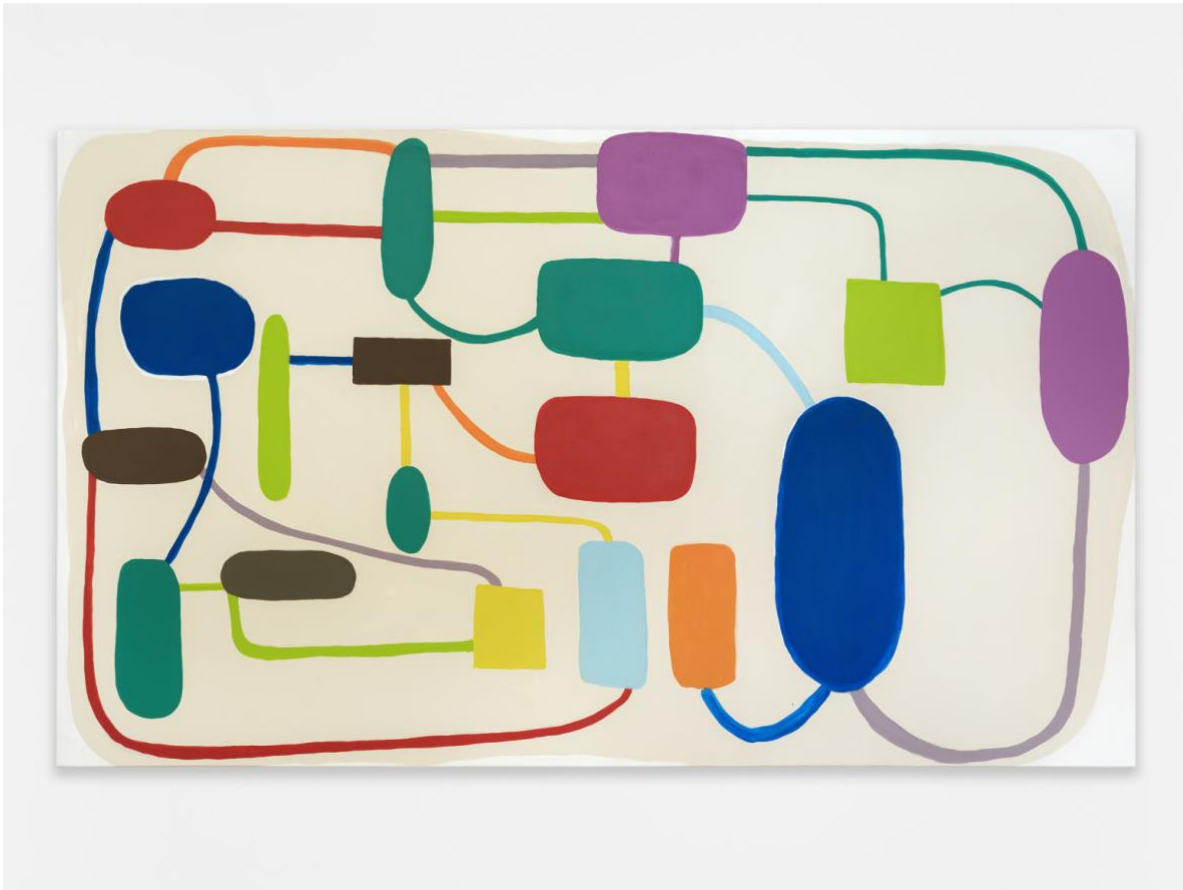
Meg Cranston
*Organizational Chart*, 2024
Enamel on canvas
52 x 88 in

**PATRON:** *Your work frequently reflects on themes of identity and personal narrative, yet it feels expansive enough to engage with broader social narratives. How do you balance personal experiences with universal themes, and do you feel there's a boundary between the two in your work?*

**MC:** I am interested in how the self is defined, constructed, and measured, though without any special interest in myself. I'm more curious about what we have in common than making claims about why I'm unique. For example, I have a lot of half cans of enamel paint, and I suspect others do too. It interests me why people store paint for years, sometimes decades.  I'd like to see other people's paint collection or a collection of half cans of paint from, say, the 1940s. I think I could infer something from

those collections. The boundary between my personal experience and common themes or experiences is blurry. I think that's a good thing. I am part of a whole.

**PATRON**: *How do you see humor functioning in your work, and do you think of it as a bridge to deeper layers of critique or commentary?*

**MC:** Even the most serious artwork must have some wit, or no one will respond, or they will only respond for a short time. People say my work is humorous, though that is never my direct aim. I instead play around with ideas we have received and ask why we think that? Most people don't want to be told what to think. I certainly don't.

The Mona Lisa is a very witty painting because Leonardo used all his technical and artistic virtuosity to portray a very bland, ordinary-looking person. Leonardo was a great wit. I also have a fondness for artworks that seem easy to make. I find Agnes Martin's work made with one color, a pencil, and a ruler lighthearted and beautiful. With the most economical of means, they just say yes to life. I admire comedians for the same reason. They are geniuses of refinement and concision.
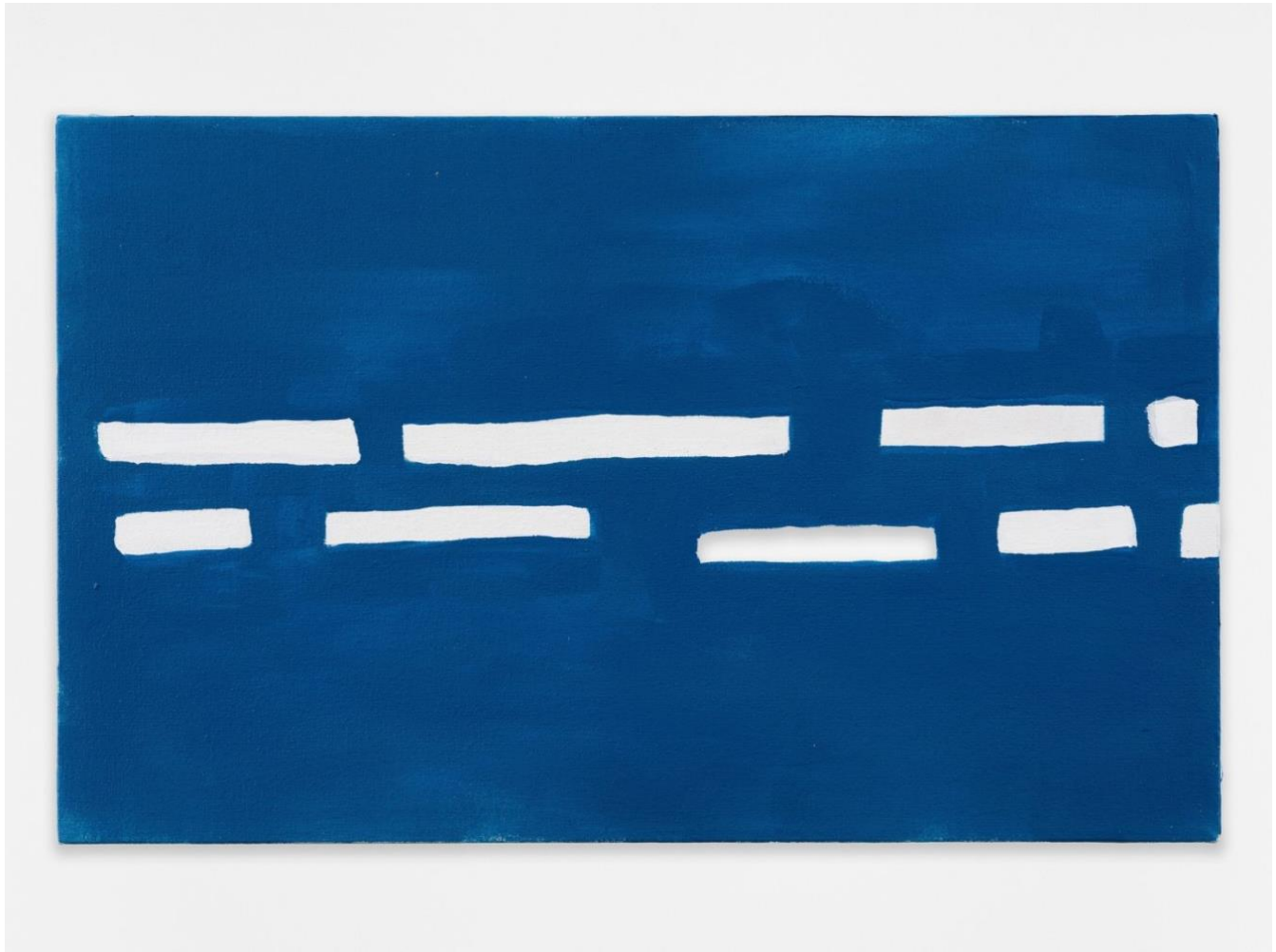
Meg Cranston
*Dark Side of the Road,* 2024
Acrylic on canvas
15 x 24 in

**PATRON:** *Reflecting on the trajectory of your work, how have your ideas evolved? Are there thematic threads that you feel have remained central, and are there new ones that have surfaced as your work has matured?*

**MC:** Overall my work has some themes or what I call organizing principles. They are: size or measurement, color, structure and scale. My last series of paintings was prompted by something van Gogh said. He said the painting is the palette meaning if the color is right the painting is right. I took that to an extreme by mixing paint directly on the canvas as I would on a palette. The new paintings

started with the observation that paintings with vertical compositions greatly outnumber those with horizontal ones. To upset that balance, I made horizontally organized works.



Meg Cranston
*Everyone Must Get Stoned*, 2024
Enamel on canvas
51 x 66 in

**PATRON:** *You mentioned that Everybody Must Get Stoned was inspired by our modern fixation on horizontal screens and the recurring imagery of falling debris and rubble in the news. How did this perspective—the way we consume images and information—shape your approach to the composition and impact of Everybody Must Get Stoned? Do you see this work as a critique of our passive*

*engagement with chaotic or troubling visuals, or perhaps as a way to reclaim and reframe these fragments of daily media consumption?*

**MC:** I guess it is an elemental truth that everyone must endure insult and injury (get stoned) and cope with that one way or another. Many people are enduring that today in a straightforward way — bombs falling from the sky. We see that every day on screens that frame violence pictorially and focus our attention. I wonder how that disciplines what we see and our opinions.



**P:** *Your fascination with Pantone colors has led you to collect and incorporate them into your work, almost like a cultural and aesthetic archive. What is it about Pantone's system that draws you in—are*

*you more interested in the colors themselves or in the idea of codifying and standardizing something as subjective as color? How do you see this practice of collecting influencing the themes or structures of your pieces?*

**MC:** I have always been interested in the sociology/anthropology and politics of color. Color choices today aren't subjective enough; instead, they are dictated by industry. The choice is minimal. The automotive industry figured out it was less expensive to make cars in a limited range of colors versus the spectrum available in other eras, e.g., the 1960s. Nearly every car now is black, blue, silver, or white. What happened to yellow? It's the same in homes. I live on Greene Ave. in Los Angeles, but no houses are painted green on my street. When I moved to my house twenty years ago, there were pink, yellow, sky blue, lime green, and even violet-colored houses. Now, they are nearly all white or beige. The Pantone corporation is one of the most obvious drivers of color totalitarianism. The world was less predictable when the average person knew less about design

To challenge the authority of Pantone and design more generally, I mixed up colors from the Pantone forecasts I have collected over the years—a red from one season with a blue from another. I used their program but scrambled it.