

*A Family Guide for...*

# GEOMETRY OF THE ABSURD: RECENT PAINTINGS BY PETER HALLEY

## COLOR

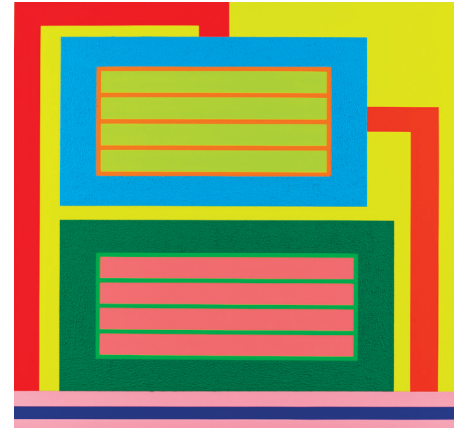
Peter Halley's paintings are connected to a style called **NEO GEO**.

*Look as long as you can at the colors in any one of these paintings.*

Halley's use of bright, bold, fluorescent colors make his paintings glow like **NEON** signs. You might have trouble looking directly at them for more than a few seconds. These jarring, clashing colors seem to vibrate, almost making us dizzy. He does this deliberately, wanting to both attract our gaze and cause us to look away.

*Do these day-glo colors remind you of anything else?*

Peter Halley, *Accretive Cognition*, 2010.  
Acrylic, fluorescent acrylic, and Roll-a-Tex on canvas.  
Speyer Family Collection, New York.



Glow sticks



Neon product packaging



## SHAPE

Although his paintings don't directly represent a specific object, person, or place, they do reference real things. In all of them, Halley uses the same simple shapes and modular building blocks (like the square) over and over again, generally only changing their size, position, and color. His shapes are **GEOMETRIC**, borrowed from the language of geometry.

*Do they remind you anything you might have seen elsewhere?*

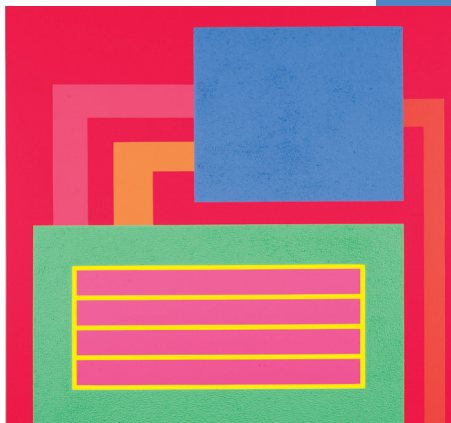
Halley calls his square and rectangular shapes "cells," referencing both a jail cell or prison that can isolate us (notice the bars) and the cells in batteries (such as cell phones) that connect us.



iPhone



Prison bars

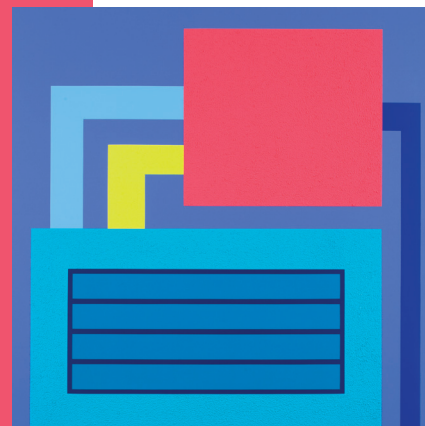


Peter Halley, *Closing the Ring*, 2007.  
Acrylic, fluorescent acrylic, and Roll-a-Tex on canvas. Courtesy of the Gilfenbain Family.

## CONNECTION

*What do you see that connects these cells?*

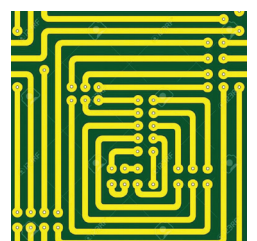
The lines and tubes that connect the cells look like computer circuitry, or may remind us of diagrams, the connecting shapes and lines of a company's organizational chart, or even a kind of electronic ant farm. Halley calls these "conduits" and believes these systems (technology and corporate structure) can be both positive and negative. He has called them "simplified versions of our complex digital world connected by technology."



Peter Halley, *Bluff*, 2007.  
Acrylic, fluorescent acrylic, and Roll-a-Tex on canvas. Collection of Nicholas Hunt.



Organizational chart



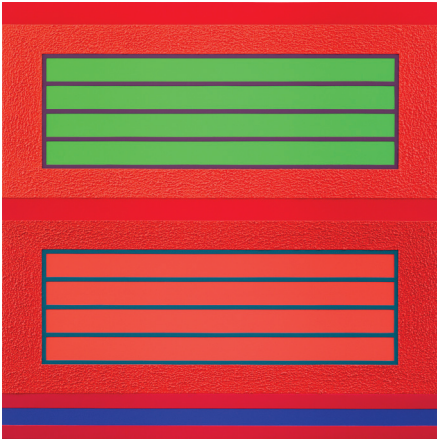
Circuit board

# FUN FACTS

## TEXTURE

*Do you notice a part of these paintings that seems thicker, bumpier, or more textured than the others?*

These raised, bumpy areas are painted with “roll-a-tex,” a paint often used in motels or office buildings, especially on ceilings, to create a rougher cottage cheese or popcorn-like surface.



Peter Halley, *Self/less*, 2015.  
Acrylic, fluorescent acrylic, and Roll-a-Tex on canvas.  
Courtesy of the Artist.

## TITLE

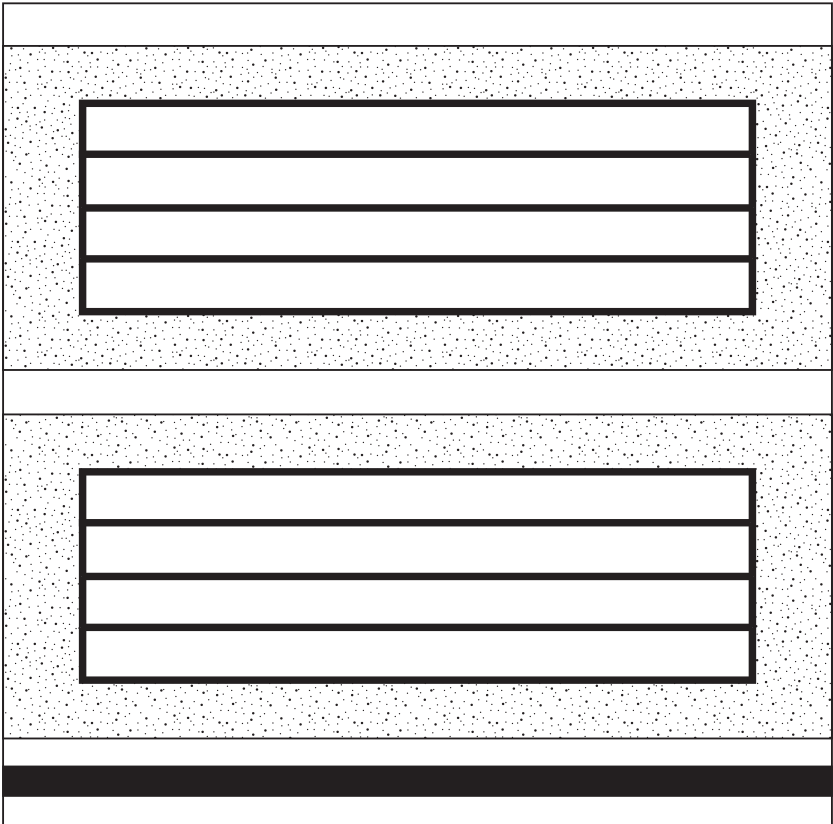
*Have you read the titles Halley used for his painting? If not, read a few of them now.*

Titles can help us understand more of the artist’s intent (the meaning he wants us to find). But in this case, Halley is playing a game with us. The titles he gives these paintings are taken from movies (*Bluff*, *Self/less*, *Arranged*, etc.) but not because there is any direct connection between the film and the painting. In fact, in almost every case he has never actually seen the movie!

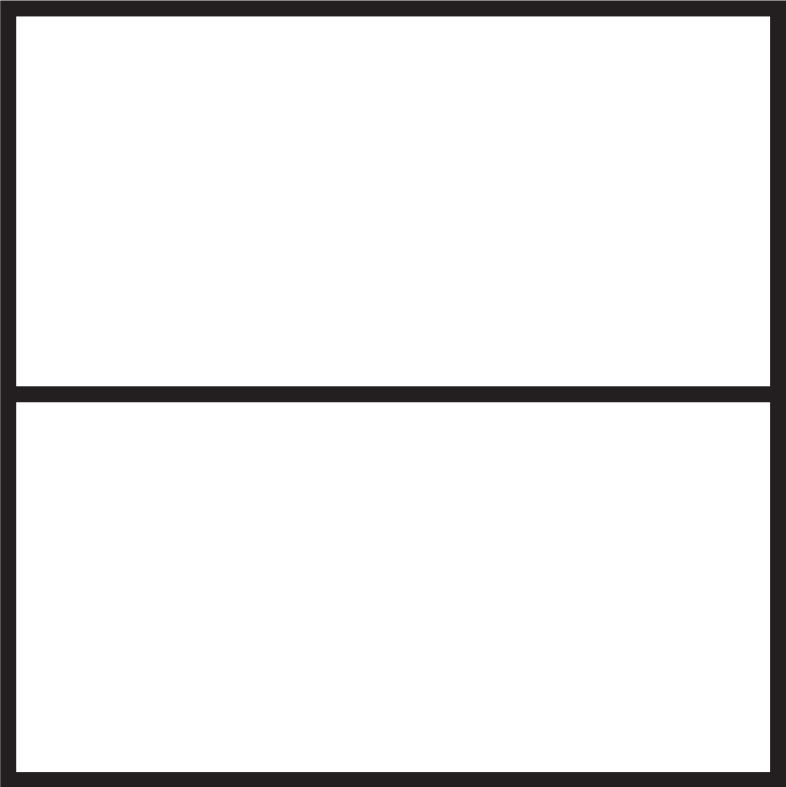
# TAKE IT AND MAKE IT

### A DIGITAL WINDOW

Color in the line drawing to the right (inspired by Halley’s work) using the same bright, contrasting colors that you see in the painting. Try using a combination of colored pencil, markers, and more to give the colors a different texture or feel.



Line drawing of *Self/less*



### A WINDOW ON NATURE

Halley has said his paintings “are a way of thinking about the future when we are no longer looking out the window but enclosed in a technological universe.”

In the space to the left, escape technology by drawing a natural scene (trees, grass, sky, etc.) that you might see looking out of your window at home or school.

*Use the same building blocks of art that Halley uses (squares, rectangles, lines, texture, and color) to create your scene.*