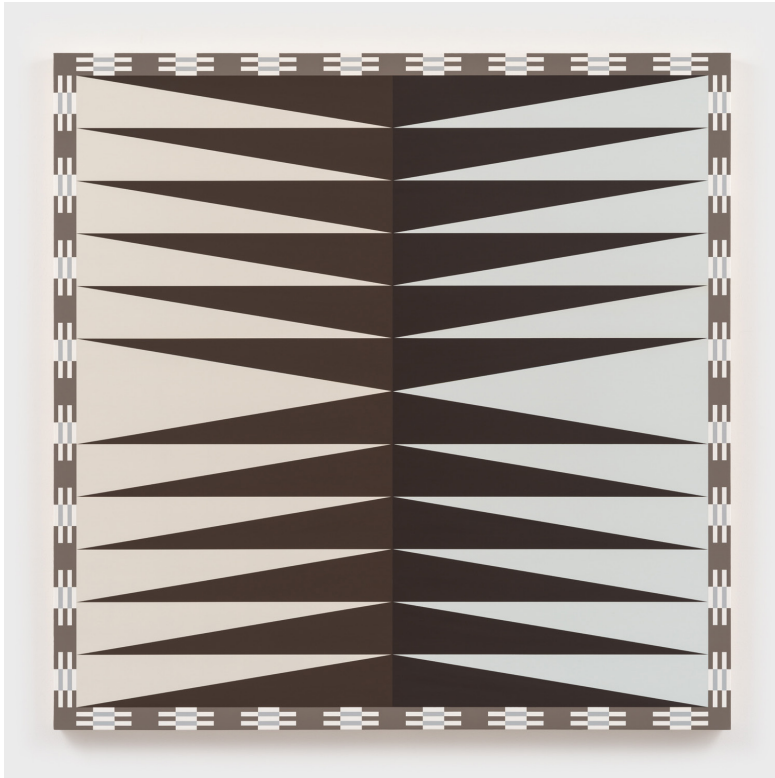


# ARTFORUM

Jordan Ann Craig

Michelle Grabner, 'Jordan Ann Craig: Block Museum of Art' May 2025



Jordan Ann Craig, "Sharp Tongue: Working on Empathy", 2024. Photo by JSP Art Photography.

## CHICAGO

### Jordan Ann Craig

BLOCK MUSEUM OF ART

From beginning to end, Jordan Ann Craig's painting process is methodical, direct. The Northern Cheyenne artist begins by culling abstract motifs from Indigenous art and artifacts, including quillwork, Pueblo pottery, and Cheyenne beadwork. She then translates this visual information into hard-edge and color-modulated compositions in Photoshop. She transfers the digital mock-ups onto canvas and applies thin layers of acrylic paint, using masking tape to produce her sharply delineated forms, which are summoned from exactly conceived matrices of chroma. Craig's largest institutional exhibition to date, "it takes a long time to stay here"—the title of which is taken from the 2022 poem "spinning air" by Northern Cheyenne poet m. s. RedCherries—featured seven canvases. It also included a specially made textile used to upholster the cushions of two wooden benches installed along the center axis of the modestly sized gallery within the Northwestern University museum's first floor.

Every component in every piece was deliberately and fastidiously conceived. Craig's work relies heavily on mathematical organization: Repetitive grids are formulaically subdivided, allowing for certain kinds of directional changes and shifts in scale and pattern. The roughly three-and-a-half-foot-square *Baby You're So Blue*, 2021, occupied a wall near the gallery's entrance. Its composition—of rectangular modules containing a tight arrangement of narrow azure bars set side by side, placed both horizontally and vertically against a shimmering white field—is exquisite but orthodox. The artist tidily synthesizes her references, which are in dialogue with all manner of Minimalist

abstraction produced during the twentieth century. Countering this airy austerity was *The Space Between the Clouds and the Horizon*, 2024, a large diptych that employs a heavy, brick-like arrangement of lines in various reds that are interrupted on each canvas by a column of mountain-like or gable-shaped forms, which help to firmly cement the composition in space.

*Sharp Tongue: Used to Cut Deep* and *Sharp Tongue: Working on Empathy*, both 2024, hung together on the south gallery wall. Each is organized around a central alignment of spiky, attenuated triangles—the works' namesake tongues. The spiny midlines dividing the compositions allows the paintings to possess two distinct regions that are nearly indistinguishable in tone. In these canvases, the interrelationship between color and shape is less predictable, and thus visually and conceptually more active—the paintings are rich in their evocations of atmospheric light and landscape. This pairing unfolds organically and mysteriously, surpassing the cool arithmetic of the works' digital origins. Because of this, they were the most surprising and satisfying offerings here.

Craig's flat, graphic surfaces double down on reductivist painting sensibilities. However, the dyed natural fibers of the blue, beige, and off-white upholstery she created for exhibition's furniture provided a warm contrast to the harsh precisionism of her masked-off canvases. The comfortable gallery seating was meant to solicit protracted viewing of the works on display—even the show's title suggested that we stop and linger. But the few pieces that actually transcended the artist's calculated perfectionism were, indeed, the ones that made us feel most welcome.

—Michelle Grabner