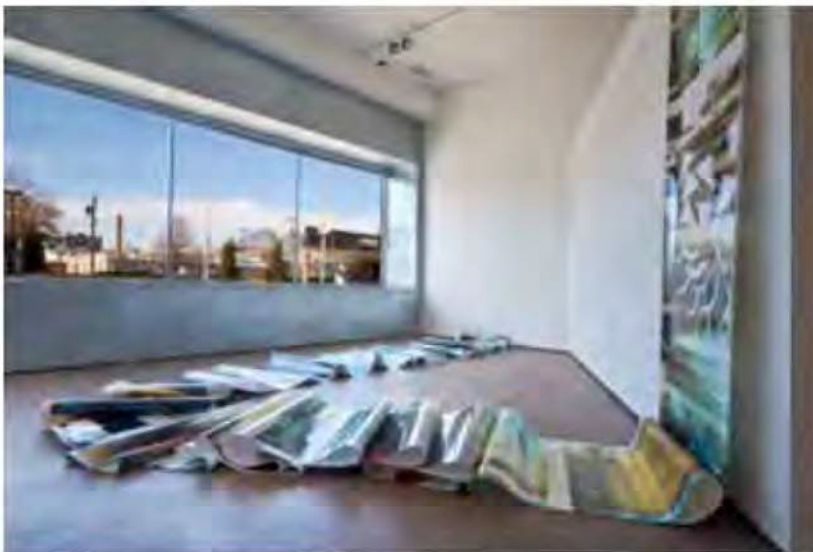


Nothing Square About These Pics
**Mariah Robertson's images in 'Let's Change' unroll across the
floor and ceiling at Grand Arts.**

BY ALICE THORSON
The Kansas City Star



Brooklyn-based Mariah Robertson liberates photography from longstanding conventions, as seen in this installation view of falling and folding photographic paper in her exhibit at Grand Arts.

Mariah Robertson wreaks havoc with photographic conventions in her exhibit at Grand Arts.

In "Let's Change," the Brooklyn-based artist rebels against the precision of traditional darkroom techniques and the instant, no-muss, no-fuss approach of digital photography. Robertson trained in sculpture at Yale, and turned to photography on her own. In 2006, Grand Arts artistic director Stacy Switzer included several of her large color photographs featuring otherworldly translations of everyday

scenes in a group show, "Haunted States."

Since then Robertson has gone wild, commandeering 100-foot-long rolls of photographic paper as the arena for no-holds-barred experiments.

Robertson does for photography what Sam Gilliam did for painting 30 years ago, liberating it from the traditional rectangular frame and letting gravity have its way. In Robertson's hands, the photographic paper behaves like fabric, dangling, draping, piling in folds. The color, deployed in snippets of images and passages of abstraction, seeps and spills, drips and pools.

The exhibit opens with "11," one of three works utilizing an entire photographic roll. The 30-inch-wide strip climbs the wall at the gallery entrance and makes a scallop-y trajectory across the ceiling. Toward the front of the space, the paper descends to the floor in a long loop and finishes up on the ceiling again.

The piece is printed with a melee of colorful images and chemical events, beginning with overlapping frames of cellular abstract patterns. These give way to glimpses of a platter and what could be shadowy hands, before shifting to a series of striped images that look like light coming through window blinds. The visual momentum continues in streaky passages of painterly drips and patches and culminates in a sequence of aquatic blue abstractions.

With its curling and swooping kinesthetic rhythms, the work emits a palpable sense of energy, as if spring-loaded with the performative actions that brought it into being. As the Museum of Modern Art's Eva Respini notes in the accompanying brochure, "the artist's body is an integral part of the work and how it is made.

For the work titled "12," Robertson printed images on a big photographic roll but didn't unfurl it for the show. Standing on the floor midway through the exhibit, the loosely wound roll hums with potential, but refuses to fully reveal its contents.

Installed at the front of the gallery, "4" begins on the floor, climbs a low wall and cascades down the other side where it falls to the ground in a series of rippling, ribbon-candy overlaps that curve to the left. Nature and landscape images — birds and palm trees and fronds — imbue this piece with a romantic, tropical air.

The exhibit includes several large framed works, in which Robertson expresses her transgressive impulse by her casual cropping of the photographic paper. The vertical composition "59" features a dimensional geometric honeycomb of color and light below

an assortment of planar and geometric shapes. The top edge is irregular and crudely cut. And the paper is not centered in the frame, so that the upper fifth is left empty. The photograph reads like liquid in a shallow boxy vial.

Robertson pursues the same strategy in the horizontal "100," a zigzag abstraction that suggests overlapping sheets of white paper shadowed with deep red. Here the sides have been irregularly cut, leaving a narrow zone of white space between the photograph's right edge and the frame.

The small north gallery at Grand Arts displays two additional framed works in rich hues of purple and red enlivened by black patterning and shadows. While the cape-like shape of "7" furthers the equation with textiles; the decision to display "8" on a black ground imparts a decorative feel, at odds with the show's guiding spirit of energetic rebellion. The same can be said of a large framed work, "13," a Pat Steir look-alike that re-enacts the veils of drips and painterly incident of abstract expressionism.

Robertson is at her best unloosed, courting chance, embracing accident and pushing her materials into places they've not gone before.