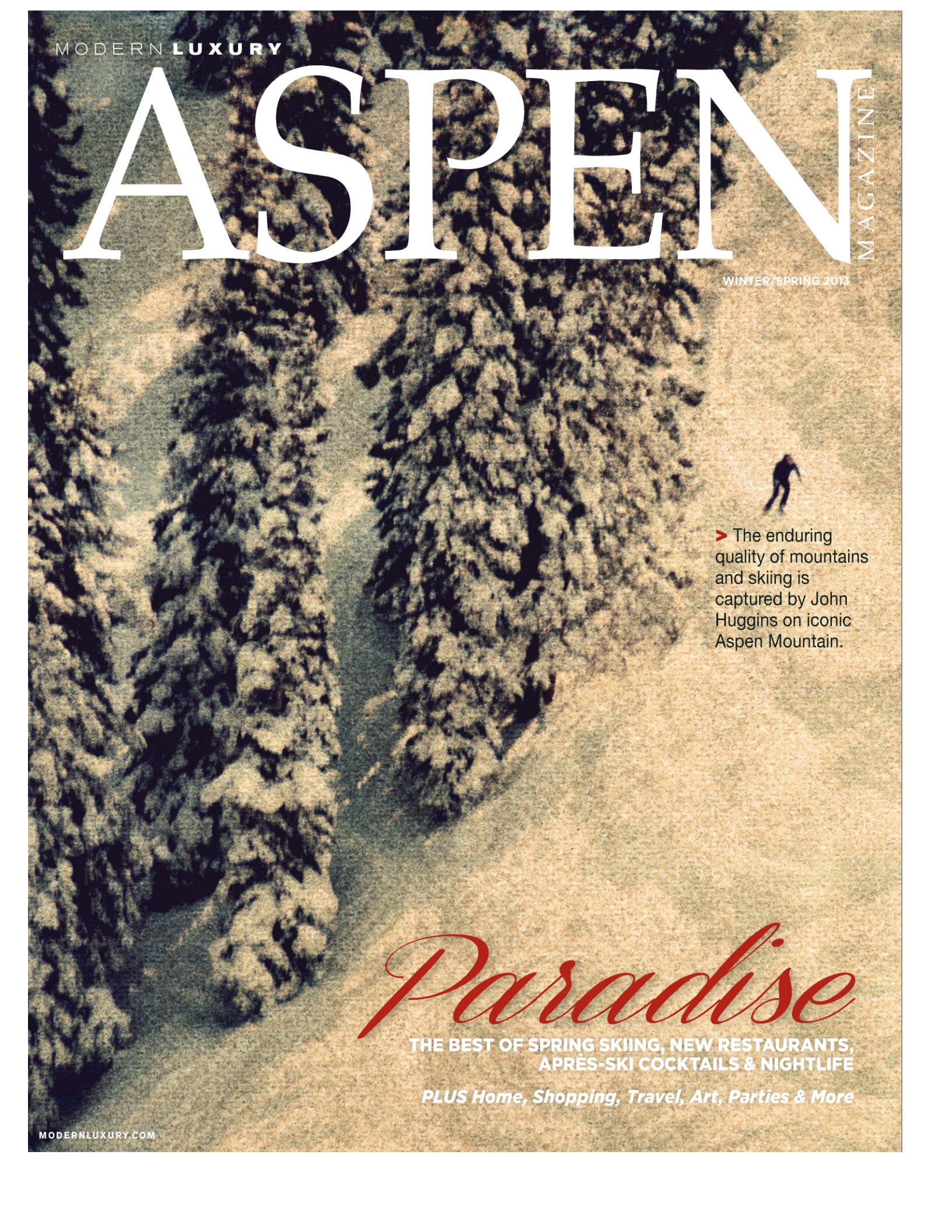


MODERN LUXURY

# ASPEN

MAGAZINE

WINTER/SPRING 2013



> The enduring quality of mountains and skiing is captured by John Huggins on iconic Aspen Mountain.

## *Paradise*

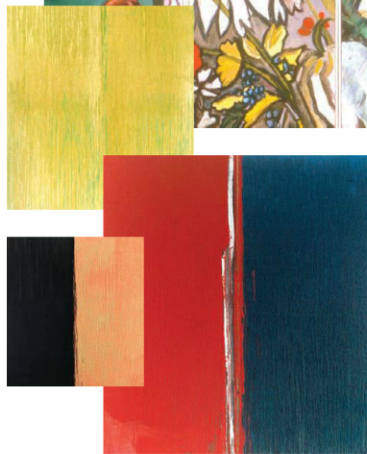
THE BEST OF SPRING SKIING, NEW RESTAURANTS,  
APRÈS-SKI COCKTAILS & NIGHTLIFE

PLUS Home, Shopping, Travel, Art, Parties & More

# THE ART OF ABSTRACTION

In anticipation of **Pat Steir's** exhibition of new work at Baldwin Gallery from March 15 to April 14, *Aspen Magazine* reflects on the impact of the artist's career.

| By Hannah Flegelman |



LOOK WITHIN Clockwise: "Gold Over Green for Aspen," 2012; "Red and Blue with Silver in the Middle for Aspen," 2012; "Pink and Green with Paynes Grey No. 2 for Aspen," 2012

of her work. Steir is credited as an "artist's artist" for the richness, intensity and sense of wit in each canvas.

A seminal piece from Steir's body of work is *The Brueghel Series: (A Vanitas of Style)* (1984). Comprising 64 panels that reinterpret Jan Brueghel the Elder's 17th century still-life painting in different pictorial styles, the series is charged with concepts at the core of art history and the human experience. Steir wrote of the work: "All art which endures the centuries can be considered great art—it symbolizes to us that there is something common among us—to our condition. Art that endures allows us to speak of the human condition." After earning widespread recognition

**F**or the last 40 years, Pat Steir's monumental paintings have dazzled viewers with poetic fervor, arousing an emotional connection between the viewer and maker, or viewer and idea. Art history, feminism, Buddhism, politics and war; all subjects are embedded in the symbols and landscapes

for the comprehensive series, Steir set out to speak of the human condition through abstraction. She internalized John Cage's philosophy of "non-intention" by pouring the mixed pigment directly onto the canvas, relinquishing much of the control to gravity. These paintings depict natural forms, notably the waterfall, and resemble traditional Chinese landscape paintings. Instead of a division between "here and there," the scapes seamlessly fade into each other across a vast space. Her 2011 exhibition at Cheim & Read Gallery in New York, entitled *Winter Paintings*, presented two-paneled abstraction. Steir deliberately sets up a dichotomy; the juxtaposition of light and dark pigments along a central vertical edge is evocative of Barnett Newman's zip paintings. By pairing contrasting colors that vary in the density and saturation of the layered pigments, Steir asks what is light and dark, open or hidden, not only in the layers of paint, but also in the human spirit.

Connecting Steir's oeuvre is an emphasis on process. She is a conceptualist, albeit a very physical one; she conceives of the parameters for each work before she begins the action, toying with how much control and finesse she can achieve. Each painting is in fact the result of a performance; her body dances as she creates each work, and the paint dances as it pours, drips, and splashes along the canvas. Just as she approaches painting, Steir views her career as an ongoing exploration: "All of my work is a search and an experiment. I don't consider anything finished, I think of it as all only a step along the way."



ARTISTIC EYE Steir views her work as an ongoing exploration.

ARTWORK PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHEIM & READ, NEW YORK; STEIR PHOTO BY WILLIAM STEEN