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An Exhibit Whose Time Has Come

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Phyllis Plous admits that six years is a long time to put together any exhibit. Her timing seems auspicious, however. When the curator began organizing a show of abstract painting in 1982, in her words, the art form was "relegated to the dust bins." Today, as "Abstract Options" is about to open, that is all changed.

"There's been a definite acceleration of interest in abstraction since the mid-'80s," said Plous, who with Frances Colpitt co-curated the 32-painting exhibit, opening Friday at UC Santa Barbara's University Art Museum.

The project began when Colpitt, a critic and art historian, arrived at UCSB to teach, said Plous, University Art Museum curator. "Neo Expressionism was so rampant at the time and we began to wonder why we only saw Abstract art in artists' studios."

Ten contemporary artists from the east and west coasts are represented in the show. The co-curators chose artists that differed in their treatment of surface and form, but shared a preference for a lush richness.

"The show perhaps is about sensuality and the process of painting," Plous said.

"Unlike Neo-Geo, this is not dry illustrative abstraction. I don't like the word *pretty* very much, but I think it's going to be a beautiful show."

Artists in the exhibit are Edith Baumann-Hudson, Moira Dryer, Heidi Gluck, Nancy Haynes, James Hayward, Mary Heilmann, Julian Lethbridge, John M. Miller, Paul Mogensen and Stephen Westfall. It is scheduled to run in Santa Barbara through Feb. 26, then travel to Evanston, Ill., and Santa Clara, Calif.