

Catherine Lentini: *Day Vision*

I am writing this in a tiny room full of art and plants, sitting on a white Ikea chair in front of a postcard hanging fifteen inches above the sleek wooden surface of my desk. The postcard captures Big Sur, California. The Bixby Bridge and Santa Lucia Mountains are on the left, and coastal views of the Pacific Ocean are on the right. Looking at this scenery, I recall smelling the ocean, eating at Nepenthe, catching the coastal wind, or driving on Highway 1 surrounded by that vista. The visuals trigger my thoughts. Memories and meaning open up through the act of looking.

The repetitive hard-edge language of grids, geometric forms, and gradients of Catherine Lentini's paintings similarly evoke variations that reveal ideas. In the gallery, we see about fifteen paintings. Up close, the paintings are reductive, an analysis of the physical limits of painting. But the limitations generate the conditions for possibilities. The permutations of their spatial structures with alluring colors create moments of pleasure in thinking and looking.

Consider for a moment *Untitled (Phthalo Blue Green Shade) I - III*. The stripes of gradation that expand off the edge in the foreground and the grid in the background form the figure-ground spatial relationship. As the gradation stops at a certain point, it reveals an interstice between the picture plane and the painting's surface. The handling of syntax accentuating this middle-ness is allied with geometry and control. Its angularity and sharpness are emphasized by the repeating and expanding gradation of stripes. Synchronously, in the flatness of the two-color grid lies a quieter scenery at a distance.

We could just say: "Oh! It's a space! Have you seen the work of Julian Stanczak (1928-2017)? Lentini definitely knows how to use tape! Next question." Here's my suggestion: the gradation with its velocity echoes an unstoppable future, and the grid with its simplicity illuminates the irreparable past. Isn't this the rigidified zeitgeist of today being stuck in-between? Having said this, the position of Lentini's interstices varies in each painting as well as their colors because such paintings represent more. As we look between the past and the future, from multiple points of view, we consider different moments of the day for joy and life's possible alternatives.

The viewer is physically and mentally repositioned while moving between the works in the gallery. Such repositioning is not only arranged for aesthetic variations but rather to concretize the essential means and ostensible concerns of the present of the world. When we approach *Untitled (Phthalo Blue Red Shade) I, II, IV*, one half is slightly or significantly larger than the other. The shifts in color and the size differential of the elements create a sense of imbalance. All at once, this dissimilitude between left and right creates a vertical line of tension. Not only does this maneuver differentiate one part from another, but it also creates two visual destinations. By putting us in the position to choose a side, this move presents a promise that one side is better than the other. In that case, the visual line of tension provides one part with a sense of alienation and vulnerability and the second with an abiding faith in new

beginnings. The sheer existence of such dichotomy stands as a critical reminder of the possibility of happiness.

Then, what if we considered paintings to be what they actually are - gifts on which we can look and enjoy the moment of looking. In *Untitled (X)* and *Untitled (Y)*, the stripes of gradation consistently stay inside the paintings' frames. The width of the supports is similar to the width of our bodies. Along with these facts, the dazzling color combination holds our gaze. So, here we are, standing in front of these paintings unable to move. And it is the moment of such intense visual focus that slows us down, creating an opening for meditative possibilities. The journey of looking can be the destination. In a world where everything feels immediate, fragmented, and automatic, this is a worthy project.

In *Night Vision III*, Lentini doesn't play tricks but rather suggests depth through her lexicon of repeated structures. The geometric shapes intrude upon each other as a tactical gambit. Everything is moving, and all the components are positioned into a non-hierarchical relation. The only thing that is set to stand out is the black-and-white circle in the bottom-left corner. Even in the collapsing structures and anxieties that come with them, there is always a way out. Checkmate to that instability.

At this point, it goes without saying: if the fundamental vernacular persists, Lentini's rules are never the same. The series *Circles* has a noticeable square format. The colors of circles, by the nature of their combinations and continual repetition, are way more intense than the single colors in the background. Given that it is the largest series in the show, along with the proximity between each painting on the wall, we encounter them all at once and have to move frequently from one work to the other. This produces a feeling of fleeting instants. The circle colors flash before our eyes, disappear, and reappear again. As a pure visual sensation, the circles resemble fireworks against the sky. Their vibrant appearance evokes feelings of joy, happiness, and freedom.

Still sitting on a white Ikea chair, but now in Brooklyn, I wonder what if Sol LeWitt painted an Agnes Martin? What a perfect Lentini that might be. Her colors trigger emotions instead of indicating optical three-dimensionality. Her ideas lead to new ideas. But going back to the beginning, California is a different state of mind where the sense of light and space is so unlike in comparison to other parts of the country. Lentini's paintings are also not like anything else. They are not intentionally spiritual, but their vision lifts us nonetheless. Isn't that what we need from art?

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