
Black and White and Red All Over Greg Bogin's Colorland

In the rainy June of 1997 Greg Bogin made a set of 21 gouache drawings while in Venice, Italy. They have a six by four square grid, with a corresponding criss-cross of five horizontal and three vertical white lines. These divide the blocks of colour like the gridwork of an acoustic drop ceiling. Together the gouaches form an alphabet ranging from the immediately recognisable to the totally abstract. The changes, the struggle for resolution of form and the simplicity of the single square stencil with which the drawings are executed are all clearly visible. Many squares are blacked out, whited out or painted over with other colours. The smudged edges and the sometimes imprecise placement of the blocks give the drawings a soft, almost vulnerable feel.

The works on paper serve as the basis for the paintings in this exhibition. By way of contrast, the paintings are unassailable, impermeable statements in which an aesthetic usually only found in supermarkets dominates. As though lit from behind, these fresh and crisp images incorporate the glare of fluorescent strip lighting. They hang like aisle signs, completely object-like and with an emphatic two-dimensionality of surface. The squares nevertheless appear to float on a white background of indeterminable depth, despite the first impression of being behind the white bars. The optical dark spot at the centre of each set of four squares is the consequence of the force-field created by the white bars moving from behind to the front of the colour and back again. The edges of the individual squares look sharp enough to slice salami. The gessoed white canvases seem plastic and antiseptic while the black adds weight and intensity.

One painting, reminiscent of the Duane Reade logo, carries the apt title "The Frozen Food Section, another "Nutella". In these paintings Bogin continues dealing with symbols and the presence of abstraction in our everyday lives. While his earlier paintings can be read as charts or logos, the new work look machine-readable. They are written in bar code, with summary information on price, supplier and shelf life. The new paintings are credible as signs and the titles themselves contain snippets of information – "A Ray of Sunshine in Your Morning" or "Coo-El", meaning "cool", but these clues more often lead astray than help in the interpretation of the work.

There is a temptation to see an image in the abstract. With the title "Portrait of the Artist's Dog", the artist himself succumbs to this impulse, even though the painting is based on the "J" drawing with no attempt at figuration. "Bubba Smith's Hand" is also a name based on an ex post facto impression which helps to identify the paintings among the generic title of "Colorland". Bubba Smith had been a well-known football player in the seventies, and his hand, with its raised index finger, calls for our undivided attention.

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The only irrefutably recognisable shapes are the artist's initials. This might seem immodest, but so did Barnett Newman's signature at the foot of many of his paintings. Sometimes inverted or reversed, g,b, G and B can be interpreted into more than half the drawings and their corresponding paintings in the series.

Just like the designers of the Bauhaus whose furniture is intended to look machine-made but in fact can only be painstakingly assembled by hand, Bogin takes a great deal of time and goes to a lot of trouble to give his paintings that industrial, mass-produced touch. The shiny surfaces and bright colours make them look like rows of glazed fruit in candy wrapping. When the occasional remaining edge of a prior coloured square is visible behind the black, the paintings shimmer like a coal fire.

The sculptures complete Bogin's vision. With more immediately apparent humour the three-dimensional work is put together using the same modular assembly system as the paintings and drawings. "Stump" is a cross between garden furniture, Lego and a custom kitchen. "Green Giant" looks like the Swamp Thing gone through a hydraulic press. Both sculptures would be perfectly at home in the playground of any Auto Grill. In Bogin's world, it seems everyone is happy in the end.

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