

At Platforms Project, Athens IS-projects presents

An international selection of artists in a presentation by invited artist/curator Jacob Cartwright

Paolo Arao, Pat Berran, Jacob Cartwright, Vince Contarino, Gabriele Evertz, Christian Nguyen, Erin O'Keefe, Senem Oezdogan and Patricia Zarate

In this project I've sought to explore the duality of painterly works that emphasize immediacy while nevertheless drawing from the historical continuum of abstract painting. The works presented here are fundamentally experiential, for whatever historic connections are discernible the paintings operate visually, and thus are firmly rooted in the moment. Overall there is an emphasis on work that formally does something and takes that experience as its primary subject.

Curating this exhibition of New York City based artists at the invitation of the Dutch art space IS-Projects struck me as an echo of another exchange between the two places - namely Piet Mondrian's move from the Netherlands to New York City in 1940. Mondrian was warmly received by the small yet tight knit cohort of artists dedicated to abstract painting there; shortly after his arrival Mondrian accepted an invitation to join the NYC based American Abstract Artists group. AAA was founded in 1936 and continues to this day, this exhibition includes three current members, Gabriele Evertz, Patricia Zarate, and myself.



Gabriele Evertz, Gray Scale Series, Yellows, acrylic on canvas on panel, 30.5x30.5cm, 2006

A historic through line is further reinforced by formal continuities between Neoplasticism, the founding members of AAA, and the work on view here. Mondrian and the tenants of De Stijl had no small influence on early members of the AAA. The American's synthesis of the most advanced art in Europe, directly fueled as well by the arrival of others expats such as Josef Albers and Hans Hoffman, laid a groundwork for the rise of American abstract painting in the 1940s. While these foundational achievements were eclipsed by the banner headlines of Abstract Expressionism and Pop in the 1950s and 60s the reductive lingua franca of these early American abstractionists arguably came to flower in the 1960s via the color field and minimalist painters whose work Lawrence Alloway called Systemic Painting.

One of the richest ongoing veins of Systemic Painting has been the Hunter Color School, a group of NYC painters centered around Hunter College who emerged in the 1970s. What has united these artists has been their focus on sophisticated organizational schemes that seek to distribute pure color to its greatest effect. Gabriele Evertz, has been a central practitioner of the Hunter Color School and her influence both as an artist and as an art educator in NYC is immeasurable. Another featured artist, Christian Nguyen studied at Hunter when Evertz was employed as studio manager there; exhibiting them together here weaves a welcome intergenerational thread through the show.

While this historic overview may seem out of place in an exhibition whose title invokes the “now” I would submit that New York City itself has a relationship with the present moment that moves in two directions at once. When navigating the city as a painter it’s impossible not to be aware of the legends attendant in the very idea of the city, but doing so is always at the service of a place that is, by design, ever hurtling forward. It’s this paradox that I seek to embrace here, a place where the sense of history is precisely what propels the new.

It’s worth noting that while I’ve framed this show and its context in terms of painting a number of artists are working outside of the medium, if still within its issues. Senem Oezdogan uses rope to create rectilinear work in a visual play on weaving. Paolo Arao uses colored and patterned fabrics to create sewn paintings that engage directly with traditional quilting. There are historic parallels here as well, knowing that De Stijl expanded its scope beyond painting to the applied arts. The range of influence here should in no way be seen to be circumscribed by Modernism, Erin O’Keefe’s feeling for color and flattened space is heavily influenced by pre-Renaissance painting and Christian Nguyen invokes early frescoes and tile work in the palate and geometric structure of his work. Conversely Pat Berran connects his work directly with the visual language of the art on skateboard decks, broadening and democratizing the use value of abstract art. Ultimately this is what makes Athens and its palpable connection of contemporaneity with the ancient such an ideal location for this show. The idea of painting that I would like to put forth here is that of a discipline dedicated to a very old, pre-lingual way of knowing, a form of visual communication that always feels familiar, if mysterious, when encountered. Like wiping fog from a mirror, each generation reveals its own self while performing this time honored action.



Christian Nguyen, Lancelot, emulsion on panel, 36x28cm, 2017
Christian Nguyen, Vesuvius, acrylic on canvas, 51x40.5cm, 2018