

Galleries *By Edith Newhall*

Rhapsody in ultramarine blue

Slacker artists they most certainly are not. Husband-and-wife team Marcia Kocot and Tom Hatton have been known to labor day and night on their projects. Their latest series, "The Color of Blue," at Larry Becker Contemporary Art, was no exception.

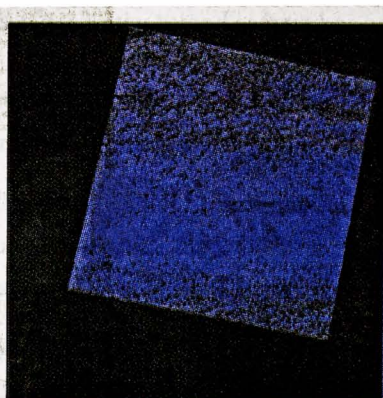
As with many recent projects produced by their nearly four-decade collaboration, the team worked while they were awake, in a well-lit studio, and while they were half asleep, in the middle of the night, their studio shrouded in darkness.

For this series, an exploration of the color ultramarine blue in paintings (Kocot and Hatton have worked in a variety of media, photography and video among them), the artists combined two concepts of color in their works. One concept represents blue as the human eye perceives the pigment, the other as seen through the code for blue from the medieval Heraldic Color Code, which indicates it with a series of horizontal lines.

Considering that Kocot and Hatton's new paintings all depict geometric shapes — typically a rectangle within a larger rectangle, although one painting features a large circle — and all share the same hue, modest scale, and materials (they're made with oil paint and oil stick on linen over wood), they're surprisingly varied. Knowing how the team works, it's easy to assume this is largely due to each artist's nighttime semiconscious efforts, although they set up their basic compositions for paintings during the day.

A conscious daytime decision, clearly, was to paint rectangles or frames around the central geometric shape in gesso, leaving a portion of sized linen unpainted. In the areas where the paintings are gessoed, the blue appears lighter; in the ungessoed areas, the blue can appear to be as dark as black, tinged with indigo. The horizontal code lines and paint application simultaneously suggest the surface of the ocean and the image of static on a TV screen.

The strongest impression each of these paintings leaves, though, is of a view through a window onto an intense, magnetic blueness: the allure of the night as experienced during the predawn peregrinations of these two sleepwalking artists.



Kocot and Hatton's painting "Untitled" ("The Color of Blue" series, floating square), at Larry Becker.

Larry Becker Contemporary Art, 43 N. 2d St., 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, and by appointment. 215-925-5389 or www.artnet.com/lbecker. Through April 18.