

On Color

Kocot and Hatton's newest body of work, the "Axis" series, was begun in 2012. The start date of the first painting was 21 April 2012, included as part of the caption information that accompanies each painting almost like a biographical note. Omitting the end date, they reserve the option to make changes, as much a conceptual stance as it is an actual practice. All are *Untitled*, the paintings consisting of oil and oil stick and linen over gessoed wood panel, the colors also carefully noted as part of the description. Monochromes or nearly so, these works are extraordinarily rich in hue, their materiality readily apparent, their presence expansive, even animate, responsive to the available light and to the viewer's position and point of view, revealing a "slightly different painting" with each shift of position. "Watching the painting's form change as the viewer moves, the role that geometry plays in color's structure becomes more evident," they said.

Kocot and Hatton's meticulous, labor-intensive projects (they work in a number of disciplines including video and photography) can seem very methodical and precise, and in some ways they are. However, in other ways, their projects are anything but controlled, based as they are on color's physical properties and psychological repercussions, its complexities and nuances. To focus their color studies—color has been a constant in their thinking for more than four decades—they impose a number of parameters at the start of each undertaking.

For the "Axis" paintings, an ongoing project consisting of 32 works as of this writing, they chose shape, size and a color code as the common denominators. For the shape, they created a "non-square square," as Hatton called it. Kocot pointed out that it had no right angles although only one angle is clearly not a right angle, their shape in opposition to the usual 90-degree rectilinear support that has been associated with European painting since the Renaissance, creating a subtle tension in the disjunction as it resonates between what we see and what we assume we are seeing, a kind of lesson in attentiveness. The idea of the non-rectilinear format was taken from their earlier "Poetry Series," which were "portraits" of Chinese and Japanese poetry, inspired by the columnar layout of the characters, its outline non-rectangular, recalling the visual as well as verbal experiments of the Concrete poets.

They decided on two sizes: one measures approximately 14" and the other approximately 22," a size that is smaller than traditional paintings and again, the overlap between the expected and unexpected exquisitely energizing. Each support

can be positioned more or less eight ways, depending upon the nature and impact of the colors, the shape rotated and sometimes flipped until the color's center of gravity is found, its axis determined. The pigments for this project are all metal-based for consistency and for the reflection and refraction of light. The colors were applied according to a medieval heraldic color code the artists discovered some 25 years ago. For instance, the structural code for blue is represented by horizontal lines, and the red code by vertical lines, Hatton explained, and established to standardize production, the colors predetermined with no surprises.

For Kocot and Hatton, however, while the code bolstered the project's conceptual foundation, it served as a springboard, not as a restraint, to make the qualities of color more visible. The results were the opposite of preordained, the color in combination with the shape ultimately dictating what the painting would be, despite the code that was referenced. However, once they determined the shape of the support, they proceeded to empirically discover what color would be most congruent with it and what the best orientation for the color, what its individual axis would be, affecting not only the "fidelity" of the color but also its "vibration," how it activates the space around it. The axis they determined for orange, for instance, appears to demand more wall space than any of the other colors they experimented with, and not only because it is such an intense shade. Blue's axis emphasizes a horizontal flow while red's axis stresses its verticality, the color's upward and downward force. White, they said, has no code that they have discovered. It represents all of the codes, since white light is composed of a full spectrum of color. They poetically likened it to seeing all the stars in the sky at once—which would result in a white sky. Indeed, their white painting appears star-struck, dazzled, the surface a textured pattern that advances and recedes, spatial determinations elusive, as the positions of constellations are to the naked eye.

As well as in an "awake" (conscious) state, Kocot and Hatton frequently work in the hypnopompic state in which ego is subdued and with it self-censorship and authorial clamor, reminiscent of the automatism developed by the Surrealists, although they preferred a hypnagogic, more cognizant state. Much of this also depends upon intuition but it is an intuition honed by decades of experience and accumulated expertise. At times, a painting they are working on is not successful and they need to discard it. Other times, they change its position and that satisfies them. Looking for color's fluidity and gravity, they don't cling to any single criterion. They freely admit that they don't know everything about color even after all this time—who does?—but they do know that there is more to it than being attached to an object and pigment is only one element used in its creation. As Kocot and Hatton have demonstrated throughout their career, color is an independent agent, although bound by historical formats and conventions.

Whatever systems they employ, they are constantly searching for ways to further their research, to make their work go deeper. The takeaway for the viewer is a bracing color experience on multiple levels that is not only about the sensation of color but also about the nature of perception. “Some paintings,” they said, “need to be actively watched rather than simply looked at.”

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