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Like a Sequence of Thoughts: Ann Pibal at Lucien Terras

by David Rhodes

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325 Broome Street 1W (between Chrystie Street and Bowery)

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Ann Pibal, DWHT2, 2013. Acrylic on aluminum, 14-1/2 x 19-3/4 inches. Courtesy of Lucien Terras

In the paintings of Ann Pibal, quietly resonant color and stringent asymmetry assert a hard-edged intimacy. There is an implied scale beyond the actual size of these small pictures in acrylic on aluminum. Her current show presents two series, both from 2013, hung at the same height on opposite walls of this long, rectangular gallery space. The titles hint at specificity without reducing meaning to something prescribed or directed: *RBWC* a group of five paintings with gold as a background color, face *DHWT*, six dark blue and brown paintings.

The gold paintings constitute a single, multi-part work, whereas the dark blue and brown paintings remain a series of related, but independent works. This fact adds complexity to serial thinking. The two groups of works contrast structurally, as well as conceptually—the gold are light filled and somewhat reflective whereas the blue and brown ones are light absorbent and close in tone. Perhaps the former tend toward an idealization where the latter are more earth bound and rational. But such generalizations are qualified by connections between the two groups, with constant and subtle variations at play and a sometime withdrawal from, and undermining of, symmetry as a given. Often close symmetry – more akin to the slight off kilter of the human body than exact mirroring – is like a ghost or reverberation within the image rather than a formal presence. We are aware of it even though it is not, in fact, fully expressed.



Ann Pibal, RBWC2, 2013. Acrylic on aluminum, 10-1/2 x 17 inches. Courtesy of Lucien Terras



Ann Pibal, RBWC3, 2013. Acrylic on aluminum, 12-3/4 x 17-3/4 inches. Courtesy of Lucien Terras

All the gold paintings contain a regular ten-inch bounding square that itself contains concentric squares that radiate, each a different color, in a rainbow sequence. Over the course of permutation within this set, horizontals become diagonal and one work may appear as an enlarged section of another. This turning and focusing is actually like a sequence of thoughts, at once both intuitive and analytical.

RBCW 2, reveals itself to be increasingly complex once the presumption of any straightforward balance has been, all be it incrementally, thoroughly undermined. A fast assumption, like a reflex, might lead to seeing the painting as only iconographic in its apparent simplicity—a single stem of parallel lines vertically off-center and flanked by two squares. But a moment later, the viewer is engaged in discerning comparative differences—thickness of line, difference of color, variable spacing, placement of shape, corresponding horizontals. In contrast *RBWC 3*, using the same colors and linear elements, demonstrates just how much change can occur within restricted means, enlarging a sense of ongoing possibility, within designated formal and conceptual frames. Like one stanza among several in a poem, or one fugue following on after another, the ensemble sense of RBWC is actively built.

The dark toned color of the *DWHT* paintings, together with solid shape, represents something quite other to those of the sharply graphic RBWC. In using a lot less contrast between the two colors, blue and brown, not only is the light crisply internal, but time seems to move more slowly, too, and the space is gradual in its expansiveness. In *DWHT 2*, a receding pair of centrally placed, symmetrical, inverted V's are beneath a slightly off-center horizontal line—consisting, like the V's of two adjacent lines, one shorter and blue—as if this horizontal could itself be converted into a V. This off balancing is so slight that, once noticed, it charges the painting with a silent, calm, and yet, occasionally surprisingly tense, emotional force. Josef Albers, and Pibal's contemporary, Tomma Abts, both come to mind. The beauty, common to all of the paintings, is that the shifts, when located, are as much felt as they are measured. Pibal's art is not one of cool formalism. There is a precision here that does not exclude either intellect or sensual pleasure. Neither of these attributes is reduced because of the presence of the other; on the contrary, they combine to enhance each other.