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artcritical

Kevin Finklea

By: Vicky Perry
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Kevin Finklea presents reductive panels of great beauty, each highlighting an obsessive adoration of color. The attachment to color lies in color's inconclusive nature. One can never know what it is exactly. Indeed, indeterminacy is at the core of Finklea's enterprise.

The panels are modest-sized, personal but not intimate, made of either Plexiglas or MDF. All panels are exactly sanded to produce rounded corners and edges. The panels are displayed several inches off the wall so they seem to hover. This separation from the wall affords the works an independent presence from the room's architecture. Additionally, reflected color from the back of the works, softly infuse the walls with a tonal halo. Although we are facing a white rectangle, we sense the presence of unnamable color fields buried below the delicate surface.



*Shift #3, Thioridazine, 2005,
Acrylic on MDF panel*

In this series, the color rectangle, whether it is white or another hue, is clearly a foregrounded presence on a disappearing background. Both the aluminum panels and the hazy Plexiglas panels refuse to present themselves as solidly as does the color rectangle. The background might compare to water or ice. This almost invisible background, combined with attention to scale and proportion, creates a traditional type of pictorial space -- almost a portrait of the color that gives a clue regarding Finklea's conceptual grounding. His work leans more toward the early Russian Suprematists than to more recent minimalism of the late twentieth century. However, this is actually what makes the work so contemporary in feel -- the sense of having digested a broad swathe of art history and declared that an inversion of Malevich in Plexiglas is allowable and necessary.

Meanwhile the composition holds a 21st-century restlessness. Although a sense of an ideal world is suggested by floating the inner rectangle off the edges, there is a brittle

quality; the color forms are positioned so close to but never synching up or aligning with an edge. The colors seem to violate the magnetic pull of the edges and hold their distance in stubborn tension. No romantic vision of closure is tolerated.

On the other hand, Finklea is turning his back on contemporary consumer society's hyper-aestheticized sensationalism and visual overload. The reductive quality is potent rather than nihilistic. Within the quiet space that these paintings carve for themselves is a moving display of gesture. Finklea is primarily an object-maker. Controlling the surface is key, so hand-sanding models the slick panels. Layers of acrylic paint are carefully applied without any mask to guide the edges. Although not self-declaring, a hint of gesture is found in the slightly uneven color application. The aluminum paint especially reveals these subtle variations. In contrast to a mechanical application, wherein these slight color contrasts would be considered "mistakes," the marks are of interest in displaying their handmade creation.

Care, too, is evident in the exacting color mixes. Finklea tints each aluminum panel to reach an adulterated state of reflectivity. We can hardly imagine why one shade of orange is finally the artist's choice -- this illustrates the largely unknowable personal references of the artist. What matters is that this choice, this willful gesture, creates for the viewer a new context for that color. It's so staged that we feel we are seeing the color for the first time.

Again we confront the resolute inconclusiveness of these works. Where is the information? We see white rectangles painted on a fog-like panel or a rather straightforward tone on an aluminum panel. It's as if we face a blank canvas or a powered-down computer screen. The indeterminacy lies within the viewer. We -- as viewers -- are the "paint" for the canvas and our thoughts fill up the "screen."