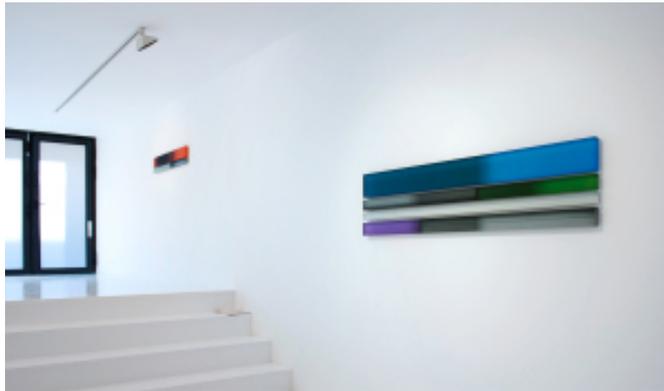


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# Visual Discrepancies

## A Reflection of the Synthetic

By Brent Hallard  
August 9, 2011



**Brent Hallard:** *I think we live in a funny color world: I mean the hills and trees, they are green, rust, brown, hay, and they are soothing. The bay, well that has every personality under the sun, and the moon... and I think of your work, and I think of the light that is much less in the hills and more in the bay, while also a reflection of the synthetic.*

**Freddy Chandra:** For me the color of things becomes more poignant when its perceptual presence asserts some kind of independence from its source. Bluish dusk framed by a window... or driving in the rain with water drops obscuring as you look out the window at the glowing red light: these are all recognized.

But how do these things translate from recognition to sensational experiences? Being awash in blue, red, violet, or any other colors: even if only in the space of the mind.

I often have a hard time answering questions about the use of color in my work. The process itself is intuitive, maybe to the point where the colors in a specific piece become a given, as if there was no other choice. And maybe it's always a reflection of the synthetic, as in everything has to be synthesized to start with.

**Brent:** *Which brings us to an interesting point: you mention the fleeting moments, your example a red signal blown out of specificity by the rain on the windshield, the color exploding into an experience. And in a sense it is a shared experience, I can hear the wipers and the driving rain. I have my personal take on all of this, though it becomes collective as long as we have had the red light, the car, and the rain, or something similar. This way it's not only the color that registers but also all that color signifies and addresses. It is then that the color is synthesized, released from any one label.*

*We did have the chance to talk in your studio before you left for Milan about the earlier time-based work and how that has grown into the newer work.*

**Freddy:** Yes, I was glad you came to see the most recent pieces I created for the show at Fabbri C.A. in Milan. I should perhaps give you some background to how my work has evolved. Painting was really where I had my first experience of engaging myself with the idea of art making. This was back in '99; I was in the middle of my architecture course at Berkeley. At first, I think I simply drifted into painting in order to find a more direct experience of using my hand in a way that did not feel like an analytical

exercise. But of course, the moment this engagement started to feel alive, it required me to periodically take a step back and perhaps analyze what was going on. It was then that I saw the connection between the paintings I was making—which actually felt more like drawing within the space of painting—and architecture, or the visual language that I acquired through the study of architecture: the structuring of space through time, and time through space. It then seemed to make sense to explore working in three-dimensional space again. In graduate school, my work was primarily about finding ways to build out into real space what I was trying to do with my early paintings. I completed several time-based installation works in the period from the start of graduate school into the four years that followed, up to 2007. The final installation in this series was *...three minutes from now...* at the Kala Art Institute in Berkeley. These works employed constructed objects integrated with multiple light projections within an architectural context. These pieces suggest sequential visual movement through different points in space. From 2008 on, I re-shifted to doing works that are wall-based. This partly happened because I felt a need to do work that would require me to have a somewhat consistent daily practice, a practice where I would be able to move through ideas more quickly. Having said that, I can see returning to three-dimensional space again in the future.



*Thrum*, 2010, Acrylic paint, UV stabilized resin and UV protective varnish on Plexiglas, 13 x 72 x 1.5 inches (33 x 183 x 4 cm)

**Brent:** *I remember your piece with the taut optical fiber at San Jose ICA, 2008. It was probably one of your last architectural time-based works (maybe the Headlands was the last). I should mention that nothing (no thing) moved in this installation unless you, who engaged the work, moved. What shifted was light, and for me that ties the earlier time-based work with what was to come: the use of the stationary object, here the taut threads of optical fiber, enhanced the fact that the interaction is very much part of creating the experience.*

*You insert drawing within the space of painting and architecture, or the study of architecture. I see your practice very much part of drawing. The way you work, looking down over the piece on a bench, and the instruments that you employ to draw the color out, remind of a draftsman's drafting board and tools. Though you are probably talking about a more conceptual relationship with drawing with painting and architecture?*

**Freddy:** Brent, you make a very good point about *Fugitive Horizons* at the Institute of Contemporary Art. The first iteration of this installation took place while I was in residency at the Headlands Center for the Arts in 2007. Cathy Kimball, who is the Executive Director of the ICA, came to see this, and it was subsequently shown in an exhibition there initiated by Nancy White called *The Space Between*, which was also where I first met you. The fleeting nature in the experience of this piece is absolutely tied to the movement of one's body and vision; a slight physical shift could potentially alter your perception of light and material within it. I haven't consciously thought of this piece as being a link between the earlier time-based works—where elements of an installation (light from video projections) literally do move around—and the current wall-based works that are static in the literal sense while implying movement. But it makes complete sense.

This installation is very much about drawing; stretching each one of the hundreds of monofilament lines literally felt like drawing in space. The act of drawing/pulling a mark/ a line across space is a common denominator for me.

Although my current work is usually referred to as paintings, I often feel they are more about drawing. Yes, they are obviously painted. Yes, my use of color recalls that of color field painting. But, the work comes together through the physical process of drawing: pulling a mark across space. In this case, I am making a distinction between making a mark in painting, and making a mark in drawing. I think that

mark making in drawing is about marking space, and marking time. The clarity of the structure itself and the rhythm it creates are important in relation to the resulting experiential quality. And in this way, it leads back into architecture. From conception to completion, making these works feels like drafting an architectural blueprint, or scoring music.

**Brent:** *Both the architectural blueprint and the musical score are packets of information that tell the interpreter how things will turn out, while the actual structure/space of the architecture and the performance or recording of the music is what the partaker gets to experience. Clearly what you are saying is that you are the producer of the pieces you make and those who end up experiencing these visual scores or compact architectures don't need the middle player to get it. Are you asking your audience to work a couple of jobs?*

**Freddy:** At face value, the answer would be no. This is one way I look at it: the blueprint or the score and its tangible manifestation are the same entity. In a sense, I am interested in having transparency in the relationship between the logical structure and the lyrical flow surrounding the work. The audience clearly does not have an opportunity to literally construct the work, nor is there anyone to re-perform the piece to be experienced.

This is unlike what happens in the case of Sol LeWitt's work. The work starts as a set of instructions—analogue to a score, perhaps—and for the work to be tangible, it has to be re-constructed or re-performed in a new situation each time.

I do think that if there is enough structural transparency, the audience has an opportunity to synthesize what they see into an experience that is specific to that moment. Perhaps this is about attempting to create an open-ended structure to allow for a synthesis that is not generalized, but specific to each individual and to that particular moment. Does this seem paradoxical?

**Brent:** *Relinquishing specificity... I guess this is what non-objective art does. But we are talking about a concrete thing, whether it be a concert of indefinable gestures and marks, or, be it... one color over one thing, we can respond without the need to give it a name. And that, perhaps, is optimum life?*

*Are you consciously making decisions to keep the work open-ended, or does that just happen as part of the course?*

**Freddy:** I don't believe I can build it into the work, or perhaps I do at times, and this is when things usually don't work. I feel more connected to the impulse of wanting to make when I can forget any deterministic rationale for it. It becomes about really trying to have a connection between what I can take in observationally, and what I can do to translate these sensations. Over time, certain parameters are established, and the visual language gains a more familiar structure; but I think this place of being open-ended has to do with not knowing what I can see before I see it. The physical work, in the end, is just a vehicle, an instrument, an artifact; but hopefully to make possible another layer of experience. These statements may seem obvious on the one hand, and nebulous on the other, and are more about a general drive behind working.

**Brent:** *As objects the work is impeccable. There is not one thing out of place, not a mark to be physically seen. Color appears saturated, embedded in a thick block of Plexiglas. But this is not really the case. In earlier work you use resin. What made you shift the material, and how did that move the sensibility as well as where color physically sits?*

**Freddy:** Often, the shift in material was initiated by the need to find a process that is flexible, as well as archival. There were slight permutations along the way, in this regard: graphite embedded in layers of resin, colored resin that is cast, colored resin applied on Plexiglas, and so on. Most of the work I had in my solo shows at Brian Gross Fine Art (San Francisco) and Walter Maciel Gallery (Los Angeles) used a combination of these methods.

At some point, the process of casting solid blocks of custom tinted resin became cumbersome, and I felt I was going through a lot of technical steps that took me out of a certain zone of focus. To prepare for my exhibition in Düsseldorf at Galerie Lausberg, I decided I had to find a process that would feel more uniform or 'simplified'. The work now employs solid panels of clear Plexiglas as physical support.

Subsequently, all colors, value gradation, and marks/ lines are applied to the surface of these Plexiglas blocks using transparent and translucent layers of acrylic paint with an airbrush. Because of the paints' translucency and how it allows light to be transmitted through, there is this illusion that colors are embedded within the physical support.

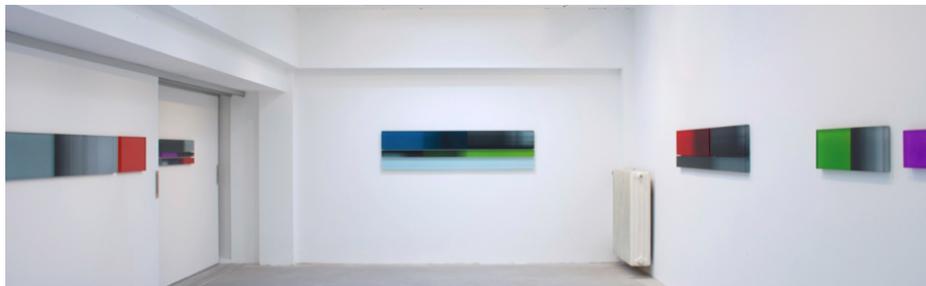
I think this shift to using paint on a transparent support gives me more freedom in keeping certain elements of a composition open during working: colors, value, line density. Marks are made more precisely, to the extent, perhaps, that they are not 'physically seen'. The use of an airbrush certainly has a lot to do with this; as a tool, it distances my hand from the surface I work on. All layers of paint, from the ground colors, to the modulation of line density, to the build-up in value gradation, are collapsed into a single physical film that sits on the surface of the support.

As you mentioned, the colors in my work have become more intensely saturated in the past year, year and a half. The use of paint film as a material sort of opened a valve for me. I am more aware of the surface tension of the picture plane, and consequently of the spaces before and behind this interface. The push and pull of color intensity, as well as the use of greater depth of value, are what come out of this, I think.

**Brent:** *I like how the film gathers there on the surface, and that you simplify the process, which in turn intensifies the color experience. But all said and done, there is still a lot of process involved once the color gets put down. The color shifts, is still embedded, and leaves it all sort of ambiguous.*

**Freddy:** Yes. I think the varnish and the thin layer of resin on top of the paint film further remove most traces of touch. This does perhaps create some ambiguity in terms of how everything is done: what creates the color, is it image or object, is it surface or depth, and so on. Maybe what I am trying to get at is making something that doesn't look like it has been made. Does this make sense?

**Brent:** *Like the sunrise! So what happens when you take the color out?*



Freddy Chandra, *In Place of Equivalence*, 2010, installation view

**Freddy:** I like that analogy. So the phenomenological experience of something potentially overwhelms or transcends its physicality.

Okay, now you must be referring to *Whether*, a monochrome I recently completed for the exhibition *with e-h o t* at Margaret Thatcher Projects in New York. When color relationship is taken out of the mix for the most part, I had to decide what kind of activity (and how much) I wanted a composition to have. With the color works, quite obviously, color plays an important role in affecting the structure and atmosphere of a piece, its rhythm and its resonant frequency. Without apparent colors to work with, I realized I would be dealing with a whisper. And probably because this was my first time revisiting a non-color situation in a long time, it felt a little bit like walking in the fog. This was exciting. But I also thought this whisper still has to have a clear, albeit less apparent, structure, in order for the piece to happen. Here, mark making was done with neutral iridescent acrylic paint, which has mica as its pigment source. The iridescence of the mica causes the painted surfaces to shimmer and change its appearance, depending on one's point of view and the light. I decided that I also needed to have different surface sheen for the different parts of the piece: high gloss, satin, or matte. This is about modulating the surface tension you may feel in interfacing with the image. All these elements then form a kind of architecture to move around in.

I just now realized this. In a sense, with the color works, the structure falls into place in order to achieve some kind of overall resonance; while with the non-color works, the resonance seem to come first, and subsequently I have to find the underlying structure. This is probably too neat of a summation, but I think there is a kind of reversal going on.

**Brent:** *With the color taken out you do read the thing as a whole first, and then the structure, which includes, in this case, the use of different finishes, thus a wider sense of space. I notice, too, that you become very aware of the wall, also the base or back of the work. Perhaps without the color you are apt to notice everything more, including the subtle shifts in color in the apparent non-color forms, even the room itself... but this also works with the color pieces. What role does the space (the gallery) play when viewing your work?*

**Freddy:** In contrast to the architectural installations, which I consider to be site-conditioned and site-adjusted work, the wall-based work are largely self-enclosed systems. Having said that, the wall spaces in between discrete elements of a single piece are integral to how you read the work. External space punctuates and disrupts the internal space of the work. Rhythm is formed as presence relates to absence. Furthermore, within the context of an exhibition, I tend to explore the interrelationship between individual compositions. One is a precursor to another, and to an extent, this affects how a whole exhibition may be sequenced as an integral spatial installation.

**Brent:** *I noticed that you made a vertical piece, and another that pulls apart the self-enclosed systems, at least in the organization of the modules... you have recently moved into a larger studio, more of that architectural space, do you think that it will have an impact on a new body of work, possible greater fragmentation, longer, or even taller strips?*

**Freddy:** I am currently gearing up for an exhibition at Thatcher Projects in late October. I know there will be a couple of large vertical pieces for this as well. I have wanted to explore the vertical orientation for a while now, having initially felt uncertain about this move. The horizontals definitely have a very specific sense of movement that is inherent in its orientation. Visually, the horizon touches on what a person may glean in his or her periphery. The left and right edges of the work suggest an imaginary continuation into a peripheral condition. A vertical orientation, I think, has a direct correspondence with one's standing figure. The sense of movement will inherently be different. I still have to see where it takes me.

With regard to the pulling-apart happening in *Coalesce 01* and *Coalesce 02* for the Milan show, and also in another recent piece, *Murmur*, it is actually an idea I have been exploring since 2009. What I find to be challenging in this direction is to avoid flamboyance, in a sense. What is the point of reference for this fragmentation? What self-enclosed system is being broken apart? How do you retain some kind of logical clarity in the process? A synthesis of structure and gesture has to be there.

I am thrilled about the new studio. I don't know yet how it will affect my work. But it's a big relief to be finally moved in and more or less organized. It will be a busy three months leading to the show in October at Thatcher Projects.

Lastly, thank you so much, Brent, for this conversation. This has been absolutely great for me!