

M A R G A R E T
T H A T C H E R
P R O J E C T S

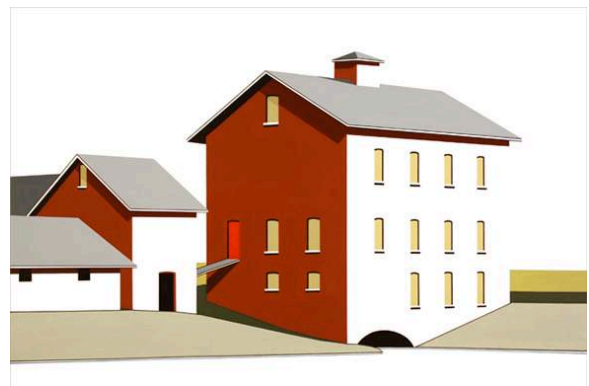


June 2011: The Paintings of William Steiger=

By Hans Michaud
June 2011

William Steiger seems to understand this dynamic thoroughly and seriously: the act of experiencing art is at least half the viewer, what he brings to the table, and art (or any other process of interaction and meaning) need not get in the way with a bulldozer of intentions.

Mr. Steiger is greatly concerned here with presenting only that which absolutely must be presented in order to fulfill his part in this subtle process. His works draw in the viewer, respectfully giving them only the essentials, allowing them entry to a series of fundamental shapes, patterns and colors.



William Steiger, Manufactory, 2011
Courtesy of the artist and Margaret Thatcher Projects

There is an act, on Steiger's part, of deep acknowledgment going on here. What I mean by this is the gesture that respects the viewer's perspective, autonomy and personal experience(s). We are potentially brought back to the notion/experience that the world is a great many things, subjectively; however, it is ALSO shapes, colors, textures.

This revelation, for me, allows me vast freedom in my sight-line. Each time I've walked away from a Steiger painting my perspective has been, for lack of a better term, let off the hook. What this means is that the elements of the world I perceive, going forward, contain greater flexibility. It is this experience that, ultimately, results in me obtaining greater resilience and fluidity (rather, my viewpoint feels more malleable).

Fluidity in human consciousness speaks volumes, potentially guiding us to narratives of not only expression and mastery (mastery of a musical instrument, a series of cognitive abilities and reasoning powers, a dance, etc) but also, on the other side of the scale, a dissolution of the self, a blending in, as it were, to the surroundings, to other

people, to the environment, to the inner life. It is this precarious balance that Steiger's works, for me, teeter on; for instance, in the Manufactory paintings there are representational and formal edges that, upon closer inspection, are not perimeters at all but continuations in both directions of the background and the foreground. The edges are implied, not delineated. This is sometimes similar to the subjective perspective that comes with apprehending the world from the point of view of a discrete consciousness: depending on the focus, the world is, at both extremes, either a series of objects, separate from the "I" that is oneself, or fundamentally linked to it, even sometimes one and the same, at least as experienced.

To me, the works of William Steiger posit a world of objects (and, here the psychology term objects applies, as well as its traditional interpretation), whether those objects are colors, buildings, ferris wheels, train cars or other consciousness. This world, fundamentally, contains a deep simplicity in forms, colors and textures. After this, however, the implications are resoundingly complex, and become more so, the longer one has placed oneself within this (literal) landscape.

In Steiger's train car paintings, which contain graphically-dominant representations of these objects surrounded by white space, it is the deliriously subtle which take over and define the painting. To wit, the flat bottoms of the wheels place the train cars in a world of objects and solidity. If he'd left the wheels round, the cars would literally be hovering in space. The fact this quotidian gesture has been inserted has dominated the representation fundamentally, entirely.

Human consciousness, in very particular ways, it seems to me, is very much structured similarly. There are delicate and infinitesimal indications that define consciousness but do not, however, literally place it in a particular location. If one imagines the world ("reality") as a projector screen, then consciousness is the images and forms from a projector imposed on top of it. However, to be precise, we must remove the actual projector from the scene. And then we must remove the beam. This is necessary due to the non-locational aspect of consciousness, as I've described above.

The train cars, not necessarily locatable in any graphic context, still find themselves (and are found, by intention) within an environment by their very visual being and indicators (flat-bottomed wheels). The environment, of course, is provided by the viewer.

My subjective gesture of apprehending these paintings and their graphic representational objects, from my non-locational perspective, locates me, literally, within the paintings.

It is these gestures and intentions/non-intentions of William Steiger that I find so absolutely, perfectly balanced. Both the paintings and the viewer are relieved of their obligation to location. And the viewer, ultimately, is allowed freedom of intention.