

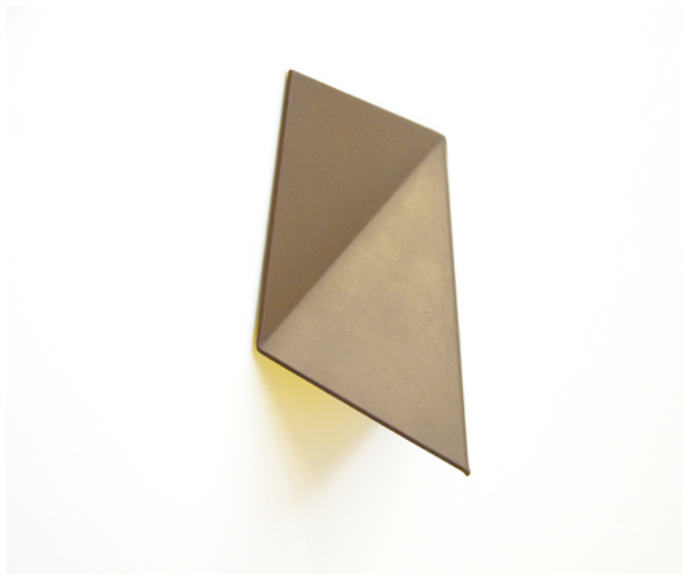
# Shotgun Review

## NANCY WHITE at JANCAR JONES GALLERY

By Stephanie Baker

April 23, 2009

Nancy White painted six geometric shapes in a range of soft colors and affixed them to three walls in the Jancar Jones Gallery. At first glance they looked deceptively light. They floated as a paper construction might, but upon closer inspection, I realized they were made of much harder substance: steel. Accordingly, White described them as "paintings...with steel as their canvas,"<sup>1</sup> but I saw more flirtation with sculpture here than she was probably willing to admit.



The gallery was small, nearly coffin-sized, but the pieces were perfectly situated at eye-level, allowing me to better notice the angles and shapes of the room, outside corridor, and stairway. I exaggerate when I describe the dimensions of the space as coffin-sized, but the fact that this building served as a casket-making company after the 1906 earthquake resonated with my experience of these objects seeking resolution through folding and unfolding, opening and closing.

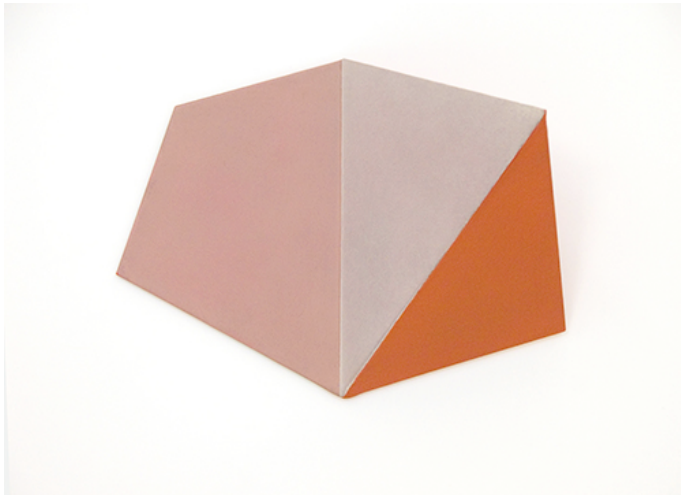
There was more beyond the first room, and I slipped sideways into the office to view two more of her paintings on the back wall. These shapes were similar to the ones in the gallery, but instead of being three-dimensional, they were two; instead of oil on steel, they were paper mounted on wood, or more precisely, gesso-tinted paper mounted on wood and painted with acrylics. These two paintings could have been schematics for the creation of the six shapes, but, in moving between the two rooms, I found it more interesting to consider the six shapes as paintings that conjure the possibilities for creating two dimensions within three and vice versa.

The artist played first with both sets of paintings as paper.<sup>2</sup> Starting with flat sheets, she folded and unfolded them to create objects and uncover shapes. The object paintings were subsequently bent at a steel

fabrication plant and primed at an auto body shop. It was then that White approached them as she would a canvas, trying different combinations of oil in very thin layers.

How one looks is as important as what one sees (or believes one sees). White's work prompted a physical response. I held my palm open and stretched my fingers to measure the width of the object paintings in the main gallery, and was surprised by the fact that they were actually smaller than my outstretched hand.

As I looked at them from above, below, direct, or aslant, they changed shape. They were origami hung on wall, sometimes flat, sometimes round and fully dimensional. I couldn't see them wholly from any one angle. They became deceptively large and animate by virtue of their morphing appearance.



Each of the shapes had an uncanny resemblance to the others, and my eye couldn't tease out the similarity until Eric Jones commented that there were only three actual shapes: thus three sets of twins among the six, each set at different angles. One bright red shape, *Br-Rd* (all works, 2009)--bent to form a trapezoid and two triangles--was nearly unrecognizable in its counterpart on the facing wall, *L-Lv-Yw*, turned clockwise 90 degrees and painted lavender and yellow. This gesture was repeated twice more with two other shapes: a double trapezoid/single triangle and a triple triangle. Collectively, they formed an altogether pleasing set of puzzle pieces my mind couldn't push into a square peg.

The shapes danced and hovered on walls lit by daylight temperature fluorescence. No hard shadows here, only the blank background on which they rested like a group of six butterflies folding and unfolding their wings. Like many animals, these "butterflies" wore their lighter, brighter shade shielded from a predator's first glance. The only discernible hints of their brightly colored underbellies were the soft glows emanating onto the white walls. Peering more closely, I was greeted by bright yellow, green, red, and purple.

I never thought of trapezoids or triangles as evocative shapes, so I was struck by the marked contrast between the openness of the paintings containing a rectangular shape and the two that folded into pure triangles. They were more closed than open. The first of the triangle "twins", *P-BI-Gy*, had two, delicate, grayish sides with a pale blue one in between. These colors were so subtle they recalled the famed "blue hour," the moment just before light fades to complete dark on a clear day. However, its bright, glowing underbelly was the lighter, brighter blue of a baby blanket lit by the noonday sun. This particular painting had

the presence of a small chapel or cathedral nave. The isosceles triangles gave the object a sense of enclosure and privacy, but with an eye towards the heavens. The colors were also remarkably subtle and delicate on its twin, *Dk-Y Gr B*. From certain angles, the even brown, bronze and purple tones eliminated any discernible depth and flattened the object on the wall. But underneath? A warm, bright, yellow glow.

The wonderful resonance of these small works--situated in a small gallery--stemmed from the impulse they created. They encouraged me to get up close and question how exactly they worked: Were they opening or closing? Folding or unfolding? In stasis or moving? Repeating or transforming? I was intrigued by these objects because I couldn't quite see what type of box they wanted to become. And as I walked out onto Mission Street, I noticed that the shapes of the buildings that surrounded me--the squares of the sidewalks, the lumps of cars, the rectangular signs and traffic lights--were not nearly as interesting as the combinations of shapes and dimensions that Nancy White had proposed.