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Geometric Rainbows

"Calculated Color" Show at College Gallery Adds Up

by Samantha Levitan



Color theory plus geometric abstraction and minimalism equal “Calculated Color” at the Cape Cod Community College Higgins Art Gallery.

Running through October 2 the show focuses on color and a variety of mediums. Jane Lincoln, guest curator, gathered eight artists to display their grids based on color theory. According to Lincoln, color theory examines how color reacts to other colors. “It is when no color is seen in isolation. It is a study of emotional value...how a red looks on green and how the same red looks on yellow. It is how color is controlled and how it is surprising,” said Lincoln. “Even when the artist thinks they are controlling the colors, the results can still be surprising.”

The artists chosen by Lincoln are minimalists that use right angles and parallel lines to highlight their bold colors.

“Minimalism is about stripping the art to bare visual forms: line, shape, volume and color. It’s about creating art with as little as possible,” said Betty Carroll Fuller, interim director of the Higgins Art Gallery. Many of the pieces initially look like simple line drawings, which is not the case. “Minimalism takes a lot of work to look at. It’s not high

impact,” said Fuller.

The result is a visual scavenger hunt as each piece provides the viewer a chance to search for meaning among the straight lines and solid colors. “I like to see the hand of the artist in their work. A wavering line or a wrinkle in the paper,” said Fuller.

The Ladder pieces by Mel Prest are prime examples of looking closer at a piece to see the intricacies. According to his artist statement, Prest intends to move the eye up and over the walls of the gallery. At first the small squares climbing the gallery walls look like a study in shades. However, the two-inch sides reveal their own gradation and steady hand-drawn lines of contrasting colors.

“How do you create compelling images when the focus is on color?” Fuller poses as a question for color theorists. Joanne Mattera answers that question with her encaustic squares of vibrant colors, which are the most striking pieces in the show. Mattera uses encaustic, an ancient Egyptian method of mixing wax with pigment, to create texture and catch the light available in the gallery. Each square is a unique look at color combinations and perpendicular lines.

Chris Ashley uses HTML tables to create his compositions, far removed from the ancient method of encaustic. His vast collection hangs in the back of the gallery, evidence of his daily effort. Many of his color and shape combinations are too small to provide as much of an impact as Mattera’s.

As much as it is necessary to see a painting in person, it is necessary to see Ashley’s HTML color tables on the Internet. HTML code was created for the Internet and his bold, rich colors don’t translate very well to an inkjet printer and office paper. His composition is clean and well thought out but the collection requires a more selective process to create the dynamics he is looking for.

It is Lincoln’s Alizarin Crimson in the same room that demonstrates the transformation of one of Ashley’s prints. Lincoln found the pattern on Ashley’s blog and asked if she could recreate the image using her carved woodblocks. Lincoln selected one color for each set of blocks and then contrasted the shade with other colors. Her intention, she said, is to show how different the same color looks against different settings.

While color plays some part in Nancy White’s collection, it is the shape of the object she considers. The aluminum shapes project off the wall creating shadows, which become part of the piece itself. “Viewed from various angles, the viewer can see himself or herself becoming self-conscious of the very act of looking,” she stated. Each piece

creates another search for the viewer to find the space in the gallery where they can see the shadow on the walls. This space could have benefited from more of White's odd shapes that create an interactive area of the show and only demonstrate Fuller's instructions to look closely at these minimalist pieces to find the full effect.

By using color as the theme rather than medium or inspiration, the artists use shape and their knowledge of color composition to create a contemporary show. While this art may require more from the viewer than a moment of their time, the end result is a show worth contemplating.

The opening reception will be held Sept. 19 from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. in the lobby of the Tilden Arts Center where refreshments will be served.

The public is invited to an artist talk by Mel Prest on Sept. 17 at 1 p.m. and another talk given by guest curator Jane Lincoln on Sept. 25 from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. The Higgins Art Gallery is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.