

Instant Disassembly

I. Introduction

Instant Disassembly is a series of abstract oil paintings on canvas. The title describes my desire to simplify painting for myself this year. I wanted to understand very basic things about making a painting and how to use this medium.

Up until this year I was a figurative painter. I made only figurative paintings of objects or surfaces. People, objects, rooms, etc. I found it really hard to get beyond having to render something accurately. I wanted to free up myself to experiment with form, color, and application of materials. For this reason I have started making abstract paintings.

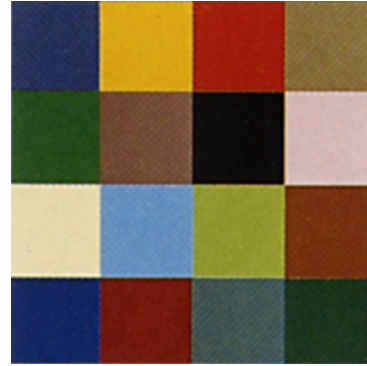
Abstract doesn't mean that I don't paint things from real life any more. Quite the opposite. I think that it's impossible not to reference the real world in some way. I just don't do it so literally anymore. Paintings never transcend real life. There is always something somewhere that looks like any painting. My paintings have very strong associations with the real world and sometimes directly reference a particular source. My paintings are zoomed in versions or fragments of stuff. They've been distilled from something real into repeating abstract forms. I don't have a desire to escape associations with whatever my paintings look like. Sidewalks, benches, trash, bricks, stripes, tables, benches, patterns, clothes, rectangles everywhere, architecture, gates, advertisements, bags, cups, circles, shadows, billboards, columns, plaid, books, shelving units, doodles, newspapers, drawings, walls, doors, chairs, furniture, rugs, other paintings, street signs, pictures. I feel that paintings can come from so many places that I am hesitant to try and name them. I think painting actually brings out the potential in seemingly bland, ordinary everyday objects.

Form, color, and application of material are the three main focuses of this work. Throughout the year, I have developed a set of rules for myself that I subconsciously follow and these rules have informed what images and sources I pull from. Through these three elements I can contextualize my work through the lenses of art history and source material. Sometimes art history *is* source material.

II. Context

The first thing I think about is what to put in the rectangle of a painting. The borders of my paintings are rectangular. The history of abstract painting and almost all painting works within the confines of the rectangle. This is because canvases are usually rectangular. How do you address four corners of a rectangle? Do you disobey the rectangle? Do you make paintings that are no longer rectangular?

As for myself, the rectangle is usually a cropping device. At times things continue on outside the painting. The pattern or repeating forms just stop at the edge of the rectangle. It's a snapshot of a larger picture. A fragment. Other times the rectangle contains and constricts the painting. Holds everything in. Other times, the rectangle of the canvas is divided up into many smaller rectangles. This is where paintings have the potential to become extremely nuanced with the potential for so many combinations and permutations of compositions.



16 Colours, Gerhard Richter, 1974

Gerhard Richter made a massive number of paintings of color charts. The endlessness of this subject is what interests me. One writer used a comparison to Zeno's paradox to describe Richter's undertaking of this body of work.

"These seemingly infinite permutations or the possibility thereof remind one of Zeno's paradox. The infinite divisibility of the steps you take, the paradox being that if, say, you are ten feet from one of these squares and you walk forward three steps and the last step is infinitely divisible, which all measurement is, then you can never reach an endpoint. The wall. Yet you can." (Gidal, Peter. *Gerhard Richter: 4900 Colours*. Ostfildern: Hatje/Cantz, 2008.)

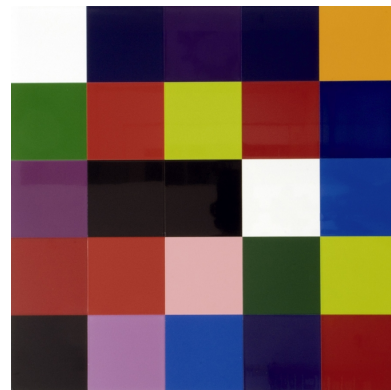


Figure 1 25 Colours, Gerhard Richter, 2007

Not only for the Color Charts, but in Richter's work in general, the paintings never end. His work illustrates that there are endless paintings to make. For him, it seems like an idea hasn't been fully expressed unless there are at least ten versions of a painting.

Because there are so many components of a painting and so many variations I could make and so many differences from one painting to another it can be totally overwhelming to choose what I want to do. This relates to Zeno's paradox because the more I indulge in an idea, the more finite every difference becomes and I can divide these things over and over again.

Robert Ryman is a great example. He's dedicated his life to white paint. He uses a million different fasteners to connect his work to the wall and creates



Arrow, Robert Ryman, 1976

endless variations of a white painting. The way he applies paint also shows the endless ways he's exploring how to use a paintbrush and white paint.

Ryman's work isn't complicated. It is about how to put paint on a surface and the various different ways to do it with a paintbrush. It's also about how to hang a painting on the wall. Make a painting, then hang it. I love looking at his work because it expresses the most basic principles about how to paint. Just put paint on a canvas/panel. You are looking at paint, not a picture. And then look at these

things that are holding the painting on the wall. This is what a painting is. The number of ways to make a painting in these very basic ways is pretty much endless.

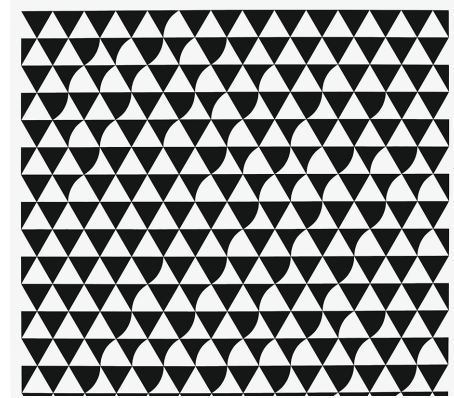
Serial recitation of a form is also important to me. Something gains power when it is done over and over again. Through a repeating pattern or composition or color, a small, underwhelming idea becomes assertive.

Bridgett Riley accomplishes this through piling simple forms on top of one another. Slight alterations in size, space, or position create a breath throughout the entire painting. A stagnant form creates movement when it is repeated many times in a painting.

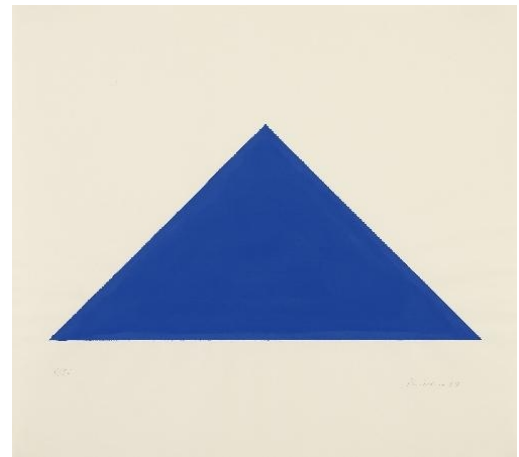
Repetition and specificity and exploring a form and color to its limits to an almost obsessive point gives something and power makes it noticeable.

Blinky Palermo drew a Blue Triangle many times and even did exhibitions of only the blue triangle. This seemingly underwhelming form gives life to the space it is placed in. Everything else stands in

relation to that pure triangle and bounces of it and back to the triangle again. It acts as a starting point to look at the rest of the room it is placed in. "Bearing no reference to any preexisting architectural element but placed at regular intervals, they united architectural space and geometric form." (Palermo, Lynne Cooke, Karen



Rustle 4, Bridget Riley, 2015



Blue Triangle, Blinky Palermo

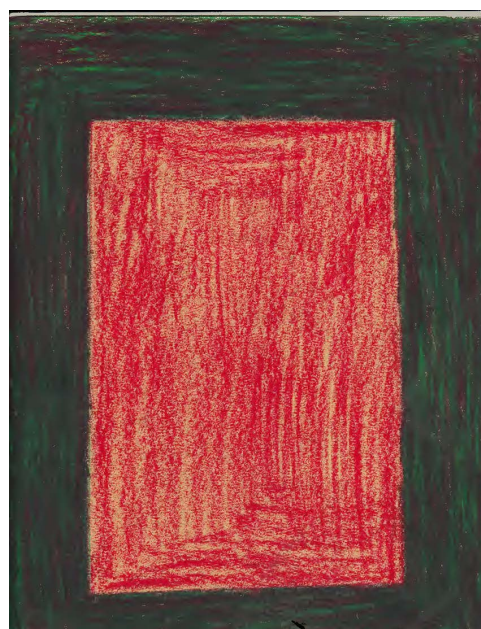
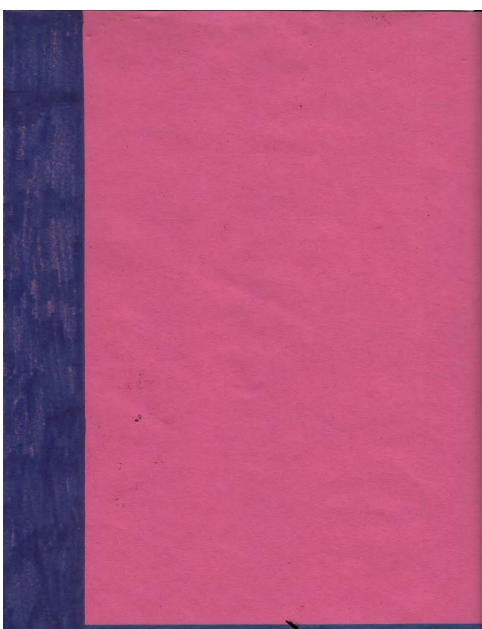


Blue Isoscles Triangles, Blinky Palermo, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 1970

J. Kelly, and Barbara Schröder. *Palermo: To the People of New York City*. New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2009.)

III. Methodology

The very first things I made in my studio were drawings on construction paper. I mostly drew with marker and pastel crayon. These started just as ways to think about gesture or application of materials. Much in the same way Ryman experimented with application of paint, I was experimenting with varying densities of gesture and layers of material. These were also studies in color.



Construction paper became a very important material for me. It was really natural to start using construction paper because in the past I would start a painting by painting the whole thing a solid color. It was jumping off point for the painting, the first decision. Painting is a series of reactions and reacting to a color was a very natural way to start. The color was already decided for me with sheets of construction paper.



I eventually started collaging construction paper onto canvas. I thought of the color chart paintings that Richter made. They were explorations of color, but in a collage instead of paint. The texture and tactility of the paper was something I grew attracted to. I preferred it over the texture of canvas.

Then I began to think about the grid that exists in all rectangular paintings. The collaged construction paper made a grid when they were fit together. I was interested in the geometry it establishes in a painting. This was when I started to think more about form. The drawings I was making became more patterned and grid like.



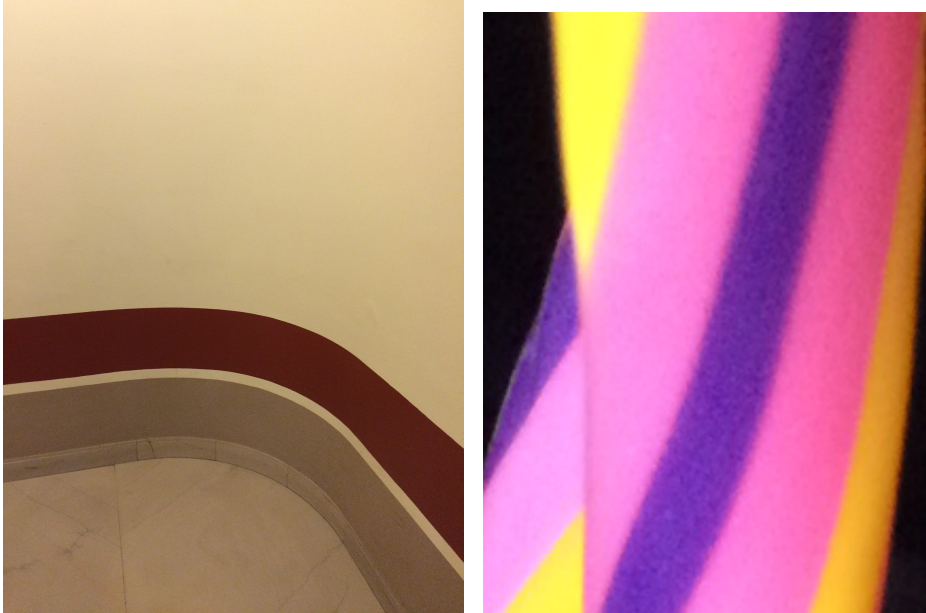
Repetition became a way to fill space and gave power to a form that is underwhelming by itself. It also limited the decisions I needed to make. I liked knowing what I was going to do in a painting. The plan you start with in a painting always goes wrong at some point, but creating a series of steps and rules to a piece

was exciting. I could execute a whole painting in one sitting fairly quickly. This made exploring different variations and versions of a painting very easy. The drawings really started to inform my painting process. I made paintings the same way I made drawings.

I started making a lot of paintings on the same canvas. I would make one painting and then another on top. I had nine canvases that were roughly all the same size: 5' x 4'. I had a hard time leaving a painting be. I was always curious about what another painting I had in mind would look like or what a particular drawing would look like painted on canvas. After painting and re-painting a canvas so many times, the surfaces accumulated texture. The surfaces of the paintings became much more active. Failed collage elements under the paint also added greatly to the texture.



For most of the year I was creating imagery based on my own studies on color and geometry. I wasn't referencing the real world very often. I started wanting to be able to elaborate on things I found inspiring in real life. I started to see potential in seemingly underwhelming everyday objects. Color schemes, surfaces, and forms that could be the start of a painting. Sometimes I took pictures of them.

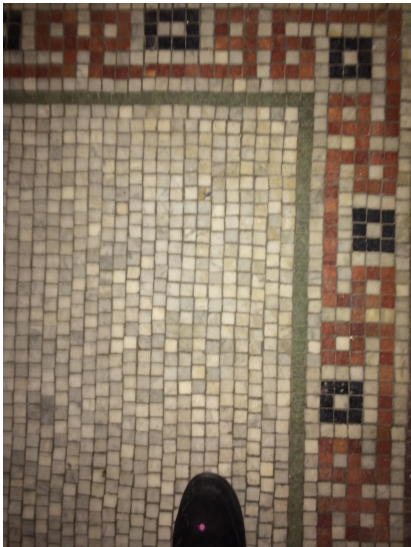


I made drawings based on some pictures.





Some pictures became the inspiration for paintings. In this case, the pattern on the tile floor was incorporated onto the painting.

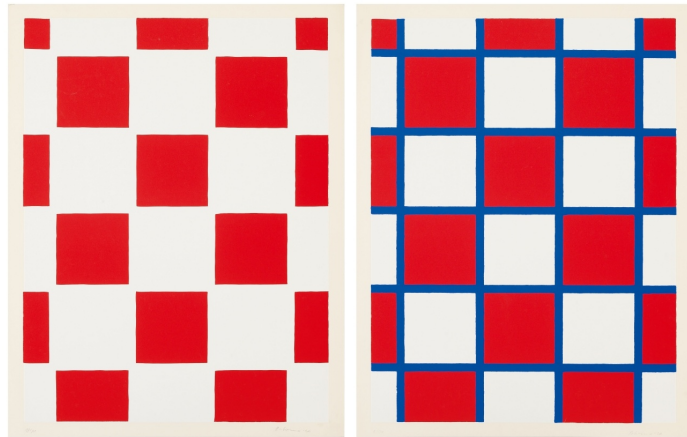


I also felt like other paintings were objects that I could reference. As a painter, it seems obvious that I would reference art history and paintings from the past. But a big realization for me was that I could replicate forms from other paintings and make new paintings with those forms. For example, I love the way Joan Miro paints stars. I love their child like quality and the ease with which he executes them. They come out uneven. I found myself doodling stars in notebooks constantly. They were so satisfying to draw. Some were better than others. I figured I could make a painting out of just stars. If I clumped stars together some would come out uneven and I would end up with some stars like Joan Miro's. In fact, Joan Miro made a series of paintings titled *Constellations*.



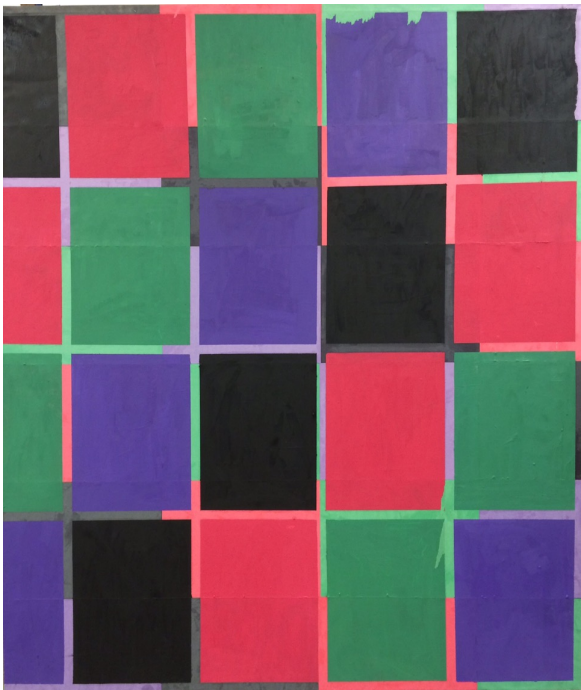


I found this image online of a painting by Miro that has been separated into grids. This is for an art class assignment where each student is supposed to replicate a section of the painting to create a new composition. I feel that I did something similar in my painting.



Flipper, Blinky Palermo

For two other paintings I copied something Blinky Palermo did in his diptych, *Flipper*. In this painting, Palermo draws attention to the margins created by paint. On the left side, he has removed the tape after having painted within the margins of the tape. On the right he has left the tape on. I used this technique and took advantage of margins left by tape in the two paintings below. On top of a construction paper collage I painted rectangles using tape. The areas the tape was covering reveals the construction paper collage underneath.



IV. Conclusion

Abstraction has opened up a lot of doors for me as a painter. I wouldn't call myself an abstract painter or a figurative painter. But this year I feel that I was able to realize many things about painting through abstraction that I wouldn't have through representation.

Source imagery can come from anywhere. Either from a physical object or from a process of drawing and developing form and color. The possibilities for paintings to make are much broader than they were before I started painting abstractly.

Bibliography

(Gidal, Peter. *Gerhard Richter: 4900 Colours*. Ostfildern: Hatje/Cantz, 2008.)

Palermo, Lynne Cooke, Karen J. Kelly, and Barbara Schröder. *Palermo: To the People of New York City*. New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2009.