

A Commitment to Process

Robert Thiele's method enables him to produce what can be described as icons of contemporary mind. The subtle mystery of his sculptural constructions bridges a gap between the known and unknown; the work builds momentum slowly, embodying the care undertaken in its creation. Thiele's art connects the metaphysical to the presentation of something as simple and profound as translucent light. The heads currently seen in a number of his pieces personalize his essentially nonobjective imagery, whose glowing presence, are seen as spiritualized artifacts. Close to the tradition of modernity, he makes contemporary work where viewers sense they are participating in a procedure charged with intuition and unspoken wisdom.

Kellyann Burns, a nonobjective painter, is also an artist working intuitively. Her sanded paintings are shown as relics of a singular, obsessive devotion to surface and color. As she says, "My process is my subject." Her abstractions are eloquent in their treatment of color and form, achieved by repeated applications of paint that are then sanded; the canvases, in their final form, are free to be displayed in any of the four possible orientations. She sands through applications of pigment to reveal the existence of previous layers, a dialogue of adding and editing, both trapping and releasing reflected light. Burns is as interested in the edges of her work as she is in the balance of the composition. The surface silently glows, making contact with the audience's gaze.

Burns and Thiele both emphasize the process of making art; their exploration of form carries with it the potent reminder of decisions that went into the work's making. Burns makes seemingly hard edge paintings but in fact creates exquisite surfaces that are the result of as many as thirty layers of paint. Earlier Thiele worked abstractly, but most recently the presence of heads in his work humanize the abstract treatment of ghosted images that reach out to the viewer through silk-smoothed surfaces. Friends, both Burns and Thiele seek the inspiring anonymity of their own unique process. The minimal bent of both bodies of work reminds that the creative self is secondary to the intuitive understanding that makes art what it is. The painting as object, then, rises to the forefront of their, and our, consciousness. In this sense their work is more similar than it might first seem.

Jonathan Goodman

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