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Interviews

Patrick Morrissey interviewed Laurence Noga in May 2014

 

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PM Laurence, the term 'abstraction' has been used a means of categorisation. How do you see, or relate to, the term 'abstract' when defining your practice - or do you regard that term as inappropriate in relation to what you do?

LN I am an abstract painter who is interested in an emotional specificity. The colour or space is usually frontal; there is a long-term interest in in-between space - physical/chromatic. I am interested in painting with a faith in process and materiality, which is often subverted by intuitive or anti-intuitive approaches as a strategy. I continually develop rules and systems, as part of a method of approach, to keep the work fresh and significant.

PM Phenomenologically, your work seems to contain a diversity in approach. The scale and shape of the work has been arrived at through what appears to be a very deliberate decision-making process. Is this scale/shape intended to influence the optical experience of the viewer by, for example, affecting peripheral vision, or is it intended to make a statement regarding context?

LN Phenomenology has a considerable impact on the picture making, in the activation of genetic, collective or individual memories. I start the paintings in an intuitive, very fast, manner - working with collage on small, panoramic, old art-show invitations, which help decide the composition and scale. The collages are significant because they are the catalyst for a series of larger works, and yet have equal weight with the paintings, as I often show them in relationship to the larger works.

I discussed this idea recently with Alexis Harding, who curated my last open studio. He felt that the collages had also become much more works in themselves as well as structural signifiers. The collage works are often mounted onto panels, increasing the object quality, and drawing the audience into a small, peripheral world of imperfect geometries.

Optically, both the collages and the paintings aim to activate luminous states of spatialisation and ambiguity. I want to pose a visual/retinal problem of focusing simultaneously on converging layers of tonally dazzling colour, while emphasising a psychological stimulus for the spectator. I have built on this idea more recently by showing the collages alongside larger works, adding to the peripheral experience.



PM Do you aim to steer the presentation of your ideas into what you regard as a completely autonomous position? Do you acknowledge any form of outside influence that might affect you in your decision-making processes generally?

LN I would say that the work jostles for autonomy. The collages are always set on a long table in my studio. This very long table is set with a specific set of brushes, rollers and masking tapes. Both acrylic and oil are used in the work, and sometimes enamel, and these are also displayed in a colour order. This is reset every day in a continual reflective process. There is an arrangement of artists' images on the table, in a kind of shifting visual hierarchy: Ellsworth Kelly, Patrick Heron, Raul De Keyser, Mark Rothko, Richard Diebenkorn, Bridget Riley, Peter Halley, Barnett Newman, Thomas Schiebitz (slapstick) and Mary Heillman. Also, Dutch interiors by Vermeer and De Hooch. This relationship with the works on the table helps make clear for me that colour underpins each decision, but also frames an attitude towards colour - sometimes beautiful, sometimes quite difficult or playful.

PM There are a range of treatments contained within the physical execution of the work; the 'fracture', as you refer to it. Can you say why you have used this approach and how you think it succeeds for you personally?

LN I use this approach to question the predictability of colour relationships, often with the aim of disorientating the viewer. The surface fracture can be pared down and translucent, or use sudden density. I want the atmosphere in the works to question the tension between form and formlessness. I like to use a strength of colour that is often disbursed, or used in compartments, to create a deliberate, strange depth of field within the structure of the paintings. I am interested in taking risks with the colour that pushes the spectators' buttons, not always using colour that is seductive. I make careful decisions about how to apply the paint, so oil paint is often used with a roller, in a kind of anti-aesthetic; the acrylic is often brushed on with dusting or sash brushes and juxtaposed against an area which is wet into wet.

PM *Does the process of layering various materials have an exclusively experimental and non-pre-determined effect, or are you anxious to avoid a completely random outcome? This is also a question in relation to the juxtaposition and use of colours, and densities of colour.*

LN My feeling is that the series I work in tends to develop a conversation, and a presence between the works. The intuition within the collages allows a flow, in the making of the larger works, trying to remember and acknowledge the speed and choice of colour or shape. So the outcome of the paintings can have a pre-determined quality set up by that speed, but also be hard-won, through the translation and exactness of the colour relationships.

The application of the colour has some rules concerning the number of layers, or specificity of brush or roller, but I also wonder if it's deeply embedded in me as to the kind of colours I always want to use. I find myself coming back to certain oranges, whites, and all types of violet-blues, and I tend to get drawn into modulating those colours again and again, they start to describe this in-between space for me. And currently I've been using a lot of sap greens, usually acrylic, because again they have an eternal openness about them.



PM *Do you initiate your working process with a clear schemata, and if so, to what extent does change occur either deliberately or unpredictably?*

LN I feel the work operates between something consciously 'painted' and sections that have a more 'accidental' quality. I am always considering the formal control and management of the whole painting and how I can make the exactness of the surface and quality of the paint produce a post-modern argument. I like to decide if a work is a diptych, or hints at a join in the sections of the work, and then the painting starts to live as a live object. So although ostensibly I'm looking at the collages as a starting point, the larger works can change from a physicality of approach. I usually work on the wall, but also in a kind of trough - a shallow tray in the studio, again, a reason for that is so I can pour paint onto the surface and the paint can do its own thing.

PM *How do you feel about the way in which your work communicates with an audience?*

LN I want the audience to feel a visual tension, through a strong sense of presence in the painting. I would like to encourage a disorientating effect on the viewer by using the impact of reading the painting from left to right, starting with flatter colour and then changing gear to a more gestural approach, to draw the spectator into a sense of the physical and plastic qualities that are key to the painting's phenomenology.

PM *Thank you, Laurence Noga.*