

INTRIGUING INTERJECTIONS IN A CENTURY-LONG DIALOGUE

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For the Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Published on: 05/30/04

It's been roughly a century since the creation of the first deliberately abstract painting, and abstraction has acquired quite a few ongoing categories. But even when it falls into existing niches, the best abstract painting is noticeably different in each decade.

The work of the five artists in "Transit: Abstracting the System" is no exception. Atlanta-based curator Melissa Messina, whose work appears in the exhibition, chose two Atlanta and two New York artists with sharply divergent styles, yet each continues and extends a century-long dialogue.



The assertive loops in Carolyn Carr's 'To Victory' collide in a blend of energy and balance. Their starkly juxtaposed colors provide both contrast and complementarity.



'Pan Am,' one of Odili Donald Odita's rigorously geometric works.

Mark Sheinkman's canvases combine techniques and materials of painting and drawing, in swirling, overlapping lines that form abstract yet surprisingly dimensional images. One would never mistake these whorls for crisscrossing cords or ribbons, yet they behave like them, the topmost casting a (painted) shadow on the one depicted as beneath it. Understated, the trick is apparent only on close inspection, when these initially flat compositions take on unexpected depth.

Odili Donald Odita's hard-edged paintings of juxtaposed triangular stripes are at the opposite extreme in a sense, rigorously geometric and getting most of their energy from the careful choices of colors. Odita is closest to older geometric styles, but puts a contemporary spin on the tradition.

In between these two, well-known Atlanta painters Michael Gibson and Carolyn Carr present considerably differing options.

Gibson's blurred ovals contrasting with a monochromatic ground are relentlessly nonrepresentational yet summon associations that might range from microscope slides to lights seen through fog. But in reality they're not biomorphic or abstracted from landscape; they tease the imagination without allowing any fantasies to take root.

Carr's newest work is as minimalist as Gibson's, but in a way more akin to Sheinkman's. Her two spiky loops, almost assertively flat, don't so much overlap as collide in a blend of energy and balance. Their respective colors on a completely unpainted background provide both contrast and complementarity — red and blue in one painting, turquoise and brown in the other.

Messina is distinct from all of these, presenting subtle gradations of color in a predominantly white, heavily textured painted surface. One includes an antiseptic solution, for conceptual as well as aesthetic reasons.

Wisely, the exhibition isn't weighed down with text. In the end, these paintings need to be experienced, not theorized about.

The verdict: A useful look at contemporary abstraction.

'Transit: Abstracting the System' Through June 25. \$2,800-\$7,500. 9 a.m.-9:30 p.m. Mondays-Thursdays, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturdays through June 14; thereafter 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Mondays-Fridays, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturdays. City Gallery Chastain, 135 W. Wieuca Road N.W. www.bcaatlanta.com