

“Orbs and Angles: New Paintings”

By Nola Zirin

Critic Jill Conner, September 2017

Nola Zirin’s recent solo exhibition “Orbs and Angles” at the June Kelly Gallery has led to an international trajectory of the artist’s abstract paintings and sculpture. Throughout the gallery, Zirin’s paintings utilized bright, bold colors and moved the viewer’s gaze around the room, from one composition to another. Before “Orbs and Angles” closed on June 13th, Zirin debuted a new sculpture at the Taoxichuan Art Museum of the China Central Academy of Fine Art, brought about by curator Lily Zhang Candler, who selected the artist’s work for inclusion in the group exhibition titled “Sculpture Dimensions”. This historic exhibition opened near Jingdezhen, the porcelain capital of China, and juxtaposed art by seven American artists with seven from China.

While geographically far away, “Orbs and Angles” opened up a dialogue between plane structures and line. Two large-scale canvases opened this exhibition and appeared as complements to one another. The predominantly white background seen throughout “Flexicon” complimented the deep black seen in another painting, named for the show. Initially both pieces seem to stand above each other but it quickly turns out that this pairing of opposites is an illusion since both shades of yellow, red and blue emerge from the center and stir these seemingly singular ideas.

Zirin’s paintings countered the assumption that abstract art is both static and stationary. Her investigations of prism-like surfaces reflect the tension that lies between space and time. “BQE Suspension” (2016) for instance, contains large volumes of a bold but light blue that pushes down against beige and black surfaces that extend from left to right. Although the subject of this painting could be considered as an upward point of view that absorbs the sky above, this composition places space against time, where the sense of movement is slowed down through the saturation of color. Even though the bandwidths of dark hues first appear as a limitation to one’s view, the artist’s selection of eye-appeasing colors cushion any sense of imbalanced melee.

The layered squares and spheres seen throughout two paintings titled “Moon Game” (2015) and “Translucence” (2016) offer up echoes of the artist’s paintings from two to three years ago. Surfaces of solid colors appear more frequently suggesting a new foundation, or a new beginning. However unlike the work seen in her earlier exhibitions, these new compositions do not play so much with depth but, instead, present weighty, monumental atmospheres that are expressed through the artist’s delineation of color. As seen in her previous exhibition titled “Stardust”, the paintings on view in “Orbs and Angles” continued to show Zirin’s characteristic layering technique.