

Dulwich OnView

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Rob Sherwood: New Work

I've never really understood abstract art, but when I visited the Rob Sherwood exhibit at Hannah Barry Gallery last week, it started to make sense – kind of.



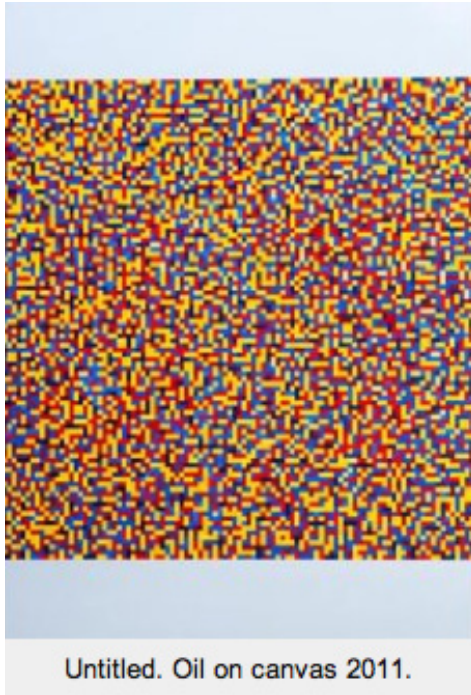
The exhibit, titled *New Work*, is quite literal in that Sherwood does something completely different than he is used to. He reduces paintings to their most basic elements. Although his 20 drawings and paintings seem very simple, there is much more hidden behind them – as with almost all pieces of art. Sherwood's inspiration for this exhibit is quite surprising. At first, I found it difficult to see the correlation.

It all began with Sherwood's trip to Spoleto, Italy in the autumn of 2010. For six weeks, he studied Perugino, Pinturicchio and the famous Giotto frescoes at the Papal Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi. Coincidentally, Sherwood's accommodation neighbored the studio previously used by Sol LeWitt.

We would not usually see a connection between the practices of LeWitt and the great Renaissance painters because they are separated by a great deal of time. However, Sherwood recognized the striking similarities between the work of LeWitt and Giotto.

Giottos's frescoes at the basilica can be understood not only as narrative transcriptions of biblical subject matter, but as a series of varied compositional arrangements on set themes. It is quite simple: Giotto uses complex geometrical patterns and figures which are set against lines of architecture. Sherwood understood that taken collectively, "these are formal progressions that follow an internal logic in exploring what it means to make pictures."

Sherwood then embarked on a series of drawings in LeWitt's studio which called upon the idea of consecutive thematic variations as the subject for pictorial composition. LeWitt's use of a grid form was initially conceived as a reaction against iconographic devices such as perspective to create depth of field. He wanted to deal directly with the physical properties of light and the matter of paint.



The gallery literature says, "while certain techniques trick the eye into perceiving depth, the application of layers of glaze to oil paint traps light within the various strata, creating a depth founded in the physical interaction of light and material."

These two ideas, the internal logic of pictures and the behavior of visible light, transformed Sherwood's practice.

New Work showcases Sherwood's use of light within a grid framework, expressing every step of the artistic process. Each square, cell or building block in the grid is filled with a single color, applied by small brushstrokes. It seems as if the cramped dimensions of the square restrict the artist's expression and dictate the way the paint is applied. But Ben Eastham, who is in charge of publications for Hannah Barry Gallery, said that, in fact, it simply encourages greater control.

What I find most interesting is that Sherwood creates his pieces without preparatory sketches or plans for his paintings. This makes his work even "newer" and more basic than it already is. Additionally, Eastham thinks that, hung up on large white walls, Sherwood's artwork "really fills the space, which is a success."

Although this exhibition is already over, Hannah Barry Gallery has much more to offer. Developed by a small group of young artists just three and a half years ago, the gallery has consistently presented contemporary artwork that makes you think just a little bit harder. They even had a booth at the Venice Biennale international art exhibition last year.

Even though I'm new at studying and writing about art, Rob Sherwood's New Work has already made me a fan of the abstract and of Hannah Barry Gallery.

The gallery is currently exhibiting Feather that boa an email by Nathan Cash Davidson at the Bond St. location until 16 June.

Wesleigh Ogle