

from the No Hassle at the Castle blog, Nov 21, 2010 by George Hofmann

Some thoughts on space in abstract (and other) painting...

A few years ago, the painters Tom Barron, Arthur Yanoff and I began to think about what has changed, spatially, in painting, wondering if this is a result of a change in seeing itself over the last thirty years.

In the shift to visual information in society, millions are looking - a lot - at constantly changing images on their TVs, computers and hand-held devices. The world is awash in visual information - unedited and torrential, pixellated, flickering, backlit, and instantaneous; this hasn't necessarily resulted in greater pictorial literacy, but it probably has affected the way we look at art, and the making of art. In painting it probably accelerated what was already happening: more and more fractured, shifting, unexpected and surprising pictorial space. Frontality persisted in painting – in Pop, in Minimalism, in Color Field, even in Conceptual art - the dominance of the picture plane has ruled since Manet, since Cubism, common to all schools. Color difference and scale alone made for spatiality – so it was mostly thru splitting that space could be alluded to; fracturing led to differentiation itself - the breaking-up of space in a shallow field - as subject. Eventually, the combination of frontality and fracture, the mix of virtual and real, the juxtapositions of subjects, and the speed that characterize media began to underlie, more and more, the feeling of almost all paintings. The reverse, of course,

is also true: collage and fracturing are now everywhere in media; Cubism probably made *Windows* possible.

Yanoff notes that newer abstract painting presents a subtle difference from the classical abstraction of previous generations – that there was a sense of wholeness in the relationships in paintings which is no longer part of our experience. The elements in our paintings don't "lock" now - there is a somewhat disjointed distribution of pictorial elements - a "piling on of history, experience and emotion set the stage for fractured space".

Barron wonders if 'fractured space' now is more about our way of responding to what we see, or if it refers to the fractured nature of reality. "Probably, it is both". "Our 'fractured space' is inextricably connected with time – in this case, 'fractured' time – the rhythm of our dynamic reality: the steady, linear continuum of time and space as we perceived it and on which we once comfortably depended has given way to the reality of infinite simultaneous happenings almost instantly perceived everywhere. We 'multi-task', jumping back and forth between reality and virtual (other) reality, we are plugged in to infinite impulses" – as people, and, it is important to remember - as painters.

Now, it seems, the confrontational/then fractured space we've known in painting is giving way to paintings that hint at depth, subtly suggesting it, opening pictures and giving us surfaces that invite us in: in Barron's words, 'we have kept open the

cracks, the spaces, the passageways between realities. We don't cover up or smooth over the seams – we keep the relationships between spaces and forms, the visible and invisible open-ended, malleable, porous and breathing – like life". Perhaps we are just tired of in-your-face, we want to enter pictures, but it seems more likely that this is a natural change – something that has grown, and then comes to an end – and a new beginning. It may be stating the obvious, but for a big change, not much is being said about it, but that also suggests that it is a natural development. For those who are thinking about it, it is exhilarating, and it is exciting to think of all the unforeseen possibilities open to us, in art.

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