

frieze

Previous Shows 

Kate Shepherd

GALLERY LELONG, NEW YORK, USA

Kate Shepherd's current exhibition, 'No Title Here', begins with a whisper. The large, mostly vertical, monochrome paintings (all are around 240 x 110 cms) hang densely in the gallery and yet, counter-intuitively, the space feels quite roomy. One reason for this lightness comes from the work's structure: individual panels of variant sizes that are deftly stacked together. Robert Mangold, whose presence is obliquely felt here, referred to such attached panels as 'interior edges'; in Shepherd's work these internal divides create skips across the surface that counter any sense of weighty mass.

Shepherd's ethereal surfaces also offset heaviness. Her planes are as smooth as a pool of water, an alchemical feat of acrylic and lacquer, or, elsewhere, oil and enamel, painted onto wood panels. Slightly reflective, the variations in colour initially read like a play of light, suggesting a raking angle or an oddly turned bulb. As the eye grows accustomed, however, differences emerge. Similar tones pop apart to reveal drastically varied hues, as the colours play against each other the registers within the work begin to sizzle. The result seems musical, like the semitonal graduations in a chromatic scale.

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On top of these fields of colour, Shepherd rakes thin white lines. Sometimes these evoke organic substances – waves, grass, air, or rain – as with the fire-engine red, *Candy Flavor, Some Erased Red Rain* (2007), where delicate, intersecting diagonals teem down the picture plane. Elsewhere, the lines conjure inorganic matter – buildings, boxes, and scaffolds. One such painting is *The Fullish Circle*

(Scaffold on Four Greys) (2007), where Shepherd posits Renaissance perspective against a flat colour field. Regardless of the subject matter, each work has a strong hold in the natural world, recalling Mondrian's resolution of abstraction and landscape. The human scale of the paintings reinforces this link; as viewer, there is frequently the perception of looking through, as if a window, to survey a scene outside.

Shepherd has spent time working in Marfa, and the clarity of her hues seems imbued with west Texan light. Donald Judd is present, both as a structural predecessor and as a colourist, and Shepherd's rigorous and analytical style derives in part from Minimalist logic. She employs a consistent vocabulary and stringent guidelines that safeguard against subjective or romantic impulses (for example, using computer manipulated patterns and architectural prototypes, or only switching colours between registers), but the variation and inflection of the hand-drawn lines results in reverberations that allow emotion to seep in softly. It is a rich and satisfying reconciliation.

Katie Sonnenborn