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Painting in the Dilated Field

by Calvin Phelps

Dilate

Kinkead Contemporary

6029 Washington Blvd., Culver City, CA 90232

May 8, 2010 - June 5, 2010



The vortex is the point of maximum energy.

It represents, in mechanics, the greatest efficiency.

We use the words "greatest efficiency" in the precise sense—as they would be used in a text book of MECHANICS.

You may think of man as that toward which perception moves.

You may think of him as the TOY of circumstance, as the plastic substance RECEIVING impressions.

OR you may think of him as DIRECTING a certain fluid force against circumstance, as CONCEIVING instead of merely observing and reflecting.

Ezra Pound, *Vortex*, 1914

In a play on seriality and minimalism, a physical engagement between the viewer and the work is staged by the show's arrangement. Michael Dopp's exhibit *Dilate* features eight large paintings and five small 'sketches.' In all the works in the show (all from 2010), Dopp is working with a central truncated cube element. Even though the space is small and the works verge on dominating the gallery, the varying iterations of four themes – *Vanishing Point*, *Kite*, *Variation on a room* and *Anemic Painting* – call for a complete filling of the space. It is in the established relationships between groupings of works that a sense of the referenced dilation occurs.

The works, when taken together, begin to play interesting tricks – think Judy Ledgerwood's recent *Chromophilia* without color and in VERY slow motion (all the works in the show are essentially achromatic). It is in the front gallery pairing of *Untitled (Kite 2 and 6)* where the effect is immediately noticed and most pronounced. Both works are composed of lines that converge on a central axis – in one a group of outer lines bend toward the center, in the other they bend out. Hung next to each other, when the eye moves back and forth between the two works they appear to breathe.

In the series of works *Untitled (Vanishing Point 2, 4 and 5)*, Dopp has created a twisted vortical shape that draws the eye in while simultaneously pushing it out. One of the works is hung in the front gallery while the other two are hung together in the back. The differences between the three paintings include subtle shifts of background color and compositional scale, but since you can't view them all at once it's hard to determine what the exact variations are. These operate less like op-art repetitions and more like psychiatric confabulations – looking back and forth between the works the mind tries to fill in blanks.

In the previously mentioned works, Dopp creates vibrant, intriguing space – a specific space not contained solely within the physical bounds of the canvas. Hung back to back on the wall dividing the two galleries, *Untitled (Anemic Painting 3 & 4)* offer another experience. Both feature a central ocular composition that is contained within (or by) the flatness of the densely worked surface. It is as if to say, a painting that fails to reach out from the edges of its structure is weak. These works don't pulse like the others, but the surfaces are rich and intriguing. And the self-deprecating titles add a sense of honesty, humility and humor.

As dour as achromatic work can potentially be, in the end Dopp offers up a less oppressive take on painting. The effects he achieves are noteworthy and quick to identify when the works are presented *en masse*. The only work that doesn't offer a companion piece, *Untitled (Variation on a room 1)*, strives to achieve without its doppelganger what the others do. I'm not sure the effect can be obtained in a singular piece, but I suspect that that is where Dopp's investigations are headed.

Dopp mines specific moments in painting - minimalism, op-art and vorticism, for instance - and mixes them with more visceral symbolist expressions - mandalas, oculi and such. It is interesting that C.G. Jung's *Red Book* is currently on view across town; a book he began composing in 1914 at about the same time the Vorticists were in their gestation. Pound said at that time, and Jung would likely have agreed, "The image is the word beyond formulated language." I would have not felt an innate connection between Pound and Jung – two diametric ends of a spectrum, so to speak. Dopp seems to disagree and it is his blurring of the Symbolist / Imagist divide I find most compelling.

- Calvin Phelps

Images Courtesy the artist and Kinkead Contemporary. Michael Dopp, *Untitled (Variation on a room)*, 2010, oil and acrylic on canvas, 60 x 48 inches. Michael Dopp, *Untitled (Kite 2)*, 2010. Acrylic on canvas, 64" X 48".

Posted by Calvin Phelps on 5/10

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