

JENNIFER GOODMAN

I want to live in Jennifer Goodman's world. Hers is an idyllic world that has been cast adrift from physical reality, where colours, lights and shapes coalesce and live in harmony. Shamelessly utopian, this world draws us in through a myriad of components whose parameters have been calculated to achieve visual order.

The canvases of various sizes are composed of gridded blocks of luminous colour; their rectilinear shapes providing a conduit to tonal bliss. I am insistently reminded of Hans Arp's introduction to his exhibition catalogue of 1915: 'The works presented here are constructions of lines, planes, forms, colours. They seek to approach the ineffable truth concerning mankind and the eternal' [1].

In this body of work Goodman's references transcend the visual. Her synthesis of flat planes punctuated by shafts of light are like musical compositions. Perhaps not surprisingly descriptions of music and of Goodman's practice are interchangeable. Each shares a mutability of substance, and become a descriptive agent that speak of pure concept – of the immaterial and atmospheric. The paintings perform a beguiling act of slippage where their position and time in reality becomes unfixed. We want to immerse ourselves in them, and bathe in the pleasure of pure colour. While directing the spatial modulations held within, the canvases are merely containers housing an array of coloured planes that shift and reverberate endlessly.

Goodman's practice employs form in the service of non-form. The grid is employed not as a historical referent but as the consequence of the application of a system. Shape and line are subservient to the demands of colour and tone. The result is a kind of meta-reality; a hyper-real utopia where physicality is dislodged in favour of pure thought and reason. We move through a space where nuance and sensation is amplified: in the absence of anything concrete upon which to cling we rely upon presentiment to guide us through.

In spite of their foundations in the Modernist grid, Goodman's squares and rectangles of sharply defined colour never appear sterile or still, but are imbued with a resonating warmth. This is due partly to the 'shimmer' effect that Goodman achieves with her colour and tone combinations, but also, in part, to her resistance to taped edges. The slight imperfections that become apparent at close range reveal the hand of the maker, and from a distance help condition the work as organic. The planes of colour dance against a choreography of slightly quivering lines, all bursting with vivacity.

The palpability of the paint, with some sections subtly built up more than others to create a modularity of depth, conspire to elicit an engagement with the corporeal. By which I mean these paintings are no mere exercises in two-dimensional formalism – they demand to be experienced physically in all their glorious, visceral tactility. We experience the painted surface and the weave of the canvas, and it's implicit occupation of tangible space. We are made to ponder the histories that lie within the works, and the various strata that are buried beneath the surface layer. The works reward patient study with a gradual revelation of nuance.

While acknowledging her formal antecedents with De Stijl, Neo-Plasticism, Piet Mondrian, and with the Modernist grid, Goodman does not reference them. Of primary concern to Goodman is her original sense of colour, tone and composition, and the combinations through which they can achieve harmony. Their application is guided by both intuition and a studied awareness of colour theory.

In this exhibition Goodman's paintings reach their largest size yet, just as her colours achieve a new level of luminosity. The pictures are more open in composition, while at the same time betray the artist's refusal to encode any didactic implications within her colours. Each colour is carefully mixed according to the 'Goodman code of practice' [3]. In the new works we see the subtle specificity of mixed and composed colours as well as the introduction of ochres and earthy colours. Devised through trial and error and her own carefully trained eye, they are the puzzle that lies at the heart of her practice. The work is only considered finished once that puzzle has been solved.

In a series of smaller geometric works Goodman presents us with apparently perfect symmetrical compositions, but their rich harmony and composure extends not from the symmetry of form, but from the carefully aligned colours and tones. Each corner and each plane is composed of a different colour – 49 in all – and yet the works seem decisively balanced. As in the larger works, to immerse into their world is to submit to the triumph of colour over figuration.

Simon Gregg
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1. Hans Arp, 'Introduction to a Catalogue' (1915), published in Charles Harrison & Paul Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900-2000*, Blackwell Publishing, 2003
2. Ted Snell, 'Jennifer Goodman: The Balance of Asymmetry', ex.cat. 2006