

JENNIFER GOODMAN

All Jennifer Goodman's paintings are grids and if not grids, then formal organizations of flat geometric shapes that imply the expansive field of the grid outside their rectangular frames. Within these fields she is free to push at the boundaries, play with the possibilities of tone and colour, suggest new meanings and points of reference. When she talks about her work she refers constantly to the core principles of the grid: harmony, balance, geometry, stability, structure, symmetry and asymmetry, but her insistence that while seeking stability she rejects rigidity is an important clue. There is a freshness and energy in her work that is the antithesis of inflexibility, stiffness and severity.

Although meticulously produced, her paintings retain a vibrancy that belies their long gestation and fabrication. 'I have a passion', she says, '... to tame the canvas and colours – to mix all my colours in order that they be specifically emotionally and idiosyncratically mine'.¹ This process of taming is more akin to domestication than repression, it is bringing the elements into line, socializing them within the Goodman code of practice so they can speak eloquently and in harmony. To enter this world is to be aware of the order that gave it form, not didactically, but by osmosis. We 'feel' the weight of forms, their sympathy for their compatriots and their lightness or vulnerability.

Tone is an important tool in creating this sense of equivalence. Although every line in the composition is sharp, almost razor-edged, the closeness of tone softens or blurs their points of contact so that some are almost impossible to look at. The tones are so close our eyes give up the challenge and leap helplessly back and forth from one to the other generating a new energy and, of course, a new space.

And then there is the veiling effect; the carefully constructed spatial arrangement conjured up by suggested transparency, as if filters have been applied to layer the forms in a sometimes shallow, sometimes deep, pictorial space. This further locks down the composition giving a simpler and more cohesive structure to the whole without losing complexity.

As she says – stability without rigidity, a sense of harmony and balance achieved through a very sophisticated understanding of the grammar of her visual language. It's not surprising then that Goodman is intrigued by Plato's notion of 'sophrosyne'. In the *Phaedrus* he explains the concept of enlightenment through harmonious living. This idea of restraint to achieve gratification, and the principle that through moderation and balance one finds harmony, resonates in her work. As Rosalind Krauss points out in her essay 'Grids':

The grid's mythic power is that it makes us able to think we are dealing with materialism (or sometimes science, or logic) while at the same time it provides us with a release into belief (or illusion, or fiction).²

Much has been made of the 'spiritual' overtones of the grid and its potential to break a path to a new, ultimate pictorial truth.³ And certainly Goodman is seeking an inner harmony and sense of balance in her works, one that can be gained through contemplation. The structures she so carefully constructs are both the epitome of harmony and a catalyst for each viewer to find that sense of inner balance within themselves.

Her work is controlled, 'fine tuned' in her own words, so that each shape is determined to have its impact, each colour chosen to facilitate a reaction, each tone pitched 'just right'. The correspondence with music is obvious. Goodman makes the connection between a musical theme and the cadence of colour and form; the rising strain of a violin or maybe horn, the resonant hum of the cello and the soft glide up a musical scale.

But tune is also an active verb and in her works she modulates each colour and each shape like a piano-tuner, preparing the painting keyboard for the many harmonies we will play upon it. As viewers we are actively engaged in these works, they cannot be approached passively – it isn't possible. Our eyes dance over the surface, lingering on one colour after another until we 'shape' our own painting from the chords and notes she provides.

Jennifer Goodman's career has been a natural progression, incrementally building to the level of sophistication and mastery she has now attained, breaking new ground but, with the meticulous methodology of the French painter Henri Matisse, taking two steps forward and one back to consolidate and review.

Professor Ted Snell

¹ Jennifer Goodman, *Of Tone and Colour*; artist's statement, John Buckley Gallery, 2004

² Rosalind Krauss, 'Grids', *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985, p.22

³ See John Golding, *Paths to the Absolute: Mondrian, Malevich, Kandinsky, Pollock, Newman, Rothko and Still*, Princeton University Press, 2002