

CHICAGO CRITICAL

A THOUGHTFUL EXAMINATION OF VISUAL ART, IN AND AROUND THE CITY

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2012

Editorial: Todd Chilton vis-a-vis Scott Stack

Chicago painters Todd Chilton and Scott Stack seem good to bring together in comparison. Independent of one another, both artists have recently produced abstract works in which successive, regular, linear elements dominate the canvas. Having written that, between Chilton and Stack there is too a telling difference in manipulation of line and color--a difference indicative of opposing strategies for pattern formation and the perception thereof. Coincidentally, in the not-too-distant past, both men opened shows only two weeks and three miles apart.



Scott Stack @ Monique Meloche, October 15 – November 12, 2011, edge detail



Todd Chilton @ Rhona Hoffman, October 28 - December 3, 2011, edge detail

In a previous article, on October 13, 2011, two days in advance of his exhibition at Monique Meloche Gallery, Scott Stack was recorded as follows: "'I'm not interested in pure green, or pure red, or anything straight out of the tube,' he said, 'That's not color.'"[1]



Todd Chilton @ Rhona Hoffman, October 28 - December 3, 2011, edge detail

Whether his (Stack's) words were driven by prescience or exasperation, that formal antithesis which he conjured in speech was seen realized by Todd Chilton at Rhona Hoffman Gallery, on October 28, 2011.

In Chilton's presentation at Hoffman, more-or-less solid colors in alternation were used to build linear elements within paintings. Band-of-paint to band-of-paint, transitions were seen to be relatively abrupt and high in contrast; internal borders were well-defined, even if painterly. The periodic reversal of value and/or hue within said bands was, in aggregate, sometimes productive of a weak "gestalt effect," according to which geometric figures were able to be recognized.[2]

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In this regard, Chilton wholly depended upon his viewer's ability to psychologically complete his half-painted patterns: secondary shapes, however simple, e.g., diamond, needed to be known (knowable) in whole beforehand.

Conversely, in his most recent show at Meloche, Stack displayed a commitment to blending not only in his palette but also in the paint having been applied to the canvas. Movement from color-to-color and line-to-line within Stack's new paintings was usually characterized by a compact but gradual gradient progression; it was refined. Where Chilton's (impasto) surfaces were thick and tempestuous, Stack's surfaces were remarkably shallow and placid in spite of hours of brushwork.

It was in his composition that Stack roiled enigmatically, as the organization of his lines appeared stochastic, whether such activity was said to have some original correspondence to objective reality. Here, Stack was open as Rorschach to readings as yet unknown to himself or his audience.[3]

Stack is, roughly, twice Chilton's age; Stack must have held a brush for more than twice as many years as Chilton. And it's tempting to attribute at least some difference in their current work to said temporal disparity: What in youth seems clear, a matter of earnest to be vigorously pursued, frequently becomes a more complicated and ambiguous affair as the years pass. Why Chilton and Stack should have drawn relatively near one another, however briefly, now, is a yet more difficult thing to guess.

Historically, Scott Stack had seemed to be committed to the representation of abstractions--and not to representation or abstraction per se.[4] Painting the imagery reproduced by electronic devices, e.g., night vision equipment or television, Stack had spent years painting scenes already multiple generations distant from reality.[5][6] And it had been fairly easy to nestle him (Stack) in the near precedents set by Chicago Imagists: linking his apartment exteriors to Roger Brown, and his figure work to Ed Paschke.



Todd Chilton @ Rhona Hoffman,
October 28 - December 3, 2011



Scott Stack, "7:30pm Apartment," oil on canvas, 78 x 66 inches,
original image from Monique Meloche Gallery



Scott Stack, "Queen", 2009 oil on canvas,
100 x 66 inches, original image from
Monique Meloche

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Scott Stack, "Untitled," 2011, oil on canvas, 68 x 78 inches, original image from Monique Meloche Gallery

Stack was a sort of surrealist with a conceptual bent, a foot in each local camp. But, Stack's more recent work recalls another continent almost one hundred years ago, in which time and place Cubism and Futurism were incubated. Maybe, Stack recalls Fernand Leger particularly.[7]

Locally, Todd Chilton has been repeatedly associated with the purely formal issues of his craft.[8] And Chilton does indeed seem to be a painter of paintings: any reference external to the activity of himself, his viewer, and art history, appears limited if at all extant in his work. To the extent that Chilton is involved in a re-imagining of Op and Hard-Edge painting he too, like Stack, relies heavily upon abstractions which already exist somewhere in visual culture.

Not surprisingly, Chilton hails from one of the coastal states, and he's been picked-up and shown on the opposite coast. In spite of what happened in architecture and furniture design after pollination by the Bauhaus in the 1930s (and maybe in needful opposition to it) geometric abstraction in painting did not take root and flower in Chicago as it did in other places.[9] The easily imagined art historical precedents for Chilton and Stack's linear work, collected and exhibited in Chicago, tend to have been trucked-in from New York or some part of Western Europe. For example, Frank Stella and Barnett Newman hail from New York, Bridget Riley from England, and Sean Scully from Ireland.[10]

Maybe, playing upon the reference to the Weimar Republic in the preceding paragraph, Chilton and Stack are equally out of step with the "zeitgeist" in Chicago. Here and now, economic theory (Marx and Engels are only rarely named) underpins much contemporary education, production, and critique within the visual arts; and, not surprisingly, types of social art, poor art and street art constitute no small part of the local scene. Specialization in a particular craft, solitary studio work, and the production of real "commodities," such as the oil paintings on canvas made by Chilton and Stack, are things broadly considered to be passe.[11] For Scott Stack not to be connected to Todd Chilton's youthful cohort of SAIC and UIC graduates is a yet-more difficult thing. Whether Chilton will become more like Stack, or Stack more like Chilton, time will tell..



Scott Stack, "Return of the Leopard Woman," 2009, oil on canvas, 89 x 74 inches, original image from Monique Meloche Gallery.

Find notes @ <http://paulgermanos.blogspot.com/2012/02/editorial-todd-chilton-vis-vis-scott.html>

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