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Jus Juchtmans at Margaret Thatcher Projects

By Cassie Cummins
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Upon first glance, “*Color Virus*,” the third solo exhibition of Belgian artist **Jus Juchtmans** currently up at **Margaret Thatcher Projects**, seems to speak to or qualify itself within the monochrome painting movement. Each of Juchtmans’ pieces is a kind of meditation on a color: one blue, another red, another yellow, another white. As such, the show seems to beg the question of what significance can be found in a monochrome painting made today, many decades after the heyday of monochrome painters like Yves Klein or Kazimir Malevich. However, an attention to the monochromatic character of Juchtmans’ paintings is, perhaps, merely an access point for the effect Juchtmans is truly trying to create. In fact, it is arguable whether Juchtmans’ paintings qualify as monochrome at all.



Jus Juchtmans, 20071015, 2007.
Acrylic on canvas. 20 x 16 in

The proof is in the pudding, as it were—each of the “*Color Virus*” paintings is composed of a series of micro layers of paint that are not all the same color. For instance, in 20120126, the title of a predominantly yellow painting hanging in the show, the viewer can identify green and orange sitting beneath and beside the more dominant yellow. The paintings have a sort of transparency to them, creating a sensation for the viewer akin to looking through multiple panes of glass, each having its own landscape, but affording one the ability to see through or beyond that landscape to the next. The remnants of this strata can be found dripping over the edges of the stretched canvas, as proof of the scrupulous process of layering that Juchtmans employs in his practice. In most cases, the drips occupying the sides of the canvas are not the color that the painting would seem to represent.

Another notable quality of **Juchtmans'** paintings is their glossy finish, created by an acrylic gel medium that he uses in creating his micro layers of acrylic paint. As a result, the viewer catches her reflection in Juchtmans' paintings, as well as a reflection of the space in which the paintings are hung. This element of Juchtmans' work and the intent resting behind it is what aligns him with minimalist artists like Donald Judd and Dan Flavin. There is an attention given to the environment in which the artwork exists as well as the viewer's role as "viewer," insisting that these both are components of the artwork itself.

In Insert, a kind of Juchtmans manifesto written by Peter Theunynck and provided by Margaret Thatcher Projects, it reads,

4.3 The spectator sees colour.

4.3.1 Colour makes things visible.

4.3.2 Colour is dependent on light.

4.3.3 Light is dependent on time (moment) and space (place).

4.3.4 Colour adds time and space as variables to the painting.

4.4 The spectator sees reflected space.

4.4.1 Through the reflection, the space paints beyond the canvas.

In employing this technique, Juchtmans veritably illuminates the familiar dichotomy inherent in monochromatic works. There is simultaneously an experience of transcendence, a movement beyond the physical object, and also an experience of grounding or commitment to the physical object, as the viewer is so intimately related to the painting itself. An attempt to understand the physical object cannot be separated from an understanding of the space in which it sits and the person attempting to understand. The look of "one" color on canvass, as well as the experience of reflection, is at the same time a representation of infinity but also a sort of Omega. In other words, there is an ongoing-ness to the "one" color and to the reflection produced, as well as an inherent sense of consummation in both.

Though part of the ambition of minimalist works is to give merit to the experience, rather than the aesthetic, of a given piece, the highly aesthetic quality of Juchtmans' work cannot be diminished. His paintings have a beautiful iridescence about them that was visibly achieved through a great deal of labor. This is definitely an exhibition to be seen in person, as photographs of the work cannot truly capture this quality of color—specifically the glossy nature created by Juchtmans' application of specialized acrylic gel. And of course, the physical experience of the paintings is a part of the works themselves; they do not perform as they are intended to when only seen in photographs. Best stop reading and just go looking.