

VOLUME 19, NUMBER 1

dart
INTERNATIONAL

#34 SPRING/SUMMER 2016
\$5 US \$5 CA



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Critical Mess and After

Nassos Daphnis



HaeYoung Lee, *March Ahead*, 2012, oil on canvas, 36" x 46"

Non-Objectivity III **Group Exhibition at Walter Wickiser Gallery in New York City** **by Thalia Vrachopoulos**

The title of the Walter Wickiser Gallery exhibition *Non-Objectivity III* may be misleading. It was Vasily Kandinsky who first used the German word "gegenstandlos" to denote what he called his absolute art. The term appears in his 1910-14 writings the years when he was developing work with spiritual content that was abstract. When Hilla von Rebay, a champion of Kandinsky's art, emigrated from Germany to the United States in 1927, and eventually became the director of the Art of this Century Museum (later to become the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum), she coined the word "Non-Objective" as her translation of Kandinsky's gegenstandlos. Many American artists misconstrued this term as art that had no content or meaning, and used it to describe purely formal process-oriented abstraction.

The works of the artists in this show, are definitely abstract, but many are also loaded with meaning. Comprised of four artists Bill Jackson, HaeYoung Lee, Kristi Rene and Insoo Shin the show ostensibly appears to be about abstract art with a formal focus. These works alternate between linear and organic forms, straight, and curved line, dark and light contrast. Although Kandinsky, and Kristi Rene both explore spirituality in their abstractions, the former sought universals while the latter sees the spiritual topos as a place for personal and individual enlightenment. This California-based artist started her abstract paintings as a way of finding her way back from a personal tragedy wherein a profound spiritual transformation took place. Her images consist of biomorphic shapes appearing in a floating space as does *Arteriole* (2015).

Bill Jackson's photographs of grasslands and ponds punctuated by native grasses, capture timeless nature. Jackson creates scenes that in several ways appear to be inspired by the 19th Century American Luminism. They both focus on seascapes, and are executed with a high finish, and meticulous attention to detail. However, Jackson's medium is photography not painting like the earlier style. Furthermore, Jackson's atmospheric photographs, for example *Golden Dawn*, 2015 are luminous in their lighting, in sharp focus, and capture views of nature in movement rather than being geometric as was the earlier style.

HaeYoung Lee's works deal with the solid and void and their opposites, but also with the interstices that for her, hold the meaning of existence. She pictures this space like a mandala upon which to pray, seeing the void as fullness and the full as emptiness as does Daoism based on the philosophy of Lao Tze. There are also Buddhist aspects in Lee's creative philosophy in that she sees the suddenness of the

moment of realization like that of Son (Zen) enlightenment. In South Korea where Lee maintains a studio, religious philosophies are composite constructs and can contain elements from one of the three commonly held beliefs – Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. In recent years, Christianity sometimes is also combined into the three main religious philosophies.

This idea of abrupt discovery found in Son (Zen) Buddhism, is analogous to her paintings' contrapuntal aspects apparent in her latest colorful paintings that contain circular elements in varying sizes as do *Flower of Being* (2015) and *Flower of Being III* (2015). These paintings consist of the primary colors blue, red, yellow, the secondary color green and white giving the impression of cosmic intergalactic orbs floating in a sea of primordial life. *Flower of Being* contains yellow and white loosely painted circles emerging from a darkness interrupted by what appear to be ropelike white lines as if caused by a lightning storm. Lee imbues her dark background's elemental soup with areas of brightness much like electric currents.

Lee's earlier work *March Ahead* (2012), was informed by Heraclitus' philosophies, for her gestural canvas, can more easily be related to his ancient Greek philosophy of flux. Lee's centrifugal brushwork is akin to the constant change found in the meaning of Heraclitus' quote "No man ever steps in the same river twice."

Her colors used to be more neutral, rather than bright as they are now, but the contrapuntal qualities were still there as seen in the plain areas that are offset against the movement of her expressive brushstroke. This work is reminiscent of Boccioni's Futurist canvas *The Street Rises* (1912) both in its golden coloration and in its vortexual composition conveying propeller-like movement. To Lee, it was important to break away from past models and forge ahead as reflected in her title, to Boccioni, and the Futurists, a break with the past was a credo.

Insoo Shin's delicately made paper weaves result in constructions

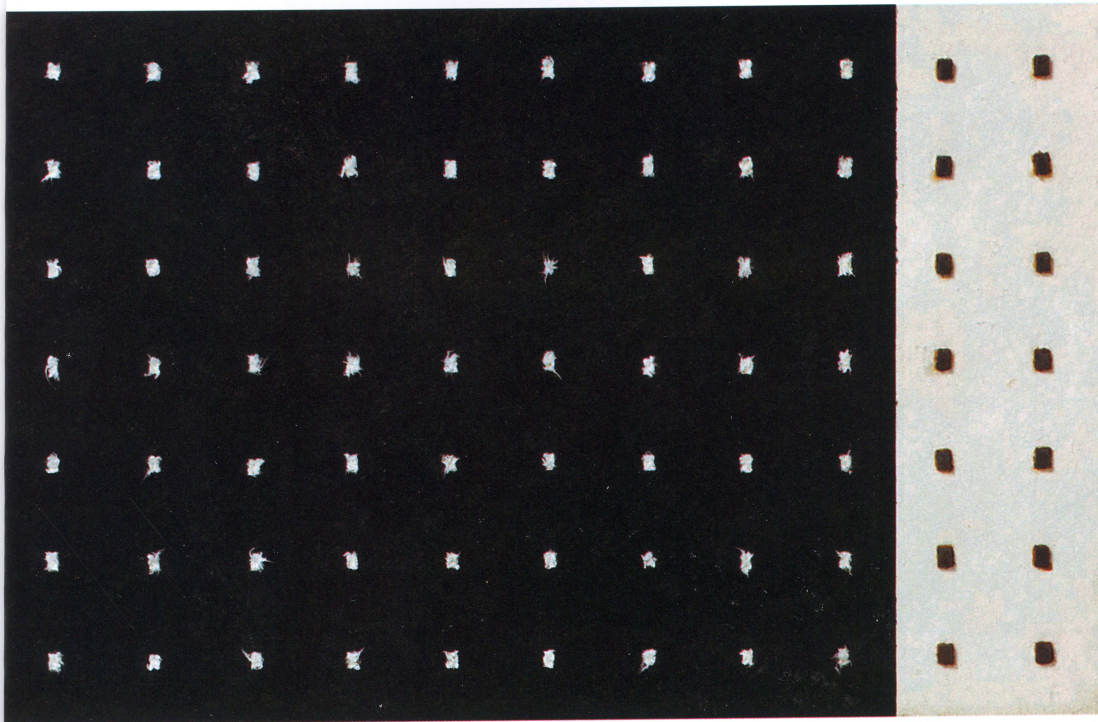
seen in her *Before Sunrise* (2014), rust stain, Sumi Ink, on mashed dak paper, Shin uses dak which is Korean paper made from daknamu or mulberry trees preferred for its softness by calligraphers and painters. She further preserves the Korean traditions by using natural hand ground dyes that are work-intensive to produce as is the dak paper. Natural staining techniques hearken back to fabric dyeing used in Korea from the 4th Century to the present. These require that one use natural resources such as plants, flowers, herbs, barks, charcoal, teas, fruits, and are thus, ecologically friendly. *Before Sunrise's* sumi black ink background, with orange stain dye in the bottom row is overlain with orange horizontal lines that recall Eastern writing progressing down in columns that begin from right to left rather than in the western orientation which is opposite. Shin's paper hand making

technique that requires her molding it into desired shape requires many layers until the top one can be embellished. In *Sunrise* the lines are formed like letters but on closer inspection they are actually found to be thread loops that reference signs.

Shin's *Respiration* series comprises Dak paper works that are worked with cut-outs or otherwise called fretwork of contrasting color. They have a rich textural surface that can be related to the raised lettering in the books for the blind. They both use abstract languages loaded with meaning; the one carrying literary signification, and the other a rich history of its own Korean legacy. This show is a coloristic tour de force, with work of varied media tied together under the rubric *Non-Objectivity III*. Although the exhibition may seem a bit uneven because of the variety of works included, it is nevertheless relevant vis-a-vis the new abstraction.



Kristi Rene, *Breakthrough*, acrylic on canvas, 36" x 36"



*Insoo Shin,
Respiration #7,
2016, iron, sumi ink,
mashed dak paper,
26" x 30"*

*Bill Jackson,
GoldenDawn,
2015,
photography,
archival pigment
print,
19" x 26"*

