

Tricia Wright

Some Like It Cool

by Lilly Wei

London-born artist Tricia Wright's new abstractions, all from 2002, mean to be alluring, to be eye candy. Well-groomed, smooth-surfaced, uncluttered acrylic paintings with Warholian antecedents, their clean, crisp colors - lifted from current fashion and design, from the tempting light-hearted palette of today's clothes, cosmetics, furnishings - offer a glossy, streamlined, de-mystified version of art into life. Life is chaos, Wright says, so art should not be. She, like many of her contemporaries, is self-consciously looking for ways to continue to paint, to refresh her medium - with criticality but without cynicism. In her current body of work, Wright divides her vocabulary of forms between the organic and the geometric, carefully calibrating the dynamics of different shapes and colors, light and dark, the reflective and the absorptive. Wright revels in polarities, in the clash and tension that opposition creates although her brand of conflict is subtle, reserved. She also revels in process and paint, which she stirs and stirs, head-over-heels in love with its liquid state, admiring its silken sheen, its color, its flow. Over fields that are sometimes monochromatic but more often duo- or triple-toned, partitioned into bands, rectangles, or squares, Wright slowly pours paint of a contrasting shade, deftly rolling and tilting the support (a strenuous exercise when manipulating the 4' to 6' canvases) until she is satisfied with the image that has bloomed on the surface, its liquidity arrested, preserved. Abetted by gravity and chance, her fretted, biomorphic dispersions are devoid of painterly gesture and authorial ego, although,

paradoxically, Wright's abstract imagery brims with attitude, with humanized inference. These are action paintings with a difference, influenced in part by Roland Barthes' proscriptions. In the larger compositions, the paint ramifies into tributaries that end in delicately looped and curled tendrils. These recall the arabesques of illuminated manuscripts or the furred and fuzzy contours of a plant's intricate root system suspended like a flamboyant bouquet within or without its geometric frame. One painting features a softly glowing black rectangle gripped by two bands of pale Arctic blue, a poisonous yellow green swag hugging one icy edge, its spluttering rivulets cascading downward like the spent glow of fireworks, while a narrow vertical band of bright blue on the opposite side acts as a counterweight with multiple functions, shifting the visual equilibrium. Another layers a flashy orange square over a black one, pinning a cool turquoise tangle in the upper right corner against a small, playful squiggle of the same hue at the lower left, as if it had shaken itself free from the larger mass and is now gleefully unencumbered. Another is radiantly silver, perhaps a magnified cross-section of airless, indeterminate space in which three brambled, crimson rootlets dangle, each a dainty variation of the other.

Wright has also made a series of consumable 14" wooden squares which she sybaritically calls "Desirable Objects". Characterized by simple, flattened shapes, the colors pared down to two or three cheerful synthetics, these abstractions, like Rorschach tests, conjure up whatever you wish, whatever you want. Some are sexy, flirtatious, others utilitarian; one suggests a stylish shoe, another an easy chair of contemporary design - reminding us of Matisse's injunction that art should resemble a comfortable armchair. Wright's coolly poised, prettily colored works with their hint of heat also remind us that painting itself may still be the ultimate desirable object.

- Lilly Wei