

Eva Faye's Permeable Fields

Watch the donut, not the hole, goes the old song. Rejecting the either/or dogma of positive/negative space, Eva Faye asks us to pay attention to both. All paintings are informed and made visible by light, but Faye makes light, and its doppelgänger, shadow, essential components of her art. Flat but intimating dimensionality without perspectival illusion, her paintings declare materiality through acts of addition and subtraction, absence and presence.

When speaking about her art Faye references dualities, and “repetitive patterns that make me think of music.” How repetition shapes perception has remained a constant concern for Faye as she shifted from painting on stretched linen to working on vellum sheets. The veiled gestures of her earlier work create diaphanous, atmospheric, or aqueous fields through a time-based accretion akin to sedimentation. What appear as recessive fissures interrupting the banded surface of a 2006 painting like 3 are foregrounded in recent work as light-filled apertures cut into painted grounds.

Vellum appealed to Faye for its “skinlike flexibility,” and over the course of 8 series painted between 2008 and 2014 she has experimented with inserting sculptural presence and graphic punch into her painting vocabulary. Faye began by layering several sheets of vellum painted with painted patterns, using vellum's translucency to create spatial depth. Working on single sheets, she began puncturing her paintings so that the tracteries of rough-hewn holes seemed like visceral violations of her subtly intoned surfaces.

Later works bundled a host of related patterns into starkly geometric theme-and-variation compositions, or structured spoke and wheel assemblies of minute holes and larger geometric shapes. Working largely in shades of white, Faye noticed that each hole collected light and projected shadow, and so began to suspend her work away from the wall. Like the relief sculptures of the Venezuelan sculptor Gego, the content of each of her paintings becomes informed by its relationship to the wall, which serves as a dramatic backdrop for the play of light on physical form.

By the fourth iteration of her ongoing *Painting on Vellum Series*, Faye began to take her strategy to an extreme, stripping away both interior and exterior portions of a vellum sheet in No. 19, 2013 so that what remains is essentially a drawing in space. In No. 28, III, 2014, negative and positive are given equal weight, with radial cutouts humming across a blue-toned sheet like a chanted mantra.

To make a painting on vellum, Faye first coats one side of a sheet with a dominant color. The striations, layers, and sedimentations of this painted ground are backstopped by graphite patterns drawn on the vellum's verso side. This drawing, which remains visible through the translucent sheet, becomes Faye's point of departure as she begins to incise her painted plane and shape her content. In contrast with the tonal palettes of snowy whites or atmospheric blues that emphasized the contrast between foreground vellum and background shadow in earlier series, the primal, primary color red dominates her newest work. Faye's decision to move from meditative, naturalistic hues to a color tinged with both retinal assertiveness and a host of symbolic or corporeal associations animates the ground of her new paintings, their vibrant "skins" pierced by bony, bright white negative spaces.

Unlike the allover accumulations of discrete patterns in her earlier work, the networks of circular, seed, or lozenge shapes incised into the painted and drawn surfaces of the 2014 series *Paintings on Vellum VI* offer open-ended distillations that reference, without quoting, human structures and nature's organic patterns and rhythms. In No. 1 seed shapes proliferate into push-pull opticalities worthy of Bridgette Riley. No. 8 is populated by dots that resonate from both sides of an undulating horizontal line; as they expand in size, symmetrical circular patterns on both side of the line suggest the shimmering contours of a distant horizon. Circular patterns pulse through the horizontal layers of No. 10, cellular growths that could indicate either a living organism or geological stratification. As these descriptions suggest, the content of her cutout patterns is always implied, never declared. Faye thinks of her vellum paintings as "equal parts memory, dream, and observation." Simultaneously expressing emotional states and observed reality, intimately scaled so as to reward close inspection, they operate as forums for what Charles Burchfield termed "conventions for abstract thoughts."

Christopher French, 2014

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