



Marina Adams CUE Art Foundation

NORMA COLE
(Curator's Statement)

Iris beckons. Iris is messenger of the gods, personification of the rainbow. In the earlier poets, Iris appears as a virgin goddess, but later she's the wife of Zephyrus, the west wind, and, according to some accounts, the mother of Eros. She's dressed in a long tunic, over which hangs a light upper garment, with wings attached to her shoulders, carrying the herald's staff in her left hand. She touches both heaven and earth, high-key palette, low-key palette, bold stroke whether line or shape.

"Therefore, O painter, do not surround your body with lines." Leonardo da Vinci

The object equals the event, the experiment, the experience. The shapes of love and of experience, which is suffering. *Experiment* used to mean "to have experience of; to experience; to feel, suffer," as in "Suffer the little children to come unto me," or Breaking up the comic book, the story (picture) or none.

"the boundary of a body is neither a part of the enclosed body nor a part of the surrounding atmosphere." Jasper Johns

The compositional puzzle, edges of lines without lines, comic foot, flip the camouflage—compassionate brushwork, masterful, humble, that is, proud exuberance. Brooding vocabulary of richness overlays uncommon commonness. Shape of flesh suddenly becomes orange jump suit. Burnt orange, blue-green, lilac, milky undercoat, or overcoat. Shades of sharpness, robust, assured, free and bold. The light is ever rock-steady.

"Learn with the body." Yuasa Yasuo

Early July, near Parma, Marina and I were looking at the night sky, contemplating Venus. We could see what's seen "from the west coast," "from the east coast," from somewhere else now, in the window, out the window, through the window, within a squared-off window. In pieces, the shapes could be landscape or body, rolling shoulder, rock, hillock. Strokes breaking through. "Opposites attract." "Personal = political." "No beginning, no end." In pieces of paint, in *dhyana*, in meditation, the hillside acid during the hot temper of fiercest July.

And now we behold the silver painted flesh of Venus. Serene. Joy. Soft power. Healed? Annealed.

Marina Adams: Continuums

Flowing along shifting continuums, Marina Adams' most recent painting series is deceptively direct. Her work exists in the realm between aesthetic and cultural dichotomies or perhaps more accurately, the slippery juncture where they meet: an East and West mentality, the figurative and the abstract, flesh and fantasy along with the passionate and puritanical. Also among the unity of opposites present in her pieces are the individual mark of Modernism and the appropriation of Postmodernism. These contrasts, in essence are antithetical, yet alternately are concealed and revealed throughout Adams' work, each one ultimately transforming into the other.

Adams combines both the graphic line and sexual imagery from Eastern print erotica, such as Japanese *Shunga* and the Indian *Kama Sutra*. In her latest painting series, the influence of the *Ukiyo-e* movement, *Shunga*, is most evident. From as early on as the 16th century the wood-block based prints were popularized by influential artists such as Katsushika Hokusai, and became the precursor to contemporary *Manga* and *Anime* comics. *Shunga* style erotica revealed sexuality in a manner that was free of religious stigma. Sex was explored in unabashed clarity, free from taboo and seeped in fetish and accessible fantasy. Unlike in Western culture, where sex is burdened by centuries of sanctimonious restrictions.

Shunga, as with the *Kama Sutra*, were purely about pleasure. Despite the clean lines and overall flat brightly colored surface of the comic print style, the content delved into the tactile sensuality of the sexual act. Often exaggerating genitalia in seemingly impossible positions, *Shunga* focused on an open and raw physicality of intimacy without moral distraction, social codes, or hidden shame.

Throughout Adams' painting, such as with *Interior Moves* (2008), there is strong sense of Hokusai's compositions and figurative forms from his work, for example his print *Two Lovers* (ca.1815). In contrast, overlaid and intertwined within Adams' closely-cropped, provocative, *Ukiyo-e* and Hokusai-esque influenced drawn lines are varying levels of transparent and opaque color fields that reference distinctly American artist Andy Warhol's *Camouflage* (1986-87) silkscreen prints and paintings.

The palette and forms within Warhol's iconic *Camouflage* series invoke an historical dialogue impossible to ignore. A challenge to the Abstract Expressionists, Warhol saw the military-designed landscape pattern as an opportunity for individually unique organic forms that as a whole were also imbued with inherent, mass-production value. The hand of the artist within his forms was also simultaneously the act of mechanical reproduction for a commercial

means.¹ In *Camouflage*, nature and the all-encompassing Abstract Expressionist sublime are colorfully flattened into an accessible, non-threatening beauty—or a “deeply superficial” one—a term Warhol once used to refer to himself.

In addition to the theoretical discourse of Warhol’s *Camouflage*, the patterns in Adams’ paintings behave as camouflage in its purest form—effortlessly distracting and tempting the eye away from a clear perspective of what lies beneath. At first glance, the shapes and contrasting color palettes dominate the compositions overall. Within the organic contours, both muted blues and greens along with florescent oranges and reds self-consciously conceal the evocative content beneath in varying degrees of opacity such as in *Breathing Room* (2007), *Walkabout* (2008) and *Early Dawning* (2007). The sensuously alternating translucent and solid forms both inhibit and elicit a sexual versus an asexual discussion. The camouflage patterns acts as barrier, rejecting the viewer’s advances with another nod to Warhol and a puritanical plastic ideal of intimacy while the partially-veiled erotica invite voyeurism.

Adams describes her work as containing a “slowness,” and upon a lingering, closer inspection the underlying lines of intertwined flesh beneath the abstract forms come through, suddenly shifting the balance of the visual dialogue to the figurative. The tightly cropped Hokusai-esque torsos and limbs extend beyond the edges of the canvas, suggesting enough to draw upon the mind, both consciously and subconsciously, a visceral desire to delve deeper, to complete the provocative and passionate gestalt.

For Hokusai, the beauty present within even the slightest hint of a single one-dimensional mark could expand into a living conversation—an entry perhaps to the vastness of the sublime:

*At seventy-three I learned a little about the real structure of animals, plants, birds, fishes and insects. Consequently when I am eighty I'll have made more progress. At ninety I'll have penetrated the mystery of things. At a hundred I shall have reached something marvelous, but when I am a hundred and ten everything I do, the smallest dot, will be alive.*²

Adams’ lines seek this aliveness. Challenging one to cross into, through and beyond the canvas, her work leaves just enough to the imagination to experience the interlaced limbs and torsos somewhere between emotions and intellect, bringing into question flesh and fantasy. Flesh is inherently about connections, defining our passions and manifesting our desires, rejections, beliefs and disillusion, while fantasy keeps the sensual messiness just out of reach.

¹ Thomas Kellein, ed., *Andy Warhol Abstracts*, (Kempen: teNeues Publishing Group, 1993).

² The Hokusai Museum online, <http://www.book-navi.com/hokusai/hokusai-e.html> (accessed September 2008).

Caught within this lusty banter, the abstract camouflage patterns become figurative, mimicking the very content they initially disguised. Eventually the abstract and the figurative begin to undulate and switch places, each one becoming a compliment to the other as the eyes shift focus over the canvasses. For example in *Naked Beauty* (2008) or *Venus in the Sky with Diamonds* (2007), the Warhol-ian camouflage takes part in becoming flesh-like forms and the Hokusai-esque lines of the body become compositional abstractions.

From 16th century *Shunga* to 20th century Pop, as much as Adams' paintings appropriate with a Postmodern sensibility, she never fully relinquishes the Modernist brush stroke. Whether it is the graphic line or color field, there is a lightness and texture that makes them Adams' alone. In Western society, where dualistic interpretations are the basis of our deductions, it simplifies things to think of aesthetic discussions in terms of separate movements with distinct identifiers: sublime and beautiful, abstract and figurative, intimacy and distance and the political and the personal in polarized, black and white terms. Adams acknowledges and confronts that inherently all supposed facts and ideologies are ephemeral forms that continually conceal and reveal themselves, ready to infiltrate the other and shift the balance at a moments notice.

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