



I would not necessarily describe Linn's working mode as installation or environmental, but to a degree that is the ideal way to experience his exploration of materials, object and image. It is perhaps a fortuitous moment to contemplate this aspect of Linn's work, in that the current exhibition at MoMA, *Inventing Abstraction*, is an opportunity to consider how contemporary approaches to the tradition of non-objective abstraction offers a continuity, an extended search for a dynamic evolution from its now century old origins. When visiting the artist in his studio, one is surrounded by works that when experienced sequentially, form a maze of signage and architectural fragments. Linn's attention to installation offers a passageway of form/line/color that cumulatively suggest a spatial, interactive construct.

It is that confluence of image and structure that imbues Linn's work with an element of surprise and sense of discovery.

The artists with whom Linn has the most in common in the *Inventing Abstraction* show are, in my opinion, Brancusi, El Lissitzky and Malevitch. All three of these visual innovators explored the



Untitled, flashe on canvas, 2012, 54 x 58 inches

Timothy Linn Painterly Geometrics

Some artists are able to make their work look easy for us to "get", its accessibility suggesting the illusion of a quick read. However, it can also lead to the discovery that the first glance may be merely an introduction. Timothy Linn's work offers the patient viewer an active, tangible space of tactile surface and image, one that explores the links between art, architecture and the nuances of the hand-made object. Linn's multi-discipline works, in a variety of media, include a confident and exploratory painting and drawing approach with just about anything that will make the desired mark or field of color. His use of drawing, collage, carved, painted and pigmented wood and molded paper, assemblage, found materials like cardboard and Styrofoam, together represent more than three decades (1967-2012) of protean works, compelling in its clarity and directness. The pleasure for the viewer is to observe how these drawn and painted surfaces of two and three dimensions offer, in an ongoing dialogue, a spatial unity of organic shape and sculptural form.

nature of geometrics with the invention of a real (ie, illusionistic) or imagined space. They were also immersed in the extension of form and color into actual space. In Brancusi's *Endless Columns* the concept of a form that was once conceived as a base, ultimately emerged as form itself, one with an infinite vertical potential. Malevitch's elemental, suspended geometries and El Lissitzky's architectural constructs both explore flat and real space and the potential for a painting to become subject and object simultaneously, both significant elements of Linn's methodology. In addition, Linn shares a focus on the architectural construct with Polish artist Wladyslaw Strzeminski and this artist's concept of *Unism*, the unification of figure/ground in abstract painting.

An opportunity to view Linn's painted and cobbled works, several encompassing both elements, demonstrates this artist's open-ended process in bringing his visual impulse to fruition. The apparent minimal approach to his works on paper disguises years of search for a method of direct application of color and line, reduced to essential, graphic structures. Linn employs both the vertical orientation of his framed freestanding works on paper as a means of extending the spatial experience to suggest either a human scale space for psychic entry, like a door, or to see through, as a window. Linn's extension of the image to both sides of the paper adds an element of surprise and mystery, as the viewer must experience the work sequentially rather than all at once, adapting flat works to a 3-dimensional experience.

Two works in the exhibition from 1976, entitled *Dipopy (A and C)*, are harbingers of the work to come, as Linn experimented with a vertical diptych of two muted color squares. On closer observation, the lower square section canvas hangs like a small drape beneath a painted wood piece of the same proportions. Linn employs the contrast of material, weight of the support and subdued warm and cool atmospheric color, thereby offering an array of variables, all affecting a viewer's measured read of its



top left: *Untitled*, 2012
charcoal on Saunders
Waterford, 60 x 60 inches

left: *Untitled*, gouache on
Fabriano, 2012, 60 x 55
inches

right: *Untitled*, mixed
media on Saunders
Waterford, 2012, 60 x 60
inches

"content" Even more elusive is an oil on wood painting from 1977, in which an open format linear grid is activated by a field or cloud of grey paint, applied with abandon. The open format leaves much to the imagination, as one might interpret the grid as a floor plan or a city view. The rough surface is consistent with other works of this period, displaying a rawness that remains both distinctive and exploratory.

Experimentation continued with the works from the early to mid 2000's, from the painted vertical wall assemblages that resemble abstracted Oceanic totems, to the carved wood block (1995) that is both an homage to Brancusi and a freestanding, geometric icon. Linn's recent works have a formal clarity while maintaining the handmade freshness of the artist's earlier graphic or sculptural works. There is a youthful indulgence, a playful humor emanating from works on paper that have left and right panels, seemingly mirrored, but with subtle variations, and a long minimalist work of black lines that is reminiscent of Bob Rauschenberg and John Cage making their tire track impressions.

However, the overtly simple composition of his works on paper often conceals the sophistication of Linn's process. Both minimalist and formal, they are nonetheless deeply rooted in experiment and improvisation. In the large two-sided gouaches on paper, Linn has fashioned the ultimate enigma; a work of art that requires a response: the realization that it cannot be fully experienced without our participation, as we move with it, and the artist, in a visual dance.

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