

Art in America

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Laurie Fendrich at Gary Snyder

Laurie Fendrich's whimsical paintings maintain an unmistakable dialogue with high modernist abstraction, with nods to Russian Constructivism, Stuart Davis and even, perhaps, Alfred Jensen. However, they are anything but museum pieces. Instead, Fendrich seems determined to make the argument that geometric abstraction remains a viable approach to contemporary art.

Fendrich does this in various subtle ways. In her compositions, the crisply outlined monochrome shapes have something of Pop art about them. There are hints of Mickey Mouse ears and cartoon profiles. In one painting enigmatically titled *Hoovering* (1999), there appears to be a black silhouette of a rabbit. One ear stands to attention, while the other lies horizontally and appears to be locked in place by a small, green rectangle. Similarly suggestive, *Cat's Pajamas* (2002) seems to combine elements from a vase, a keyhole and a caricature head with a bulbous nose.

The shapes are arranged so that a figure/ground distinction remains, which

helps to contribute to near-emblematic readings. But such interpretations are unstable and fleeting, as the compositions can, just as convincingly, be seen as formal abstractions. From this perspective, shapes operate as interlocking forms with notches and protrusions like eccentric jigsaw-puzzle pieces of pure, brilliant color.

These small paintings (most are 30 by 27 inches) pack a graphic punch from a distance, while close-up they exhibit an engaging hand-painted quality. As in paintings by Malevich and Mondrian, one can detect irregularities of surface texture that come from dragging a brush across the canvas. At the same time, the compositions reference mechanical modes of creation like commercial printing and computer graphics. Sections of the paintings are composed of clusters of little, colored rectangles that evoke the breakup of a pixelated image. Similarly, the broader areas of flat color are separated by the pale, almost imperceptible outlines that result when the color plates of a print are not fully aligned.

There is something slightly postmod-

ern about Fendrich's colors. Instead of the pure primary or secondary colors one expects to see in paintings that make reference to modernism, these canvases are often dominated by peculiar shades of hot pink, chartreuse, wine red or aquamarine.

Such details bridge the gap between past and present. Despite her modernist lineage, Fendrich's treatment of color, form and composition suggests that she can't resist a playful jab at the modernist quest for purity.

— *Eleanor Heartney*