

The subject matter in much of Kate Shepherd's earlier work depicts familiar objects such as a flag, a shoe, or a flower. The images and contour drawings — rendered with grace and delicacy — are poignant yet subtly detached. Her recent paintings and works on paper at the Lannan Foundation take aim at the same goal, but further reduce the subject matter: an open box, an extended horizontal line, or simply a rectangular patch of paint. This work is composed with a limited visual vocabulary of distilled geometric forms enveloped by rich colors. Shepherd establishes an empirical game where the rules keep changing, and then steps back with us to consider the delicate balance within and between these elements.

Sometimes a presence is articulated without being completely drawn, or a geometric volume has been subtly altered to challenge our perception. These new forms seem more impersonal, and convey a sense of a surrogate; they're *there* but blank. Perhaps this is the solution of a figurative painter who is no longer willing to invest in nameable objects — an attempt to find meaning in the material world without furthering its clutter. The distillation of common shapes that look like empty containers brings a fresh beauty to the work.

Shepherd cuts up these geometric images, coolly edits them, and sets them floating on colors she calls palest yellow, same deep purple, apple green, and Big Red. One rectangle appears swollen with lines that subtly change direction. *Constellation, Bent Tray on Two Dark Blues*, is a pattern of dots without lines. Here Shepherd teases the viewer with the editing process and the painting becomes evanescent; all that's left is a subtle geometric constellation of points rendering the painting as a dark, starry sky.

At first look these pictures might even evoke a little anxiety as your eyes dart back and forth trying to fuse the two parts into some meaningful whole. The impulse is to correct a mistake or fill in the missing lines until you come to appreciate what's awry. In fact, a bend or a blip may not be an accident at all but something deliberately left in to playfully subvert our expectations. And Shepherd's approach couldn't be more secure. The visual breaks call to mind an ellipsis — the omission of a word (here a mark) necessary for

construction but understood in the larger context. Her hovering volumes are carefully composed of lines that might abruptly end in mid-thought. It is a fragile and beckoning geometry asking us to participate in its shaky conclusions.

The format of the diptych adds to the complexity and informs the work with a sense of event or narrative. The natural inclination is to read each composition as a kind of puzzle. The play between the parts is also compelling, the flickering movement that feels more like a visual conversation than a fixed idea.

Shepherd's classical training provided an early understanding of the painted depiction of space, and this work is a natural continuation. The recent vertically stacked panel paintings refer to portraits of nobility, echoing the presence of handsome, Spanish 17th Century full-body pictures that often occupy a neutral stage-like place: a good pedigree, poised and dignified. Each shape or volume in the paintings seems to exist in a space all its own, suspended and detached from everything around it, the absolute center of attention.

Like Fred Sandback's delicate geometric constructions in space made with colored yarn, Shepherd's lines have a humble confidence and intent, and carry authority, however threadlike. She also shares with Sandback an interest in bringing drawing and sculpture closer together, demarcating space without weighty materiality.

In *Wall Painting, Reflection of Opposing Entrance Door, Blue Tint*, Shepherd joins painting to the architecture of the gallery space itself. A luminous white shape painted directly on the wall implies a haphazard ray of light; it is off center and its outlines are not perpendicular. Continuing the binary dynamic, the wall painting relates to a preexistent element in the space, suggesting that light streaming down the long hallway from the opposite entrance door is casting this idiosyncratic glow. Like other works of Shepherd's, the wall painting is at once enigmatic and entirely logical. Can a picture be this blank and contained at the same time? These paintings recall seeing something familiar as if for the first time.

Rob Weiner