

Art Review: Jack Youngerman - Observe The Beautiful Form

May 29, 2013

by Gabrielle Selz

“Jack Youngerman: Triads Tondos Foils” at Washburn Gallery

Jack Youngerman is searching for the beauty that resides in the balance of harmonious arrangements. In other words: symmetry. His show, “Triads Tondos Foils,” on view at [Washburn Gallery](#) in New York until June 28, is an exploration of elaborate correspondences and balances among colors, systems and parts.

When he was a young man in Paris on the GI Bill, Youngerman befriended a group of artists, Ellsworth Kelly among them. Together, Kelly and Youngerman were later included in Dorothy Miller’s landmark show, *Sixteen Americans*, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in the winter of 1959. Both artists experimented with single colored canvases and geometric patterns, but while Kelly’s shaped canvases were often irregular, Youngerman sought to explore a radical symmetry of form.

The selections of paintings at the Washburn Gallery are optical constructions on plywood. Ranging in size from 2-foot triangles to 5-foot squares to circles nearly 5 feet in diameter, they are hard-edged emblematic shapes made up of intersecting patterns of triangles, squares and circles. The basic forms are often identical, but in each piece the artist varies the colors. Combinations of yellow and black, red and green or orange and red pulsate from relief to relief.

Each time Youngerman spins the kaleidoscope of bright colors, he changes the relationship between the images and the patterns they form. Translated from the ancient Greek, kaleidoscope means “observe the beautiful form” and the definition fits with the show, which is an examination of pattern, color and spatial ambiguity. A darker red center may recede causing the image to collapse inward, while a bright white center pops the shape forward like a flower in full bloom.



“Center/Red” by Jack Youngerman, 2013. Oil on Baltic Birch plywood, 25 1/2 x 29 1/2 inches. Courtesy Washburn Gallery, New York. Photo by Gary Mamay.

Though painting on flat wooden surfaces, Youngerman is playing with 3-dimensional depths and the stereoscopic quality that results from overlapping forms. This layering of shape causes Youngerman’s simple squares and triangles to appear complex and allows new patterns to emerge. When symmetries are combined, another symmetry results.



“Triptychos” by Jack Youngerman, 2011. Oil on Baltic Birch plywood, 59 3/4 x 56 inches. Courtesy Washburn Gallery, New York. Photo by Gary Mamay.

Some of Youngerman’s shapes resonate with a crystal-like structure, while others are more totemic, like tribal objects of protection and battle. This ability to be both organic and formal is classic Youngerman. His career has bridged an early passion for the wild colors and patterns of Matisse, with the stability of later Geometric Abstraction.

Along with the show at Washburn, [The Drawing Room Gallery](#) in East Hampton is currently exhibiting Youngerman’s recent gouache emblems on handmade Japanese paper. In keeping with that show, Washburn Gallery has made the stunning choice to exhibit the plywood paintings on a similar grey-brown wall. The muted wall displays the paintings in a softer, more natural light, causing them to feel less like coats of arms, and more like starbursts and constellations.

Ultimately, Youngerman has been seeking the harmony of opposites: the organic with the formal, the random with the ordered. His work is a balancing act of the simultaneous combination of parts in which the familiar and the elusive merge. The show on view at Washburn is a compelling statement of the beauty to be found in his radiant geometry.



Installation view of “Jack Youngerman: Triads Tondos Foils” at Washburn Gallery. Photo courtesy Washburn Gallery, New York. Photo by Gary Mamay.

BASIC FACTS: “Jack Youngerman: Triads Tondos Foils” remains on view through June 28. The Washburn Gallery is located at 20 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019.

www.washburngallery.com

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