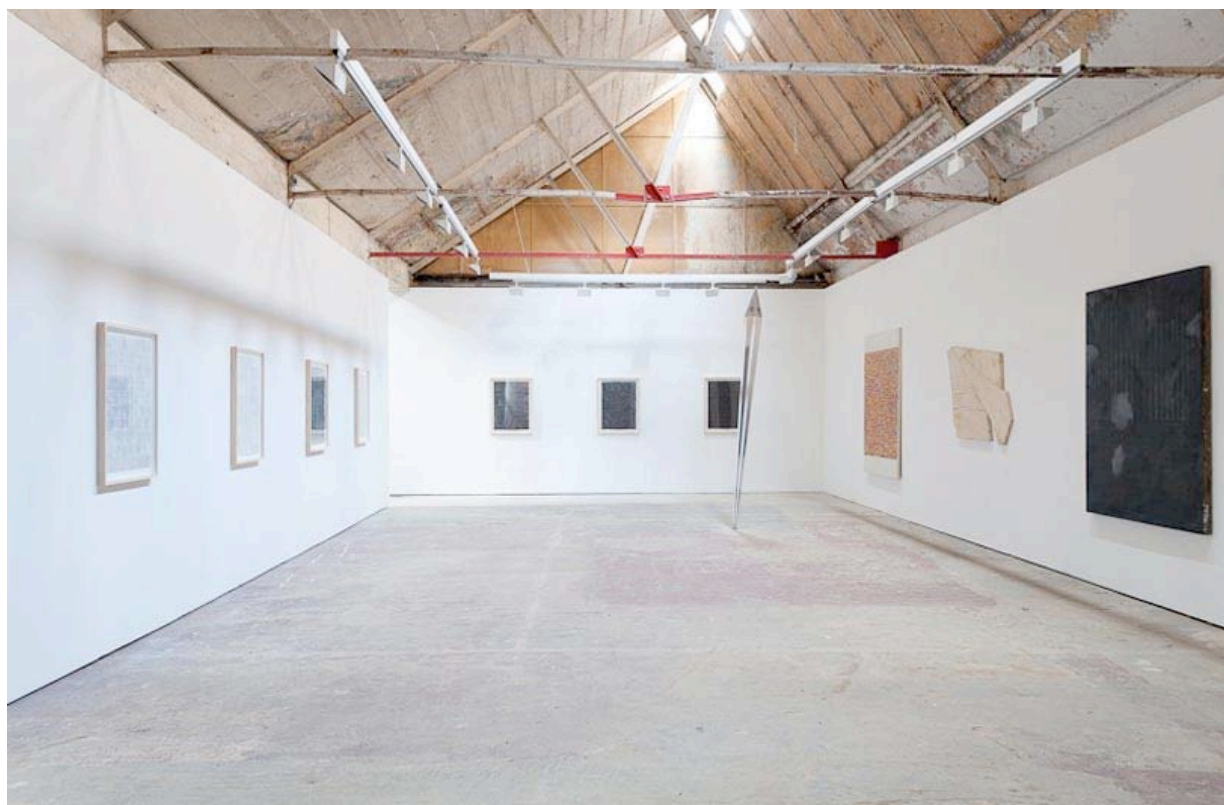


this is tomorrow

Contemporary Art Magazine

Hannah Barry Gallery, 133 Copeland Road, Copeland Industrial Park, Unit 9i, Peckham, London, 29 Dec 2011

Point. Line. Plane.



Title : Point. Line. Plane. (installation view)

Credit : Photo Damian Griffiths

Point. Line. Plane., review by Rye Holmboe

Kandinsky dreamt of a form of abstraction free from any reference to the external world. The angles of his curves, the breaks in his lines, the unrefracted quality of his colours, were, for the artist at least, unmediated manifestations of interiority. Spirit was present in the timelessness of line and colour, whose purity was unsullied by the vicissitudes of the material world.

The works gathered in Point. Line. Plane., a group show at the Hannah Barry Gallery in Peckham whose curator takes Kandinsky's writings as a loose starting point, subvert this metaphysical idealism without relinquishing the vocabulary of abstraction. Instead it is retained as a lever of intervention, a means of exploring the contradictions that arise when abstraction's transcendental pretensions are confronted with the claims of sensuous particulars.

Take Christopher Green's series of seven works, 1050 in the Key of Grey. In order to produce each work a sheet of paper has been cut into 150 rectangles that are roughly the size of a business card. These have been stuck onto a sheet of paper that measures the same size as the sheet out of which the rectangles were originally cut. The entire surface has

then been painstakingly covered in shaved graphite. The first of the seven works is of a pale grey, but they become progressively darker. The last, pictured below, is flooded with that reflective blackness particular to rubbed graphite.

The adjectives that first come to mind belong to a minimalist lexicon: reductive, serial, repetitive. But each rectangle is in fact slightly undulated because it has been pressed down and stuck to the under-sheet with a finger, a single gesture that has raised the paper's edges and left a fingerprint at its center. An otherwise rationalized pictorial plane is impressed with indexical traces of bodily activity. One might also say that the immutable geometry of the rectangle is marked by the sensation of time – the time of pressing and the time of making. The process of repetition, often associated with the mechanistic, here opens up a space in which the body's presence can be inscribed, albeit negatively.

Questions regarding materiality may provide a point of entry to the work of Rob Sherwood. His oil on canvas, *Untitled*, is composed of innumerable squares of red, blue, yellow, and green. In this chromatic configuration the expressive and symbolic qualities of colour have been evacuated. Yet Sherwood's use of colour is neither rigid nor inflexible, as it is in the work of Joseph Albers, say, or the Neo-Constructivists more generally. Instead the colours are arranged in an illogical manner. Sometimes the squares stand alone. Sometimes they merge into one another. Significantly, though, they do so without ever collapsing into sheer arbitrariness. Indeed, Sherwood's method in *Untitled* might best be described as one of random order.

At the same time, however, the endless modulations of colour invoke an inexhaustible boundlessness that challenges the finite dimensions of the pictorial plane, which are accentuated by the two colourless horizontal bands that give the work its spatial unity. Put slightly differently, it is by working through the contradiction between chance and system that colour obtains its contingent materiality and undermines the ordering constraints of the canvas. It is this paradoxical sense of bound boundlessness that makes Sherwood's work so compelling.

Contradictions arise in several of the other works exhibited. Lilah Fowler's beautifully balanced sculpture, for instance, has a mathematical purity that is brought into tension with the spectator's need to move around it. The body travels in a kind of negative space, destabilizing any single point of view. If Kandinsky's aesthetic can be described as a process in which higher concepts are derived from first principles, here we encounter a sense of provisionality where the contingencies of perception have the power to subvert mathematical absolutes.

Relatedly, Tom Hackney's *Chess Paintings* undermine logical structure by pushing it to its illogical extreme. Here the artist uses records of Duchamp's chess games to produce paintings in which each move is mapped out by filling a square on a grid, resulting in a palimpsest of delicately nuanced greys. The moves themselves, however, are now irretrievable. In *Inscription*, the work suggests, always bears within itself the risk of forgetfulness. The success of one game is the loss of another.

Whether they address memory, colour, space or indexicality, the works gathered in this elegantly curated exhibition are consistently at odds with themselves. This, perhaps, is their accomplishment: to have worked through contradictions without losing their coherence altogether, releasing abstraction from the metaphysics of purity and transcendence.