

Art Review:

Judy Ledgerwood: Chromophilia

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Five years ago, Judy Ledgerwood stopped painting before reaching the edge of her canvases, leaving white borders of varying regularity that make her paintings (as she has remarked) less like objects and more like walls themselves: stable if not permanent architectural structures that enable even the most weighty application of paint to look momentary. In this her work brings to mind John Wesley, master of not only the white-bordered painting-as-a-box but also the blissful heaviness that surprisingly can be found in absolute lightness – as well as, of course, his killer colours. Weight, in Ledgerwood's work, is as psychological as it is material: various thicknesses of oil paint (or in one instance, encaustic), vibrant and deliberately clashing colours, and aggressively intricate patterns come together in eye-boggling combinations that simultaneously catch and release her imagery as if it were rays of light moving across a room. Ledgerwood has pulled out all the stops in this exhibition, taking advantage of the gallery's two floors to move us through the 'story' of her work, a narrative supported by the formal mainstays of modernist abstraction yet driven by an unrelenting, even badass attitude.

Six of Ledgerwood's small paintings (each 38 x 38 x 5 cm) fill the first floor of the gallery. Most have been given walls of their own, and they need them, as no one is like any of the others, even though most of them use her now-signature four-part 'floral' arrangement made from fat strokes of paint that circle back to where they started. Each of these expansive paintings has an irregularly painted overall shape that pushes the white edge of the canvas against the surrounding wall so that the painted image itself acts as if it were in motion: for example, *Hot Sun Cool Shade* (all works 2010) looks to be slipping off its right edge, while *Tangerine Sun* and *Summer Sea* sticks to its centre by holding onto a ring built from frostinglike deposits of candy-coloured paint.

An unapologetically over-the-top wall painting crowds the irregular space at the top of the stairs. Called *One Voice (For Patti Smith)*, it surrounds a set of seven ceramic vessels that Ledgerwood recently produced in Mexico. After the intensifying contraction of the small paintings, the expansive collision of pattern and colour, as well as the domestic context of usevalue and visual pleasure, reinforces Ledgerwood's commitment to the diversity of both physical and pictorial space in her work. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the three large paintings that bring the exhibition to a riotous yet rigorous climax. Painted as if they were cloths draped on the wall-like white surface of their tall canvases, the patterns of *Monster Love*, *Tequila Sunrise* and *Magenta in A Minor* could almost be waving in the wind, if not for the drips of paint that re-attach them pictorially to their bottom edges. Their colour combinations simultaneously make everything vibrate in our eyes, demonstrating that when it comes to creating movement in stillness, Ledgerwood is at the top of her game.

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