



RANDY BLOOM

Cover: "Clown Around," Acrylic on Canvas, 68" x 68", 2011

Special thanks to Richard Timperio and Sideshow Gallery.



"Big Fun," Acrylic on Canvas, 71.5" x 68", 2011

Randy Bloom's paintings are big, squared-away fields of color, luminous and subtly textured. This would be enough to say if they were nothing more than that—and it's worth stopping for a moment to ask why they should be anything more. Ever since Kazimir Malevich painted *White Square on White* in 1918, monochrome has been central to the very idea of modern painting. And I think Bloom embraced this idea, in all its stark simplicity, even as she made these paintings so wonderfully—and wittily—complex. A wide range of colors flickers through the canvases in this series and they all swarm with formal incident. Yet their underlying color fields never go out of focus, never retreat to the role of backdrops to everything else that goes on in these paintings. Far from it, for this "everything else" looks like a commentary on the luscious expanses of monochrome color where it appears.

Take the hollow squares that somersault across every canvas, capturing right-angled patches of the surface and thus marking off fields within the field. Laid on in a color distinctively its own, each of these squares—or frames—enters into a unique relationship with the color it encloses. It's as if a friendly competition is taking place, with an orange frame saying, look, my hue is the best at bringing out the vibrancy of the prevailing monochrome, while a blue frame says, no, not at all, mine works much better. Of course, Bloom has chosen these framing colors with an eye to leaving the controversy unresolved. In fact, one after the next, these hollow squares elicit a fresh quality from the monochrome field and it is impossible to say that one of these lush and lively color combinations is any lusher or livelier than any other.

Throughout this exhibition, we see the artist instigating rivalries that morph, as we look, into collaborative unions, as a form's variants join in the illumination of something basic—the canvas, a flat surface defined by right angles. But "illuminate" may be the wrong word, for it implies an impersonal process, as when the critic says: deployed with sophistication, elements of the pictorial art are made to clarify one another. Bloom is thoroughly sophisticated and her forms and colors are mutually clarifying. Yet there is more to her art, because of the mode—or the mood—in which she creates it. The artist doesn't soberly illuminate or clarify so much as animate or even intoxicate, imbuing her pictorial devices with a giddy sense of the parts they play in the big picture. The hollow squares are small, but thanks to their cartwheeling energy, they are bigger than the lives they lead on the canvas, for each is a recapitulation of the canvas itself. And sometimes grandly wavering streaks of color echo the straight edges of the field, restating these familiar premises and also teasing them a bit for their staid propriety.



“Oh No,” Acrylic on Canvas, 24” x 23”, 2011

Throughout these paintings, pictorial elements are responding to one another, to the overall image, and to painting—the medium that makes them visible. It's as if they are contemplating their own existence, and I am reminded of Socrates's remark, that the unexamined life is not worth living. Reverse this maxim, apply it here, and it goes like this: a painting is worth painting only if it carries on, in the midst of its other projects, an examination of all that makes it count as a painting. For a painting needs the look of self-awareness we see in Bloom's works, though I am not suggesting that, in the light of Socrates's remark, her art becomes ponderously philosophical. Rather, in the light of Bloom's art, the idea of the examined life acquires a spirit of fun and, ultimately, joy.

Carter Ratcliff 2011



"All Fall Down," Acrylic on Canvas, 68" x 65", 2011



"Merry-Go-Round," Acrylic on Canvas, 71.5" x 68", 2011



"Boo," Acrylic on Canvas, 71.5" x 68", 2011

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