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By Molly Enholm

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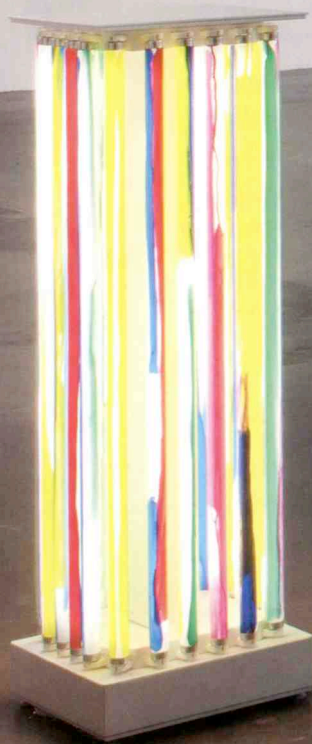
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# SUPER SATURATED!

With inspirations as diverse as the sun, surf and pixels, three SoCal artists bring a vibrant new twist on modernist abstraction

By Molly Enholm



It is nothing new to speculate that artists have found inspiration in “the unique light” of Southern California; it has been a defining factor associated with the West Coast from the so-called provincialism of the Eucalyptus painters to the innovations of the Light and Space icons. Likewise, Finish/Fetish and SoCal brands of Pop had a look of their own, with an equal infatuation with color, taking inspiration from man-made constructions as varied as surfboards, hot rods, beauty queens and swimming pools. Although this rich source material continues to inspire artists working here, over the past half-decade it seems to have been turned up a few degrees, as though the traditional pigments found on artist’s palettes have been infiltrated by radiated pixels. The soft hum of Lisa Bartleson’s lush primary-hued mixed-media works; Jorge Oswaldo’s graphic manipulations of corporate branding reimaged in neon colors; Ali Smith’s expressionistic vibrant swaths of paint; not to mention Cosimo Cavarelo’s public artworks, electric-eccentric oversized jelly bean sculptures recently installed at West Hollywood Park are but a few of the latest examples of this growing phenomenon.

Active within this proliferation, SoCal-based artists Yunhee Min, Heather Gwen Martin, and R. Nelson Parrish each posit a no-holds-barred approach to color, culling inspiration from such varied sources as sunlight, animation, and motion, respectively. Beyond sharing a passionate concern for color, these artists maintain a sophisticated and studied approach, reaching deep into the vast lexicon of modern “isms” to create contemporary mash-ups that simply reverberate with vitality, beauty, and—dare I say—touch of optimism.

## Yunhee Min

“I think it takes a long time to look at a painting,” states Los Angeles-based artist Yunhee Min. “It is asking a lot, and counter to everything that we do every day. It’s demanding for us to just stop and look at something.” Min’s knockout summer show at Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, titled “Into the Sun,” rewarded a viewer’s careful scrutiny beyond the surface appeal of her super-saturated paintings. A combination of primary,



neon and fluorescent acrylics—the type that linger in your vision after staring straight “into the sun”—the show reflects Min’s current fascination with colors that seem to radiate from within. “I might begin with a certain set of decisions, such as colors, size of the painting itself,” Min explains. “But it’s not a set process, I’m always looking for some sort of surprise to happen. And, this way of working is fairly different from what I had done before.”

The evolution of Min’s career may be considered a bit unusual by today’s standards. After receiving her BFA from Art Center in Pasadena in 1991, she decided not to go to graduate school. Instead, looking for a change in scenery, the young artist traveled to Germany, where she was accepted in to Kunstakademie, which she describes as a one-on-one master/apprentice relationship. She returned in 2003, with a solo exhibition at Vielmetter, and shortly thereafter was asked to teach a course at UCLA. Somehow between painting, teaching, working on production sets—where her interest in installation was peaked—she found herself in Boston, where she applied for and was accepted into Harvard University. After a two-year period “thinking about painting,” and “getting no sleep,” as both a student and teaching fellow, she received her MFA in 2007.

At this point, Min’s painting style was strategic: color-field style paintings, consisting of three vertical stripes of color. “I remember making the conscious decision,” Min explains. “I didn’t want to deal with the problem of composition... as a problem. The vertical bands became a kind of structure, so I could pay more attention to color and I could use color more urgently.” Additionally, the hard-edge approach completely removed any indication of the artist’s hand from these works, instead employing a strict formalism to explore not only color, but also space, perception and memory.

While the *Sun* paintings continue the vertical orientation of the earlier paintings and installations, there is an open-ended quality in the newer works. The layering of pigments in various degrees of translucency allowing viewer’s to glimpse beneath the perceived surface. The highly

“INTO THE SUN,” 2013, Yunhee Min, SUSANNE VIELMETTER LOS ANGELES PROJECTS  
PHOTO: ROBERT WEDEMEYER; COURTESY SUSANNE VIELMETTER LOS ANGELES PROJECTS

physical process, applying the thinned washes of paint with a squeegee instead of a brush, also reintroduced traces of the visible interaction between the artist and canvas. "In some ways it is anti-theoretical to the historical, early modernist notions of abstraction always distilling to some ideal utopic state of purity," Min explains, "For me it is more about the potential for new things to happen, and new relationships to occur."

In this latest series of work, Min chose to work with a combination of acrylic and flashe paint, noting the highly concentrated pigmentation and her attraction to the spectrum of fluorescent colors of the latter. "I think there is something 'West Coast' here," Min says as she notes how the brightening of her palette followed her return to the southland. "Colors can be specific to culture, to a region, and can work in a very culturally or regionally specific, symbolic way... I'm interested in all this, and I think it works through me."