

My first encounter with the paintings of Lloyd Martin was at his solo exhibition at the historic Lenore Gray Gallery in Providence, Rhode Island in 2002. While writing for a Boston-based art magazine, I was assigned by the editor to review his show. The first sentence of that review is still very applicable to Martin's paintings today: "It's great to see a show of solidly-balanced abstract painting where process and color are ripe with passion, and form is steeped in structure."<sup>1</sup> Since that exhibition, his use of emboldened color has definitely become more expansive, as in his newest paintings at the Friesen Gallery in Sun Valley, Idaho. And, the geometric bars of expressive brushstrokes have drastically multiplied. But, the relationship of those expressive bars to his soft enigmatic background washes has continued and become even more emphatic.

Visiting Martin recently in his new spacious studio in North Providence was an experience filled with color but also sound as he enjoys a variety of music while working. Music has been an integral part of his work as his paintings can also be viewed as musical notations and recall his early days playing guitar in a rock band. His complex but sometimes rudimentary gestures are like the movements and passages in a musical score. On his studio's walls, that were bathed in ambient light from high clerestory windows, were placed a variety of older and current paintings that he continues to study and rework. Each was a different size and proportion which he acknowledges has an influence on their final compositions. Working from a variety of approaches to begin each painting, Martin utilizes thumb-nail sketches, collages from photographs of architectural elements that are generated from his computer, and sometimes even scraps of paper found on his studio floor. Just like his final paintings, there are many preliminary pages that are developed to create a final composition. Actually, he also sees his paintings as a series of pages on each canvas. To better comprehend and categorize his work, he has organized his paintings into three categories: Benders, Stacks and Shifts. These categories become like volumes in a literary series when considering each painting as a publication in Martin's ongoing process.

In this new exhibition that Martin has titled *Shift – Stack – Bend*, the hallmark painting will be *Large Carbon Riff* (2018) which Martin calls a Bender. In this large (68 by 92 inches) oil-on-canvas painting, areas of brightly-colored stacked bars appear to float above a dark background like colorful rectangular islands on a dark sea. Each is separated by the contrast of their light and dark shades which aid in defining the foreground and background. The viewer's eyes jump from one island of color to another but one can also become immersed in one specific area in the center-left of the canvas that is engaging with its labyrinth-like form. The area bends its bars to create corridors of color in which our eyes playfully glide. Martin pushes the boundaries of color relationships in this painting by juxtaposing color opposites in these bars, by using blues and

oranges, and quirky pinks and minty greens. And, all are painted with highly visible brush strokes to add to the charged energy on the canvas's surface. It's an exciting optical adventure to view this painting.

In the square composition *Figure* (2019), which Martin also calls a Bender, the "figure" in its 60 by 60-inch canvas appears to spiral counter-clockwise as the primarily-monochromatic, blue linear areas float on a white background. The abstract "torso" of the "figure" is playfully injected with narrow bars of yellow. Unlike other Martin paintings, this geometric "figure" is surrounded by a contrasting light background, which also contributes to its visual sense of mobility.

In *Quad* (2019), the vertical composition is divided into four separate but adjacent areas. There is a dramatic play between each of the separate backgrounds and the bars that float within their specific areas. Some are interconnected while others are isolated within their confined spaces. Most of the color is subtle and explores the mid-range of the gray scale and is accented with punctuated bars of different shades of blue. However, in the upper right quadrant of the painting, two bars of bright orange add quirky elements to the overall composition.

One might say that Martin utilizes a grid when establishing a format for his paintings but that would be only a small aspect of what actually takes place. His compositions, that draw primarily from architectural influences, are the result of intuitive placement and his reactions to the gestalt during his act of painting. The structural order of these compositional environments is altered and transformed by the gesture and emotion within these micro-moments. There is a dynamic balance between the structure and the rhythm within each of his paintings, and that balance is achieved by his eloquent use of color, form and intuitive gesture.

<sup>1</sup>Michael Cochran, quoted in "Gallery Gallery," *artsMEDIA*, Summer, 2002.

Michael Cochran  
*Adjunct Associate Professor of Art History*  
*Bridgewater State University*  
*Bridgewater, Massachusetts*