

Wetterling Gallery

ANGELA DE LA CRUZ

Vacant

Magnus af Petersens

When entering the gallery to see Angela de la Cruz' exhibition, the visitor has to sidestep a warped deep red canvas without its frame that is lying on the floor, as if just left there. The tire-marks of a wheel chair run across it. Two rolled up canvases are leaning against the walls like carpets in a shop or rolled up for transport. Another canvas is bundled into a ball, as if it was a piece of paper that someone, dissatisfied with writing, crumbled and tossed. The title of the show, *Vacant*, suggests that the space is abandoned. White cube galleries can indeed look empty but usually, there is a clear sense of order with works of art installed according to a specific rationale. But the gallery has not closed down; it is of course all carefully staged. Angela de la Cruz' exhibitions are conceived with a strong consideration of the architecture of the spaces where the works are shown.

Angela de la Cruz is an artist that repeatedly calls attention to the physical quality of the paintings she makes. Taken off their stretchers and rolled or crumpled, or with the sides deep enough to appear as a box hung on the wall, their three-dimensionality is emphasized. They occupy and relate to the space where they are shown in a concrete manner, sometimes becoming actors in a drama.

But, nevertheless, they are paintings, even if the borders between painting and sculpture have been blurred at least since Minimalism, which more often than not, originated in sculpture. As has been pointed out by many writers on her work, it is very much in line with what Donald Judd described in his seminal essay *Specific Objects* (1965): "neither painting nor sculpture but something in between".¹ The strong and often bright colors of the painted surfaces, whether canvas or aluminum, are shiny and the smooth, even brushstrokes are luxurious and sensual. The bubble-gum pink of several works in this new series is pop, but it is also the color of make-up, of a feminine world, very un-like the rather macho and severe unpainted surfaces of Minimalism.

However, the paintings seem to have been subjected to some sort of violence, torn from their frames, the support broken, abused. The

¹ Donald Judd, "Specific Objects", *Arts Yearbook 8*, reprinted in *Donald Judd: Complete Writing (1959-1975)* Halifax, Nova Scotia; New York, The Press of the Nova Scotia Collage of Art and Design, New York University Press, 2005 (1975), p 181. Miguel Wandeschneider discusses Angela de la Cruz' work in relation to minimalism in: "A painting too many": notes on the work of Angela de la Cruz, in *Trabalho*, Lisbon, 2006.

[Skriv text]

contrast between the slick, beautiful, even sexy paintings and the violence they have been subjected to, is disturbing. But at the same time there is something absurd and slapstick in these crashed works, like a cartoon.

Tight (201) is the title of a group of paintings where the canvas has been partly detached and then stretched onto a larger stretcher. Half of the painting is still on its original frame or stretcher and the other uncomfortably, almost painfully dragged out to reach around the larger stretcher. The canvases of the works are stretched to the verge of bursting or snapping, it appears they are held in hard tension.

Throw(2013) is a deep, box-like painting attached to the wall. Its lower part is dented as if it has fallen from a great height and has been compressed on impact with the ground, folding like a harmonica.

Burst(2013) is a bright, yellow painting in the shape of an aluminum box that seems to have been subjected to considerable pressure or even to an explosion inside, which has caused the sides to bulge outwards leaving only the top surface flat and square. Both works have the character of pressure-cookers; their energy contained within. Unlike the Minimalist cube, which was intended to be empty, this box has something inside that has created or exerted a great pressure, which in a way, tells a story.

When discussing the expressive character of these works with the artist, she compares them to some people who hide their emotions behind a glossy surface, like a buttoned-up smile. Many people want to show a calm, collected front even when they are bursting with emotions inside. Is it too stereotypical to presume this might be a Spanish person's perception of the English?²

The expressiveness, the drama in de la Cruz' work, the hints of a narrative, as in the deserted space or the disfigured paintings bearing witness to some sort of violent act - all are traits that set the works aside from the concrete, from the constructivist or from Minimalist disinterest and empty cubes. Because after nearly 100 years of abstract painting, abstraction is no longer without references. Geometric abstraction was invented in a revolutionary utopian spirit that was part of larger social and political upheavals - as a new art for a new age. It was something that nobody had seen before, a new start, a point zero. But today it is possible to look at new abstract works and to consider those works and ideas that preceded them, which they either celebrate or critique - often both at the same time. Angela de la Cruz' works are in dialogue with the history of painting, especially with those abstract works that were once seen as the end point of painting. Luckily, they were not the end but rather another beginning.

² Angela de la Cruz is born in Spain and moved to London to study art and she has remained in the city.