

Models of Light: Brian Zink's *Chromatic Structures*

By Jeff Perrott

Chromatic Structures finds the artist transfiguring his hard-edged, colored Plexiglas assemblages *from the inside out*. Where recent iterations of this project have complicated and problematized the artist's language of abstraction by introducing clear figure-ground spatial relations, *Chromatic Structures* exposes these figures to the action of light, transforming them from solid bodies in space into bodies of light—all while hewing closely to the compositional and conceptual rigor that has marked his work for over 20 years.

Zink's work always begins with and returns to its formal particulars—its flatness, scale, and proportion. His original compositional method operationalizes a set of rules governing possible choices in how each square support gets divided symmetrically by diagonals—and then divided again, and again. By varying the initial conditions of the game, and applying parameters for reduction, lines become interconnected geometric shapes, and then shapes get color—prefab Plexiglas colors, another constraint whose limits push the game in a new dimension: the interaction of color that alternately signals flatness and illusory space. Simple rules gain complexity and diversity—a hermetic plastic language producing seemingly endless permutations.

Zink, however, is not interested in formal permutations, but in linguistic expansion: the steady evolution of the parts, and the whole they make, into new expressive formations. For Zink, his *method* is a *model*, in the sense the critic Yve-Alain Bois ascribes to Piet Mondrian, in Bois' essay *Painting: The Task of Mourning*:

"Painting was for [Mondrian] a theoretical model that provided concepts and invented procedures that dealt with reality: it is not merely an interpretation of the world, but the plastic manifestation of a certain logic that he found at the root of the phenomena of all life"

"The function of plastic art is not descriptive..." Bois continues, quoting Mondrian, "...but it can evoke in us the conviction of existent truth."

If Zink has never wavered from his *certain logic*, the basic principles and parameters of his *method as model*, it is not because of an aesthetic preoccupation with the shapes and forms it produces, but because of his allegiance to the *reality* this logical model asymptotically approaches. Over time, the evolution of this model has turned flat, adjacent colored planes which point to an idealized flat ontology into subtle shifts in hue and value which model figuration, grounded in the here and now.

In *Chromatic Structures*, Zink infuses this model of *figuration* with one of refiguration or, more accurately, *transfiguration*: ground and figure get fused by light to push the appearance of figure-in-ground to *figure-as-light*. By opening the center of the figures to this infusion of light, they gain transparency, and their planar parts become mixtures of colored light, not surfaces illuminated by the fall of light. This new model of light-as-constituting-agent acts as what Bois calls, in his essay *Painting as Model* (from the book of the same title) a 'symbolic model'—one symbolic structure infused into another, not to destroy or contradict the first, but to effect a "...taxonomic collapse, [an] overturning of opposites—especially between representation and action..."

Representation—description, body—and *action*—the fugitive escape of the body into time—fused into changeable, ethereal bodies, visible here in the works as they seemingly continue to unfold in light, as light. What's modeled is not *transfigured bodies*, but *transfiguration* itself, the continued and sustained infusion and action of light on the body—*bodies of light*.

Essays cited:

Yve-Alain Bois, "Painting: The Task of Mourning", in *Painting as Model*, MIT Press: 1993, p 240.

Yve-Alain Bois, "Painting as Model", in *Painting as Model*, MIT Press: 1993, p 254.