

ZIN HELENA SONG: Beyond Color

by Jonathan Goodman

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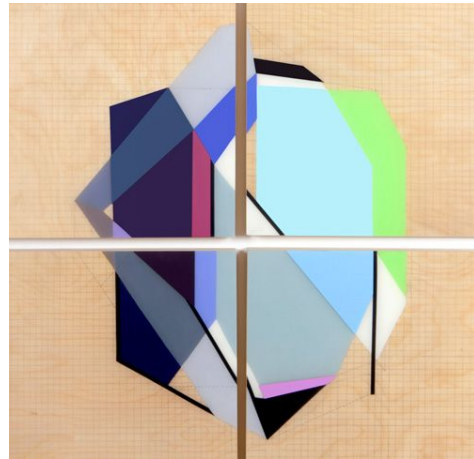
Zin Helena Song is a painter of real precision and technical acuity. For the past few years, she has been painting on wooden sculptures, whose angles and structure reach out from the wall in the direction of her audience. In this very good show she continues to make similar pieces, but adds to her repertoire flat pictures, also done on wood. Song is a Korean-born, New York-based artist who received her master's degree here in America. She possesses an impeccable sense of design, and is open to Western geometric works of art. To give a sense of her hybrid approach, Song has named an ongoing sequence of works "Grid Origami," which sites her efforts in both Western modernism and Asian paper folding traditions. Finding a common origin between two such different kinds of art is a difficult task, but she has come up with a language that pulls imagery from both in interesting ways. Her succession of paintings reflects the influence of Mondrian as well as the exactitudes of origami. The paintings convey a formal intelligence that, in the three-dimensional works especially, pushes the idiom of abstract geometric painting into new areas of expression. Additionally, her strong sense of color relations invigorates both the concept and the expressiveness found in her art.



Zin Helena Song, "Polygon in Space No. 18," 2014. Mixed media on wood. 38 x 24 x 4".

It appears that the kinds of investigations Song has addressed herself to are of an individualistic kind. Certainly, the modernist realm of abstraction is mostly behind us, although the pluralism of new American art gives voice to single, and singular, efforts that make use of art history. Song is an artist who represents such pluralism in the best way possible. Her attractive work plays off the notion that just about anything in the past can be made use of, enabling both artist and viewer to enjoy tradition within a highly contemporary motif. In the wall painting, "Polygon in Space No. 18" (2014), the depth of the work is four inches, clearly a dimension that indicates sculptural meaningfulness as well as a painterly decision. Consisting basically of two triangular forms, "No. 18" conveys a radical modernity that is built from differing colors—gray, orange, magenta, white, yellow, and dark blue. These hues are painted so that they highlight the overall shape of the work, which has as its core an empty space revealing the wall behind it. The angles move both vertically and horizontally, establishing a rigorous presentation that is formal throughout. The expressiveness exists within the complex relations defined by the differing areas of paint, whose linear aspect acts as a key to the work's meaning.

Song's paintings are beautiful to look at. Additionally, they are complicated within their mode of expression. So much is going on that they tend to be hard to describe, although the artist's painterly abstraction eventually prevails, communicating the close-to-absolute beauty of a visual ideal. This happens in the flat paintings as well as the more sculptural ones. "Grid Origami No. 3" (2014), a mixed-media work on wood, is a square abstract painting consisting of four pieces. The mix of colors occurs on the panels' tightly gridded area; the four components are separated from one another by a small space. The polygonal shapes on top of the grid are painted a variety of colors; except for black, none of the colors are repeated. In the lower-right quadrant a thin line extends beyond the mass of colored forms; this line is exceptional in that its lower fourth is the sole part of the composition that is not within the general aggregation of shapes. It sticks out, but in a way that suggests difference and originality rather than mere assertion. Here, Song finds ways of painting that emphasize creativity rather than geometric gridlock.



Zin Helena Song, "Grid Origami No. 3," 2014.
Mixed media on wood. 24 × 24".

"Origami 1 No. 28" (2014) measures 17 × 17 × 6 inches; it is a painting that is also a sculpture. A thin, bright, cobalt blue line outlines one of the jutting edges. Large areas are pink, with the lower front part of the work colored blue and edged with a grey stripe in one space, and yellow in the left side, lower space. Minimalist but painterly, the work is interesting for its direct use of colors; these underline the different fields created by the shape of the object. As often happens in Song's pieces, "No. 28" feels as much like a scientific exploration as it does a whimsically colored



Zin Helena Song, "Origami 1 No. 28," 2014.
Mixed media on wood. 17 × 17 × 6".

work of art. Song is a painter of rigorous method, and this adds to the effect she is seeking, namely, a work that begins and ends in painting but also investigates sculptural values. Her viewers gratefully acknowledge such technical gifts, knowing that they are a means to an end. It is rare to find a young painter who offers us both potential and finished works of art, but Song establishes an aesthetic that makes excellent use of the two categories.

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