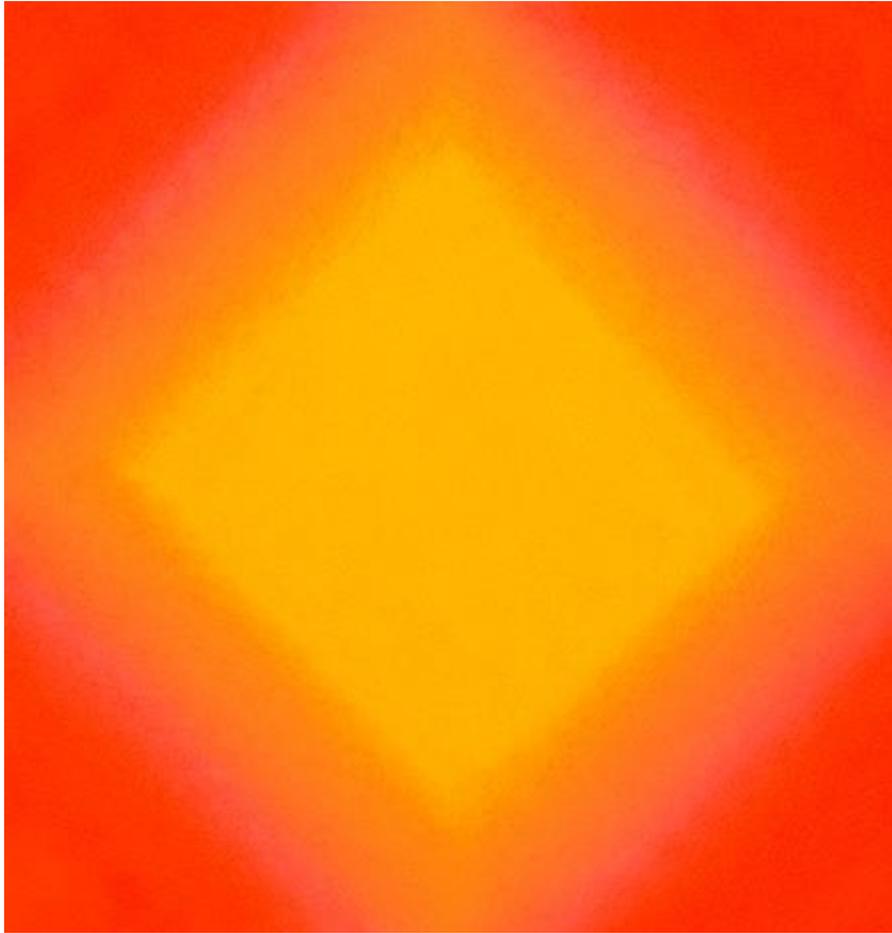




Ruth Pastine

Carnegie Art Museum, Oxnard, California

Preview by Roberta Carasso



Ruth Pastine, "Warm-Light Yellow-Orange, Diamond, Interplay Series," 2013, pastel on paper, 14 x 14"

Continuing through May 24, 2015

Master colorist Ruth Pastine's current show surpasses her previous exhibitions. The artist exhibits 32 new works, hung in six galleries where each room is designated for displaying a particular color system investigation. Placing each color interchange in separate areas allows the viewer to experience the depth of Pastine's art. Seen individually, each oil on canvas is a record of the profound dialogue that ensues in her process. Seen together, as a series of ensembles, the art effectively sings either sotto voce; and in some areas, shouts with color.

This pivotal exhibition is rich with artistic ideas that invigorate notions of color theory. Its title, "Present Tense" sets the tone, telling much about the art and about Pastine. It means that the

artist's engagement, when deeply exploring penetrating aesthetic concepts, takes place in the precise moment, not before and not after. The artist in effect pulls hidden ideas out of a void, engages in receiving and responding, takes risks in developing something fresh, sustains the excitement of discovery, and at the end of her rigorous process presents us with the newly-born color possibilities she has unearthed. Pastine also shows that color is not just a spectrum of the familiar, but an unexplored vein that must be mined. The way in which she pursues each investigation feels relentless, relating color-to-color, color in dialogue, contradictory and complimentary colors, the rhythms, luminosities, balance, temperatures, strength, and flow inherent in color's capacities. Pastine excavates this, placing each work within a unique beveled structure she designed. Her art yields seamless depictions that come as close as possible to the primary spiritual meaning of art.

Certainly, Pastine gives us much to contemplate. Her process has the structure of a musical composition, in which arrangements of a limited set of options (notes or colors) yield infinite combinations within that plastic language. In each painting she seeks to find new relationships between what is known about color; and more importantly, what is not known. One color discovery is seen in her archetypical complimentary "Red and Green" paintings. In them she highlights the secondary color green as it relates to the boldness of red. Through color relationships, Pastine shows that the temperature of a hot red can be cooled down by the placement and quantity of a green; making the green seem warm and intense. Thus, red, the more powerful, is subdued by green, as we see green as an illumination appearing as if for the first time. Then there is the "Blue and Orange" series, in which she draws our attention to orange by accentuating the offset between the internal and external distinctions of blue and orange. Here Pastine demonstrates that blue, with its regal nature, can bow out to orange. In Pastine's hands these relationships are but visceral and demanding.

The artist's use of what she terms "banding" addresses the geometry of the square. Here she places a variety of colors next to one another to maximize the radiance each hue emanates when placed in the confines of a narrow vertical space that butts against a color of a different visual strength. In her quest to find a variety of ways to search out the nature of color possibilities, Pastine exhibits pastels executed in gray, black, and white. Due to the unique qualities and limitations of the powdered chalk pastel medium, Pastine intensifies optical edges between chroma and value shifts. In this way she heightens perceptual contrasts of light and spatial interplay, creating surface and spatial tensions that are in constant flux. She also now brings this quality to her newest oil paintings.

The muscular nature of her inquiry comes from building up many layers of numerous color juxtapositions. Employing countless brushstrokes, she explores the changing dynamics of color across various media. When color is positioned structurally, it can leap out, contrast with adjacent color, as well as convey distinct polarities. The intensity of her quest fuels heroic efforts. Pastine goes for broke in this exhibition and has produced one of the best shows of the year.

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