

HUFFPOST ARTS & CULTURE

Haiku Reviews: ART 2014 Roundup III

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RUTH PASTINE, *Red Green 2-S4848 (Magenta Violet)*,
Sense Certainty Series, 2014, Oil on canvas, 48x48 inches

Ruth Pastine paints as purely optical a kind of painting as it is possible to paint. Her work comprises nothing but color and its presentation; that is, her canvases and works on paper, usually square, present our eyes with myriad, closely shifted color modulations, the modulations defined and delineated in vertical bands that occur towards the sides of the paintings and drawings. This columnar banding reinforces the infinite depth -- or, if you would, depthlessness -- of each image's center; but as the eye comes to rest in this center it realizes that relative optical depth is not only indistinct here, but is not even at issue. It is the color itself, its effect as a luminous, vibratory presence and as a spaceless space that acts upon one's sensibilities -- not just one's eyes. With a tad more subtlety in her tonal shifts Pastine could thoroughly fool our eyes into seeing what isn't there. But what she wants us to see is everything that is there, a far more difficult goal -- and yet one as reachable conceptually as it is improbable retinally. Her reds and blues stay red and blue, rather than shifting into something else (or nothing-at-all invisibility) precisely because they are anchored with modifying hues and modulate as they do toward the wings. Pastine refuses to trick us into the transcendent, but she does everything in her power to bring our eyes to that level with more forthright -- if thoroughly deft and sophisticated -- means. (Brian Gross, 248 Utah St., San Francisco. www.briangrossfineart.com)