

WORKS ON PAPER
Raimundo Figueroa

Presented by: Luigi Marrozzini and Virginia Miller

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FROM COLOR BLACK AND BACK

*“That longing you have to be invisible,
transparent as glass, thin air –
that is what moves you certain times to tears
watching the evening fill with city lights
and the long dusty summer avenues
rise weightless through the air
and tremble like constellations in a sky
so deep and clear you are your one desire,
Oh, let me be that blue...”*

Katha Pollitt
“Blue Window”

The “White Paintings” mark a time of transformation and flux in Raimundo Figueroa’s work. A dichotomy emerges between his familiar iconography of boxes, ovals, fish, scribbled figures or words and a new minimalism devoid of images. His former palette of bright primary colors and luminous pastels becomes literally over painted with white or earthy brown, black and gray. In many ways the work represents the artist’s pull in seemingly opposite directions: between color and absence of color, between imagery and abstraction, between the material and the spiritual. Yet both the expository and the reductive styles of painting have as their underlying concern the process of becoming the artist Figueroa wants to be.

Figueroa rejects the word “spiritual” in referring to his work as an appropriation of the Catholic Church, but the “essential being” is an ever present theme. The one-eyed figures (no relation to Ulysses’

Cyclops) in “Two Faces” and “White Painting #12” represent this inner “third eye”. Whereas before he might have expressed a sense of spiritual longing with the phrase “empty the self of ego”, with his new series, the White Paintings, spirit appears as a one-eyed face or simply as whiteness. Figueroa’s minimalist paintings are reductions of psychic clutter more than aesthetic manifestos like the minimal work of Agnes Martin or Robert Ryman.

Yet like a Milton Resnick or a Brice Marden, the minimal paintings speak of process. The white surfaces of “White over Red #18” and “Its’ Only a Dream” are far from vacant. They reverberate with the layers of paint beneath, with the delicate pencil scratching on top, or in the case of “White over Red”, with the smooth planes left by the palette knife giving the impression of hidden depths, like winter pond life beneath frozen ice. His use of translucent mylar as the base for most of the “White Paintings” allows the viewer to see both sides, the surface and the undercoating, of each work. The process of building up color from deep red, blue and black becomes apparent. The dark, patchy, chaotic beginning of each painting is belied by the final, almost monochromatic surface.

“I’m Finding Myself, White Painting #14”, takes this artistic conversion as its theme. A can of colored paint, surrounded by patches of yellow, red and blue, is scratched out. The word “minimal” appears on the right, with a sketch for an abstract sculpture above. Figueroa’s desire to work in a more minimal mode or with sculpture is juxtaposed with his established colorful style.

“I Miss the Good Times, White Painting #10”, also alludes to Figueroa’s yearning to move into three dimensional work with an homage to Donald Judd’s modular wall sculptures in the upper right corner. This painting is a collage of things the artist cares about. Aside from art, the environment appears in the form of fish and flowers, and the totemic figure of the spirit, the “cosmic eye” appears as well.

Figueroa is not an artist to work in social isolation. Other people are important influences, and as two paintings in this series attest, he even has the idiosyncratic habit of painting while talking on the phone. “Where Are They?” and “The People that I Love” use lists of

names and personal symbols to explain his concerns. The imagery of "Where Are They?" moves from a list of instigators of social/political change such as Allende, Ghandi and Pancho Villa to nuclear missiles to figure-eight symbols of eternity. This diary of historical figures and the associations they evoke are contrasted with the musings on his career, which appear on the right side of the canvas. Together they form a picture of the artist's mind at a moment in time. The people listed in "The People that I Love" include the artist's family, his girlfriend and artists such as Arnaldo Roche, Fernando Colon, Cy Twombly. People whom he admires and who have influenced his personal and artistic growth. A human figure is juxtaposed with a sun to indicate the mutation of the soul through death and rebirth. His heart and phallic shapes seem to stand for female and male relationships. Figueroa leads the viewer through his associative thought process, just as the viewer imagines his painting process in the minimal works.

Mutation of the human spirit provides a theme for both types of painting. In some works, the essential being struggles with the restraint of ego and hypocrisy. In others, boxes fly and windows open in an effort to flee the artistic limitations imposed by the material outer world. In yet others, the chaotic process of painterly development is resolved by the calm of the abstract surface. Nether explained by words and symbols or alluded to through artistic process, Figueroa gives us dynamic images of transformation.

Laura Roulet

San Juan, Puerto Rico

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Independent curator and art historian