

FLOWERS, SHIPS & OTHER DREAMS

Raimundo Figueroa

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The Infinite and Infinite Voids

When M. Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* writes “of the waking time in which eternity takes roots as the field of presence in the wide sense, with its double horizon or primary past and future, and the infinite openness of those fields of presence that have slid by or are still possible”, his commentary becomes apt in light of the precise calibration and control of gesture, color contrasts, and scale. Raimundo Figueroa’s achievement in this body of work is to have come out with works that are not pictorially engaging of formal levels but those also philosophically teasing and profound images on the sublimity of infinity.

The physical manifestation of the primal nature of the unchanging metaphysical ground of infinite space in painting has traditionally been expressed by monochromatic color fields representing a shift of attention from figure to ground starting in the Modernist epoch with Turner’s later seascapes devoid of horizon lines and slightly later Whistler’s Nocturnes. In pre-modern times we need only think of the gold background space of Byzantine icons, and in the early twentieth century to Malevich’s ruminations on Ouspenskian-inspired intuition of fourth-dimensional awareness of infinity exemplified by his painting 1918 *White on White*. In late Modernism the minimal geometric abstractions (exemplifying infinite expansion) of, for example, Yves Klein Lucio Fontana, Barnett Newmann and the stark interruptions on those surfaces implying man’s relation to the absolute had become part of a firmly established modernist cannon of formalism. Figueroa’s new paintings manipulate these conceits of elemental residual formalism by incorporating the ground of the monochrome with the pictorial introjections of the gesture defining the solitary stroke.

Figueroa’s neo-abstractions appear at first to be comprised of the basic expressive unit of gestural abstraction, the painterly mark of the

brushstroke against brightly saturated colors. These simple gestural loops are foregrounded calligraphic marks whose optical intensity quivers against their overall backgrounds. The artist purposefully combines the vibratory contrasts of colors between the large brushstrokes that partially define the infinity symbol (a stylized “8”) and its backdrop to create luminous pictorial fields of stunning glance and amplitude. Figueroa’s works, consisting of magnified brushstrokes floating, colliding or intersecting in space, emphasize the touch as a constitutive element in a larger image and as a self contained expressive element in its own right. Since the artist’s challenge in this body of work is to give the visual sensation of an endless extent of space, time of any series the seemingly random painterly mark meanders but it does so through mark making that is harnessed to give a wide range of sensations. Figueroa tackles the definition of the infiniteness of heroicized things through synecdoche (outsized brushstroke demarcating parts of infinity signs) on groundless infinite space to pose rich metaphysical conundrums on our place within the flux of space and time. Given the nature of the intellectual dimension of these paintings (that is to express the inexpressible by alluding to beginnings and endings without entirely visually defining either notion), Figueroa’s measured painterly loops are properly and positively ambiguous; they oscillate between the two poles of the mark seen as constructive/deliberate and expressive/random. The artist gives the sensation of an essence that is poised, (in Scholastic term) halfway *in fieri*, that is, when it is beginning to be, but is not yet complete, and *in facto* when it exists completely in the nature of things with those constituent parts with which it remains.

Figueroa’s looming and tremulous brushstrokes evoke both the gathering point of fading perceptions and the locus of new, emerging, visual interpretations that include the persuasive unraveling of closed systems. As I mentioned before teasing conundrums abound in these works. One of these involves the age old issue of relativity that allows us to conceive of parts of infinite spaces within larger infinite spaces, voids within fullness. To delineate this entropic situation, Figueroa uses the space of his canvasses and the positioning of his gestures as if the strokes of his infinity signs were being cinematically panned into view as they enter the “screen” of his canvasses. At times his panning will stop and he will give us a close-up of an end

loop of one of his signs. At other times he will show us two end loops cavorting in space but not touching and, yet, at other times meeting as in an embrace. In his diptych one part of the end loop of his infinity sign is itself cut into two parts as if to defy the mind to think in the impossible term of half infinity. The outsized segments of the loops of the artist's cropped infinity sign careen and hover inside the picture planes of brightly colored over-all grounds and metaphorically suggest a range of metaphysical musings of time and existence while inducing psychologically dense and emotionally expansive readings. Raimundo Figueroa's art works and their reflections on the impossibility of visually defining or embodying godhead reminds us of Shelling's comment that art was the resolution of an infinite contradiction in a finite object. In light of his painterly ambitions I do not think it would be stretching the point to claim that within Figueroa's paintings rest a (nearly) infinite amount of visual impetuosity that quite matches their intellectual verve.

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