

FRIEZE

After Finitude

Or Gallery, Vancouver, Canada

BY MITCH SPEED IN REVIEWS | 15 JUN 13



'After Finitude', 2013, installation view

'After Finitude' was the second exhibition produced by Eli Bornowsky – a painter who also writes, curates and produces music – for the Or Gallery. The first was 'Making Real' (2008), a group show that cordoned primary experience from referentiality with a handful of quiet, highly reduced abstract art works. The essay for this exhibition – which featured Neil Campbell, Hanne Darboven, Nicole Ondre and Cheyney Thompson – began with the following statement: 'I decided to curate a show in the same fashion that I would paint a picture.'

The exhibition's principal structure was an axial symmetry formed between works by Campbell and Ondre. Each consisted of two imposing components on parallel walls. Campbell's *Probe* and *Hangdown* (both 2013) were wall paintings. The first was a one-and-a-half metre-wide rectangle that hung from the top of the wall and ended just shy of the floor; *Hangdown* was the same shape in white, bounded by a wide black outline. Both were effortless gestures undergirded by invisible technical operations, like wall-bound cut-and-paste commands. Campbell's best works induce freaky bodily reactions through rigorous calibrations of figure-ground, and colour relationships.

In his writing, Bornowsky has criticized the paranoid relationship with sensual experience that, from his perspective, permeates much academic criticism. A better artistic reflection of that argument could not

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be found than Campbell, who prioritizes sensuality to the extent that he claims to see the electric fields of human bodies. I enjoyed the effects of *Probe* and *Hangdown*, but harboured doubts as to the extent to which their affects were actual, or products of suggestion.

A more explicit, literary quality of suggestion appeared in Ondre's *Cadmium Yellow Window* (2013). On one wall hung a mural-sized piece of paper covered in arcing brushstrokes of light yellow oil paint. A monoprint made from the wet painting had been left on the parallel wall. Ondre's decision to call her dual monochromes 'a window', in the singular, bore dual consequences. Colour fields became literal fields – canola or mustard – while the empty space between the monochromes was drawn into the experience. Its congeniality to multiple readings displaced substantial responsibility for making and sorting experience onto the viewer. That is the habit of monochromes, after all; the source of both their emancipatory potential and their reputation for aloofness.

Standing within the glass pane, I heard the slow, repetitive plucking of a harp, like stones breaking water. This was one of Hanne Darboven's 'selected musical compositions', which were piped into the space like a slow, unifying baseline. For a period, Darboven's soundtrack intoned the exhibition with a weird pastoral calm. But that intonation was sharply altered by an instrumental of 'Happy Birthday'. The accompaniment of these monochromes by so many contrasting moods, appeared as a model for the contingency of affect.

Three works by Thompson hung in the foyer. All were titled *Ten Metres* (2013) and are tinpoint, silverpoint and copperpoint drawings on paper. In each, a line ten metres in length was drawn in meandering and overlapping tangles. Retina-bafflingly minute, the lines shift in density, creating beautifully subtle tonal undulations.

Thompson's five paintings were installed in the spaces left between those of Ondre and Campbell. Each was made of the same six colours of acrylic, applied in the same quantities, to the same small-medium linen supports, in insouciant swaths, pools and daubs, alternately opaque and glowing, translucent. The paintings were banal. Their surfaces affected an expressive pose, but lacked any of the idiosyncrasy, struggle, earnestness or bold-faced virtuosity that have made lyrical painting throughout the 20th century moving, disarming, funny or, to some, repugnant. Each title – *R31.55-BG31.55-p1.31-y1.31-yg1.31-pb1.31(65.72ml)* (all 2013), for example – indexed the colours, and the quantities of them, used in each painting. Here, painting was reduced to a procedure dictated by a code. But the works' comportment was more optimistic than cynical; painting in the key of Sol LeWitt, still somehow life-affirming in its democratic mechanisation.

'After Finitude' was a model of reduced abstraction circling between left and right brain. Multiple artistic agendas, and the multiple ideas forwarded in Bornowsky's essay, interrupted and garbled the exhibition's frequency like invasive radio signals. If 'After Finitude' managed to achieve the quality of music – a beautifully antiquated and Utopian expectation for painting that I easily imagine Bornowsky believing in – it was of a cacophonous variety; so many agreeing and disagreeing attitudes, intentions and effects, zigzagging around and through a structured choreography.