

Shaping Color

Paintings by Jason Stewart

Essay by Claudia Carr Levy

Upon first seeing Jason Stewart's new work, I thought of Filippo Brunelleschi's facade of the *Ospedale degli Innocenti*, the founding hospital in Florence that he was commissioned to design in 1419. The arches of the hospital facade have always captivated me. Brunelleschi's arches are perfect in their form and progression: perfect graceful architecture. Why, I wondered, did that architectural image appear as I looked at the series of paintings called "Shaping Color"?

The precision of Jason Stewart's arcs in their spaces on canvas resonate with Brunelleschi's architecture. The paintings seem to transpose geometric architectural form into pictorial space. Perhaps this geometry would seem to belie the dominance and importance of color in these paintings. Yet color holds the arcs; the arcs hold color. The more one looks at these works, the more one observes the paradox between color and form. And the more elusive the paintings become.

There is a mystery in these works revealed through close observation. Do the arcs ascend? Descend? Are they hovering in space? Why were careful squares and horizontally shaped canvases chosen to contain the paintings' movement? Ultimately, these questions lead to the metaphysical nature of these paintings: the spaces between the concrete and the spiritual. "Painting goes its own way, leaving the onlooker with the presence of something and the possibility of making that presence personal. It's the presence, not the painting itself that has meaning," Jason Stewart said in describing his previous exhibition.

I have witnessed the evolution of Jason Stewart's work since his 1998 exhibition at my gallery, Claudia Carr Works on Paper. His paintings at that time were generally in a square format of 22" x 22" and composed of dry pigment on paper. The paintings consisted of elusive imagery and lines that seemed etched on deeply colored backgrounds. In his later shows, work on paper gave way to shallow relief surfaces for geometric structures.

In the artist's 2019 exhibition at Anders Wahlstedt, precisely defined colored shapes predominated, and the paintings in acrylic on linen were a departure from his previous exploration of surfaces. The work presented a more concise definition of form interacting with color. In his current exhibition, Jason Stewart has greatly expanded his format, with some paintings as large as 48"x 60". Utilizing this significant change in format, he has achieved a new marriage of color and form, of architecture and color, and of geometry and space.

The "Shaping Color" series was composed during the tumultuous time of the pandemic. Within the isolation imposed by the pandemic, Jason Stewart found an environment enabling him to concentrate on his work with protracted intensity. This exhibition is a result of deeply sought spiritual values and pure expression of complex thought, which contribute to the architecture of the soul.

Jason Stewart is an American painter working in New York. He earned his B.A. at the University of Southern Maine and his M.A. and M.F.A. at the University at Albany, State University of New York. Stewart studied with colorfield painter, Pete Taylor as well as the abstract expressionist sculptor, Richard Stankiewicz. He has exhibited widely at galleries such as Anders Wahlstedt Fine Art, NY, Geary Contemporary, NY, and Blackburn 20/20 Gallery, NY. Stewart's artwork is featured in the collections of the Portland Museum of Art, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, and The Delaware Art Museum among others.

Claudia Carr Levy is a working artist. She was curator of collections at The Picker Art Gallery in Hamilton, New York before opening her own gallery, Claudia Carr Works on Paper, in New York's SoHo district. She has been a member of 22 Wooster Gallery and worked as a director of sales at the renowned Sindin Galleries on Madison Avenue in Manhattan. She received a Master's degree in art history and has taught art history at Colgate University.