

THE MISSION

It would be a mistake to view these paintings as simply another example of geometric hard-edged abstraction, or latter day Op Art. Although the artist clearly has his eye on each of these historical precedents, with the former he shares neither the faith in the object as the sole carrier of ideal pictorial form, nor the commitment to precision of execution alone as an embodiment of virtue. Like Frank Stella's stripes, Pierce's geometries are painted with an incremental exactitude that is more about an economy of means than a cult of perfection. The color is applied with discipline in interpolated analogous gradients – but loosely. The masking by now is more or less flawless, but it is not without the occasional eruption or slippage, which is accepted for the most part. In fact, upon close examination, his paintings often point to the imperfect process of their making – modular and additive, rather than deductive and a priori - and to the unstable facts of their beholding, not to some ideal sense of order or balance (with all of its moral overtones). On the contrary – these paintings share with Op Art a belief in the destabilizing effects of perception itself. Yet they have as much or more in common with the nearly immaterial investigations of artist like Robert Irwin, Norman Zammitt, and Robert Swain as they do with more matter bound painters like Bridget Riley and Victor Vasarely.

Yet there's also a performative aspect to Pierce's work that distinguishes it from each of these historical examples, aligning it in an understated way with more disruptive contemporaries like Merlin Carpenter and Richard Aldrich. Yet again – Pierce's work neither shares Carpenter's apparent political commitments, nor Aldrich's faith in the institutional frame, which he relies on to place his ethereal gestures into a narrative context. Although Pierce shares with each of these more recent examples an openness to conceiving of the object or its placement as a site of performance (as he demonstrated to brilliant effect in his immersive all-over wall installation at Roman Susan in 2015), he puts less pressure on this aspect than either of them do, gently allowing the site to discretely enable his investigations of the subtle effects of shape, color, mark making (and its absence), light, and rhythm on our sense of where we are, and what we are looking at.

Nevertheless, it would also be a mistake to view these paintings merely as documents of a performance of painterly construction. The fact alone that they never feel cropped, either in the placement of the shapes on the support, or in the placement of the effects of the gradient in relation to the framing edge, would indicate that although these paintings may in one sense be the literal residue of a performance of dutiful pictorial construction and execution (brick by brick, as it were) they are also meant to be viewed not only as *acts* of painting, but also as paintings themselves – discrete pictorial objects which both acknowledge the facts of their making, while also alluding to an illusory depth, belying their internal and external edges. It is the specific articulation of these latter relationships, from painting to painting, which is the key to the meaning of this work.

– Steven Husby, Chicago, based artist and writer