

GAGOSIAN



David Reed: New Paintings

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David Reed, #713, 2017-19. Acrylic, oil, and alkyd on polyester, 28 x 112 inches. © 2020 David Reed/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Rob McKeever. Courtesy Gagosian.

David Reed's new paintings at Gagosian present how abstract painting can engage the long history of painting. These bright, busy, glossy, luscious swirls of paint may remind some of contemporary screen culture, of the iconography of graffiti or Tiltbrush, but they also reveal a direct line to the Baroque. Reed makes this explicit in *#715 (For Beccafumi— Fall of the Rebel Angels)* (2017–2019), in the downstairs gallery, but it is apparent throughout these works.

Baroque painting is dynamic, full of emotion and energy. Bright color and light focus the eye on a central scene that gets pulled in every direction by lines of action, scrolls of ornamentation, cycling back to the main passage only to wander again; there is a sense of restlessness even amidst moments of stillness. This is also apparent in the way Reed's swirls and stencils sweep and stop the eye around the carefully managed canvas. His painting *#709 (For Jeremy Blake and Theresa Duncan)* (2005–09, 2018–19) has strips of gradient turquoise overlaid with broad strokes of green and magenta, hints of red, scrawled, scribbled, swiped; the lines and colors merging somehow to evoke television color calibration bars. In the upper left corner is a dark box dominated by reds, greens, and tans. The eye keeps moving through the central portion, jumping to the top, pulled back down by the semblance that the ribbons of paint in one area connect to the other. They almost do, but don't and we struggle to make sense but can't walk away. It's a challenging tribute to two complicated artists.



David Reed, #709 (For Jeremy Blake and Theresa Duncan), 2005-09/2018-19. Acrylic, oil, and alkyd on polyester, 121 x 55 inches. © 2020 David Reed/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Rob McKeever. Courtesy Gagosian.

In contrast, #726 produced across the same time period and placed across from #709, is simply beautiful. The white mark on the left side captures your attention with an aura of grays and blacks, but the eye fades into the gradient depths to the right before shifting back. The Payne's Grey is transcendent, a sheen of blue so calming that standing before the painting felt like stepping into an altar to Mary where a prayer might be answered.

Reed's works are an image of the gestures in painting and glorify the medium. Viewers can peruse Reed's working drawings on a computer at the entrance of the lower gallery and revel in the excruciatingly detailed planning inherent to each work. Reed's process includes dozens of layers of gesso to get a fine finish on the base that allows the carving and layering that will supersede it. Every paint and stroke is determined. Every facet reflects a guiding idea, much as the famed Baroque architect Borromini drew the exacting logic of his designs into each structure.



David Reed, #712, 2010-11/2018-19. Acrylic, oil, and alkyd on polyester, 96 x 54 inches. © 2020 David Reed/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Rob McKeever. Courtesy Gagosian.

The bold colors and high contrast evoke the digital aesthetic popularized through the filters of Instagram, but it is a mistake to think these works come across by representation that flattens their finely crafted, layered effort. What appears to be splatters of paint from afar transforms into carefully carved paint with thin coils in contrasting color, or finely shaded shapes slipping into other tones. Reed loves to model with color not hue, a technique called *cangiante*, so that shadows are not darker shades of the same pigment but a different color altogether. Gradient color underpins some of the paintings, revealed beneath the thin washes. These offer a master class in color theory. They are not unaware, however, of their dual nature, pointing us historically as they adopt and adapt contemporary visual culture.

Some works (#713 through #719) have similarly elongated proportion (approximately 26–28 inches by 116–120 inches) with repeating motifs that are ideal for some scholars' extended study; the domestication of painting makes these canvases seem awkward but they are kin to the individualized saints in many churches (such as Beccafumi's four apostles in the Pisa Cathedral). Reed takes those shapes and like a mad Mannerist pushes them further, longer, and flips them horizontally. Suddenly, they could be memories of polyurethane longboards from the golden era of 1960s California surf culture. Or, they are 1970s subway cars covered in the winding coils of color made famous by the street art scene in New York.



David Reed, #713, 2017–19. Acrylic, oil, and alkyd on polyester, 28 x 112 inches. © 2020 David Reed/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Rob McKeever. Courtesy Gagosian.

Some particularly large paintings were started over a decade ago but only now completed, specifically to be showcased in the new Gagosian space where the diffuse light makes them glow. It is a cathedral to art, and Reed has produced altars to the art and history of painting. Only that makes them sound serious and stern, possibly boring, and these are not that. The last painting in this series #724 is a lovely ode to his good friend Jack Whitten and a story he described in these pages about Arshile Gorky [see BR February 2018]. Most notably, there is humor throughout.

#715 for *Beccafumi, Fall of the Rebel Angels* offers vivid red tones reminiscent of God's robes in Beccafumi's second iteration in the altarpiece of the San Niccolo, Siena. Except here, the darkness is interspersed through the cobalt violet as if the fallen angels are in the very fabric of God. Greater imp is Reed to make this a horizontal painting—rather condensing that great fall. Italian Baroque artists often layered meanings in their seemingly pedantic religious paintings and so does Reed. Andrea del Sarto's *The Holy Family with the Young Saint John the Baptist* (ca.1528) at the Metropolitan Museum has Mary's hand pointing to, or cradling through the fabric, the Christ Child's penis, a reminder to viewers at the time of the frailty of man. The body has its limitations, as Reed emphasized in his 1975 paintings (last shown in 2017 at Gagosian), for which tools try to compensate, but even Viagra won't solve for man's final limit. There is a stencil camouflaged in #721, a painting using those same teals and pinks as the baby Jesus's loin cloth, that is amusingly suggestive of those dangling bits. It's a bit of clever painting but also a funny nod to cock tags and #dickgraffiti—a humble penis pun. There is humorous wisdom too in #720 (*The Prodigal Son*) being apart from the set, placed in the lobby of the Madison Avenue building, neglected by many rushing to the galleries upstairs. It's fun to see art that takes its own seriousness lightly.