

SPACES OF SPACES

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The fact that you don't quite know what you are dealing with is part of the basic experience with Terry Haggerty's art. His practice explores ambiguous forms, for instance in moments when two-dimensionality is tilting into three-dimensionality. It wants to know where, when, and how abstraction transforms into illusion; where, when, and how the hard concreteness of canvas, paint and form becomes something else, something that transcends the sheer materiality of these elements: a flickering space. Put into an art-historical context, his art wants to know where the early Frank Stella's dry, but always slightly dirty minimalism meets with the firm edges and clean color fields of an Ellsworth Kelly, or with the accurately parallel, irritating lines of Bridget Riley's Op Art.

As these interests and references suggest, Haggerty's practice can be described as predominantly painterly. In fact, for the most part of the last 20 years, the canvas – or, as a substitute, a wooden panel – has been Haggerty's favored support and starting point for his reflections. On these flawlessly even surfaces – first in the classical rectangular format, later also in the form of the so-called 'shaped panels' (for example *Memory Fold* or *Twisted*, both 2012) – Haggerty has created shimmering, captivating compositions with the most reduced means: parallel stripes, repetitively and precisely applied at equal intervals. He complements these standardized stripes with an equally standardized bending, which allows his images to make sharp curves or form loops. Stripe, distance, bending – a minimal set of elements is used for maximal effect.

His interest in minimalist reduction and rigorous formalization of means, however, is only one of Haggerty's concerns. The other is his interest in how the simplest elements can create complex spatial illusions. At the outset of his artistic career, he placed his abstract stripe works somewhat ironically near respective real-world equivalents, establishing affinities to venetian blinds or air vents through titles (e.g. *Up, Down* or *Air Condition*, both 2001) or a suitable presentation in a window frame or high up on the wall (e.g. *Window*, 2000, or *Andy's Candy*, 2001). In a way, he installed these works as substitutes of that which was supposedly depicted in them. Over the years, Haggerty's paintings, with their precisely arranged stripes and curves, have established their own autonomous painterly space. It could perhaps be labelled 'abstract illusionism,' an approach not unlike that of 1950s and 60s Op Art. It features the same elements, but they are combined in a way that allows them to bend backwards and spell out protrusions, indentations, and waves on the otherwise even surface, evoking a three-dimensionality in the strict space of the stripes where actually there seems to be no possibility for it.

Haggerty's new works bear an oddly ambivalent relation to his earlier pieces. Profanely entitled part I to part VI, his series of wall objects, which he is presenting at the turn of the year 2016/17 at von Barth in S-chanf, constitutes a disruption while at the same time maintaining a certain continuity. These new works retain some vital elements – minimalist precision, the interest in illusionism – yet abandon the space in which these have been

articulated so far in order to open up a new one. The artist's new wall objects move away from the canvas in order to enter the actual exhibition space. Compared to the wall drawings, which Haggerty creates alongside his canvasses, they do so in the other direction – no retreat into the wall, but a protrusion into the room.

Haggerty's first 'genuinely three-dimensional' works, these wall pieces were all created in 2016 and draw on the same precision as his stripe paintings. They are meticulously cut and bent aluminium objects whose planar powder coat in black and white and/or bright colors lends them an incredibly smooth finish. These simple, yet astoundingly accurate objects literally turn themselves outward of the painterly space and extend into the sculptural space. The questions they pose nevertheless remain painterly in nature, addressing the notions of illusion and perception, representation, materiality and color force. Yet they ask these questions in a space which strictly speaking is no longer the space of painting.

Perhaps the most conspicuous feature of these wall pieces is that their visual effect literally relies on 'a sharp bend'. They produce a certain optical illusion, at least when seen front and centre. Let me refer to just two of the six works to illustrate this: part II consists of two barely connected, elongated hollow parts, slanting downwards on the outside, gently curved at the top and bottom, their outsides a luscious, even turquoise-green, their insides warm-black. Due to the slanting form, the color, and the accurately calculated contours and curves in particular, it seems as if the two parts of the sculpture were bent around a corner in a 90°-degree angle. Moving through the room and looking at the work from the side, you quickly notice that the object is actually quite flat, mounted on an even, white wall. Part I presents a similar, but even more intricate case. Here, too, the inside is black while this time the outside is painted in an off-white. Mounted on the wall, it appears as if it were a strip of wallpaper which is black on the front and white on the back, curling up at the top and bottom – but in a very skewed manner and in two different directions, something that gravity would not allow for normally, an impossible movement.

To express this in somewhat complicated terms, both works, as well as the other four works of the series, could be seen as three-dimensional executions of a two-dimensional depiction of a three-dimensional object: 'flat volume' and 'voluminous flatness' – both are combined here, wrapped around themselves in an impossible way, making them at the same time two-dimensional and three-dimensional. And this makes the matter more complex than it is in Haggerty's paintings. Here, another layer is added, or rather prefixed. Whereas in the paintings, one register – namely that of three-dimensionality – is evoked in another – that of two-dimensionality – his wall objects use three-dimensionality to produce another impossible three-dimensionality via a pretended two-dimensionality. It is not depth in a surface that is imagined here, but depth in a surface which in turn is already imagined in another surface. The works bear a likeness to a Möbius strip; however, the impossible interleaving is not limited to the space of illusion here, but instead takes place in the exchange between the registers of image and object.

Radically dependent on the viewer's position and point of view, this series creates a moment of tilting. At the very moment when Haggerty's works assume a definitive body themselves, they introduce a rather 'incorporeal' category into painting through this perspective-based

illusionism. They no longer open the illusionistic space within the actual image space, but instead create the image space as an illusionistic space in real space. By inserting a space into another, you bend it, you contort it up to the impossible, or at least beyond the categories in which you conceptualize it. The door opens – and painting enters the room in the guise of sculpture.