Anne Appleby
Jo Baer
Jake Berthot
Daniel Buren
Alan Charlton
Thomas Downing
Don Dudley
Luke Frost
Tadaaki Kuwayama
Robert Mangold
Yunhee Min

Michael Klein, Curator

painting
IN PARTS

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Maryland Art Place • Baltimore

Anne Appleby. *Red Oak*, 2007. Oil and wax on canvas. 6 panels, overall 68 x 45 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Tadaaki Kuwayama. *Untitled*, 2000. Anodized aluminum. Set of twelve, each 8 x 8 x 2 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Introduction

Essay by Michael Klein

Painting in Parts **is about Minimal art and the impact the movement has had** on several generations of painters both here and abroad. This exhibition brings together the diverse work of abstract painters from the U.S., Japan, France and Great Britain. Their shared focus is on the innovative and dynamic way in which they both conceive and then realize their Minimal works. What ties them together in a most unorthodox way is the manner in which they structure their works so that each painting is the sum of its parts.

Evidenced by their many shared characteristics each of the painters in this exhibition experiences and expresses their ideas about Minimal painting in a different manner resulting in what might best be termed personal signature styles. While for many decades we have read paintings through the artist's hand, his or her brush-work, but here we look at an overall structure to determine the character and the nature and of their individual style.

Historically, the Minimal movement began in the 1960s. Its proponents and practitioners such as Carl Andre, Robert Morris and Donald Judd, mostly sculptors, were a younger generation of artists mainly based in New York whose paradigm was built on the rejection of any of the tenets of Abstract Expressionism. For them feelings, emotions and biography characteristic of Abstract Expressionism were unnecessary add-ons, concepts that still clung to what were for this new generation, an outdated and outmoded European model; a model that they felt that was long devoid of energy or prospects and did not represent the needs or desires of this next generation of artists. The older generation of painters and sculptors who had come to prominence twenty years earlier had become in a word, redundant. And as one of the movement's key theorists Judd was quoted as saying about his older colleagues, "I am not interested in the kind of expression that you have when you paint a painting with brush strokes. It's all right, but it's already done and I want to do something new."

In general the "new" that Judd imagined was an art to be defined in purely abstract terms. Its proponents turned to extreme reduction in shape and form, rectangles and squares with no embellishments and monochrome when it came to the use of color. At the same time their work made use of a circumscribed reliance on serial structures and divisible arrangements. When it came to sculpture they favored an industrial look, machine like precision in the execution of forms. As for the painters of this movement the same held true for color and composition and as for form they innovated in using the rectangular or square shape of the canvas as their platform and miming that industrial look by thinking in parts.

Certainly some historic precedents exist that serve to indicate how the idea of painting in parts came into being. While the character of Abstract Expressionist painting of the 1950s is typified by grand self-expression; large-scale, panoramic canvases and overall painterlyness, there are painters who explored structural ideas within this school. We can look to the works of Alfred Leslie's for example. His monumental abstractions were sometimes divided into four parts or "Quartets" as he titled them. Another of the important

Abstract Expressionist painters, Barnett Newman, painted expanded fields of color, which he too divided into visual parts by what he called "zips." Finally, Frank Stella and his series of black paintings of the late 50s opened the door for painters presented in this exhibition. What resulted from looking at Stella's dark pictures was not an emotional response but a response that questioned the visual experience of looking at paintings built of simple black lines. Judd's "new" aesthetic and Stella's questioning of visual experience was very much in keeping with the times. The 1960s was the era of the "counter culture" and of social revolutions. Experimentation was in the air and one witnessed on a worldwide scale a radical shift in contemporary life and the unfolding of differing, some times combative points of view following the post war boom. Certainly what evolved to be the new in painting was equally radical and revolutionary with ripples, as we see in this exhibition, into the next century. Two key elements that characterize all the work of this period and those younger artists who continue this route today are the striking optical effects and a purity of form and the belief in painting as an important means of self-expression.

More than forty years ago two exhibitions foresaw the impact of this new way of working and thinking with what one critic referred to as the "opaque surfaces." Primary Structures, primarily a sculpture exhibition at the Jewish Museum opened in 1966. That same year English critic Lawrence Alloway organized Systemic Paintings for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. In his introductory essay Alloway wrote: The personal is not expunged by using a neat technique; anonymity is not a consequence of highly finishing a painting." What had for some become the sign of end of painting was for others the opening of a new chapter and new development in the on going evolution of contemporary art.

Previous spread: Jo Baer. *Untitled*, 1970-74. Oil on Canvas. 2 Canvases, each 36 x 39 inches. Courtesy of Emily Smith, Freeport, Maine.

Luke Frost. *Supervolts No. 4*, 2010. Acrylic on canvas. Triptych, overall 72 x 72 inches. Courtesy of Beaux Arts, London.

"Certainly what evolved to be the new in painting was equally radical and revolutionary with ripples, as we see in this exhibition, into the next century."

Jo Baer, Robert Mangold, Jake Berthot represent perhaps the first wave of artists to explore this new strategy among painters. **Tadaaki Kuwayama**, a recent arrival in New York from Japan in 1960 and **Don Dudley**, living at the time on the West coast and moving to New York in the early 70s, shared this sense of the elemental when it came to their respective painting. As a group one could say that they strove to limit color and simplify structure. Their individual formats were at once reductive and yet extraordinarily recognizable when perceived by the viewer. The achievement of these painters is perhaps best described in a 1982 exhibition surveying Robert Mangold's work. While paraphrasing from the author's observations this description could aptly apply to all those in this exhibition. "He (Mangold) has reduced this complex of painterly elements to the problem of two basic pairs; form/line; color/surface, avoiding all ornamentation."[1]

Jo Baer, one of the few women recognized for her significant contributions to this movement, also arrived on the scene in New York in 1960 from her native Seattle, Washington. Her painting style was to evolve into a group of works done between the mid 60s and 1975 that explored the fundamentals of painting like her colleagues and specifically the "organization of visual elements on a surface; the painting as a volume in space; and the problem of the border: the moment in which the painting meets the world surrounding."[2] Her shift in directions and thinking was marked by this move to New York and her new associations with other artists working in a similar vein, such as Sol LeWitt, Carl Andre and Dan Flavin.

In a 2003 interview with critic and curator Judith Stein, Baer explains the genesis of these works in which the emphasis is placed on color and line as in *Untitled* 1970-74 from the artist's Wraparound Series. "... I had to play with the depth of the canvas and at the same time keep it flat. ... I didn't see any reason to put anything in the middle, white would do. I understood this blank, white area as light ... I was mostly interested in something that sat there, like phenomenology, a there-ness. I did work with Gestalt psychology, but I wasn't interested in the slightest in it. I was interested in something that's there. I mean, you're not going to argue with the monumentality of something."[3]

And most telling about Baer's intent is a statement she made in a 1970 article in *Aspen Magazine* in which Baer suggests that "most sensation is the edge of things." The edge of the diptych in this exhibition is in fact where the action lies. It is the tension between the parts, the space between the interior of the canvas and its edge and the space between the parts of the two canvases that is the life and meaning of her work.

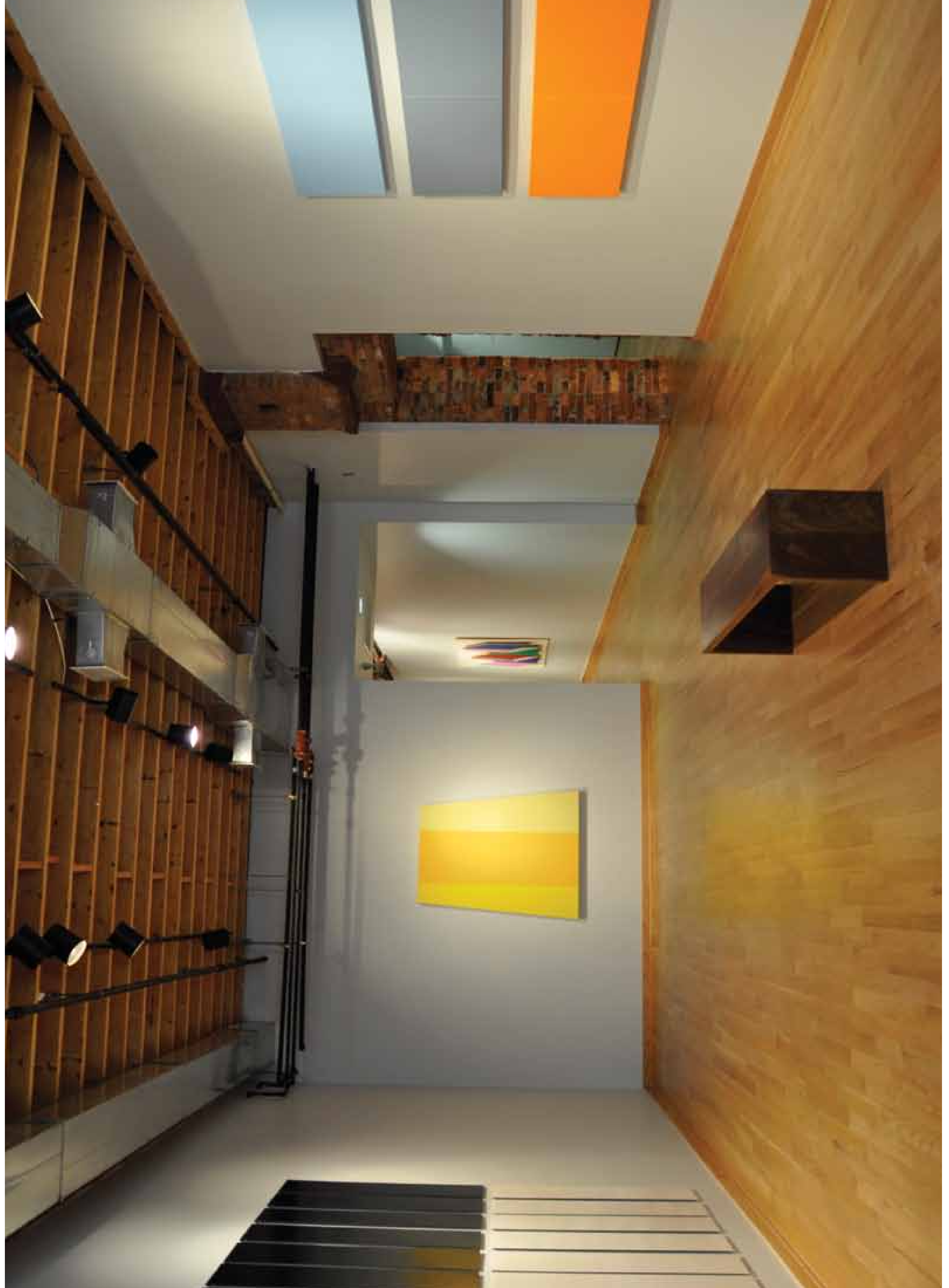
Jake Berthot's shaped canvases and canvases bearing shapes as in *Bones*, 1973 are perhaps among this group the most painterly and therefore expressive of the group selected for this show. Yet his personal touch should not deter the viewer from the strong geometry in which the painting is placed. Berthot talks about his wish to communicate to the viewer in a way in which the character of color and paint express, that is to " sound a more personal and poetic note." Nonetheless the limited palette and refined shape of the canvas links him very much with the currents of the day.

Robert Mangold began developing his ideas with works painted on wood and masonite. These early pieces had a certain architectural feel and three-dimensional character to them with references in their titles to "wall" and "area," similar to the early sculpture pieces of Sol LeWitt. Mangold thought in parts and as he refined his ideas and vision. He turned to canvas and to a now on-going enterprise of flat pictures built of parts. The parts of his painting were either literally sections hung together to form a diptych, a triptych or multi panel works, or painted so that the part was described or inscribed by a drawn line. However not so rigidly attached to using only rectangles or squares, Mangold invented shapes, allowed for curves, triangles and polyhedrons but always following the same method of producing flat, monochromatic areas of color. Throughout his work he has remained focused on the shape of the canvas itself as a guide to its finished appearance or structure. *A Triangle Within Two Rectangles (Red)*, 1977 is quite typical of Mangold's use of these conventions. Even without embellishments or ornamentation Mangold, like the others of his generation, was able to achieve a sense of both elegance and harmony through his reductive concepts and approaches. Here it is the simple balance of a triangle drawn within the two halves of a horizontal rectangle. He can scale the painting up or down because in the end Mangold created three versions of the composition each of a very different size but all with the same compositional structure.

Writing about **Don Dudley**'s work only recently seen in New York after a thirty year hiatus, Ken Johnson described the vertical metal panels,"as if made for a Euclidean mystery cult, it is classically modern and modernistically timeless." His work, *Dracula*, 1972 is a major statement in black and white. Comprised of 24 modules, it is acrylic enamel on aluminum. Like all of Dudley's work of the time the painting is grid based and arrived at by using vertical metal panels. In many of the paintings color is used to create multiple part paintings made up of varying degrees of hues or tones, others are monochromatic. All of the paintings are based on elegantly made works on paper in which the plan for each painting has been worked out ahead of

Left: Jake Berthot. *BONE*, 1973. Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 72 inches, Courtesy of Betty Cuningham Gallery, New York, NY.

Right: Alan Charlton, *Solent*, 1985. Acrylic emulsion on canvas. 30 parts, each 87 x 7 x 2 inches. Courtesy of The Michaels Collection.



time. Using this system of a planned geometry Dudley could continue to make an infinite variety of works in an infinite variety of colors and corresponding modules from pairs to groups of four and more. The single unit is the seed for multiple ideas and seemingly endless variations.

Though acknowledged for his work as a member of the Washington Color Painters in the early 60s, **Thomas Downing** saw in the use of shaped canvas and the use of repetition a means by which to move color across a field in a more syncopated if not entirely physical manner. Downing's first show in New York in 1962 at the then new Allan Stone Gallery was of his now famous dot paintings; dots of color applied to the canvas in a grid pattern or formation. Later Downing expanded his use of color to more three dimensional sections of canvas shown at the same gallery in 1968. Downing manipulated the shape of the canvas to heighten the emphasis on geometry. He sometimes stacked multiple canvases or he created shapes to suggest repetition and an underlying system as in *Fold One* from 1968. In this particular series of works Downing was able to focus on his passion for color, like his colleagues Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland, but at the same time he could also explore the very physical structure of the painting. These works suggest visual compounds like those of his New York colleagues in which there is a balance between color and form.

Tadaaki Kuwayama's first shows in New York were at the Green Gallery. The gallery's Director Richard Bellamy was to be recognized in later years as the "eye of the 60s." From Kuwayama's first large fields of primary colors he has expanded and evolved his thinking into this recent untitled series of anodized aluminum units. These are the next step in the artist's exploration of his notion of minimalism and his experimentation with new methods of painting. Having developed an interest in metallic paints in the 70s Kuwayama set out ways in which the surface and reflective qualities of light and metal could be adapted into other formats.

Recognized for his precise and reductive systems, Kuwayama described his process in *Flash Art* magazine in a 1973 article entitled "On My Way." The painter wrote: "First, color, shape and size must be clearly determined and this will be the start (to create my work)." And though over the past four decades he has moved from oil pigments, to acrylic and metallic paints and finally to aluminum and titanium his practice and methodology remains the same. *Untitled*, 2003 is one such example. Today's modules, parts if you will, are built to reveal both the delicate reflective surface to the viewer as well as the under structure of the module itself; all indicative of a system at work-akin to Dudley. By the extension of these parts it also suggests to the viewer that the infinite is also true. Kuwayama posits that were it physically possible the creation and multiplication of these parts can stretch into the infinite. It is this suggestion of the infinite that marks Kuwayama's work and gives it its unique physical presence. Describing this experience of looking at the work the critic Robert Morgan writes in a recent catalogue essay, "Rather he (Kuwayama) is concerned with how the act of perceiving this materiality as a modular sequence of forms gives us the exacting quietude of a spiritual experience."[4]

The impact of the minimalist ideal was felt beyond the galleries of New York and into the studios and museums of European artists as well as dealers in Dusseldorf, Paris and Milan. In the early 70s such exhibitions as *Arte come Arte* in 1973 in Italy and then later *Geplante Maleriei* (Analytical Painting coined by Klaus Honnef) that first opened in Muenster, Germany and then traveled Milan, Italy in 1974 were an attempt by curators to come to terms with this new painting and its historic sources. The later exhibition catalogue even includes a chart, illustrated here, to explain the chain of events and movements that led to the present condition of painting. A third important exhibition, Fundamental Painting, at the Stedlijk Museum in Amsterdam opened in 1975 and included Berthot, Mangold and the English painter Alan Charlton.

As European models were being formulated-ironically now based on an American paradigm- two important promoters of these ideas came in the works of **Daniel Buren** and **Alan Charlton**. French artist Buren began with a striped cloth; the stripes were his "seeing tool"— as he described them. The stripes were already a design recognized and used in his native France. That stripe was then adapted to different sites and locations and

eventual became used in paintings, either by working directly on the wall or incorporating his visual sign into the design of banners and flags or grand architectural schemes like his columns at the Palais Royal built in 1986. From the 60s onward Buren was interested in reducing painting to its basic visual and physical elements through the use of this systematic repetitive motif—fully in keeping with the American proponents of similar type works.

Location too became an important consideration in Buren's use of his visual tool. *Three Light Boxes for One Wall*, 1989 is a work typical of the artist's intent to incorporate his characteristic stripes into other kinds of mediums. This set of three light boxes is a single work built of parts while the wall becomes a place, and the lightbox in that place makes for a specific location for the "painting." From cloth to canvas, to wall and to lightbox one sees an evolution of an idea the stripes of red are his signature used in projects and installations around the world.

For Charlton, color too, was an important identifying trademark in the work but his palette was significantly reduced so that the colors of his multi-part paintings were predetermined always as a shade of gray. Gray became a signature of his work. In design the painting is constructed of very specific and repeated elements, all painted gray and arranged on the wall in sequential order or by means of simple, relational orchestrations. Over the course of his career Charlton has turned to a variety of rectangular and square shapes wide, narrow and in between. The paintings are sometimes horizontally oriented, other times vertically oriented, but always built from regularized parts that have a strong physical presence. The on going variations in the work explore what he refers to as his "physical forms." One such form is *Solent*, 1985. It is one of the largest works Charlton ever created. It comprises thirty narrow vertical bars each some 7 feet in height allows it to be shown in a variety of ways and for its premiere it appeared on a curved wall. In published notes for an exhibition of new paintings in Lyon, France, Charlton wrote, "I made a painting in 30 parts which was intended to be shown on a straight wall, however I had the opportunity to install the painting for the first time on a curved wall. During the

Daniel Buren. *Three Lightboxes for One Wall*, 1989. 3 electrical light boxes with silkscreen on plexi. Edition: 15. 23 ½ x 31 ½ x 3 ½ inches | 31 ½ x 31 ½ x 3 ½ inches | 39 x 31 ½ 3 ½ inches. Courtesy of The Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston, MA

“Thomas Downing manipulated the shape of the canvas to heighten the emphasis on geometry. He sometimes stacked multiple canvases or he created shapes to suggest repetition and an underlying system as in *Fold One* from 1968.”

Thomas Downing. *Fold One*, 1968. Acrylic on canvas. 45 x 74 inches. Courtesy of Wigmore Fine Art, Inc., New York, NY.

Don Dudley. *Dracula*, 1972. Acrylic enamel on aluminum. 24 panels, overall 166 x 96 x ½ inches. Courtesy of Simon Watson.

installation as the painting curved around me I was excited being inside it. I later thought that to place a painting in a corner would be a very direct way to physically create the act of entering the painting."[5]

A younger generation is exploring what it means to work within the vocabulary of a minimal structure and reductive methods but added to this are components that are personal, expressive even emotive. The three younger artists in the exhibition are from very different parts of the world yet like their elder counterparts they share a passion and dedication to the tenets of the minimal aesthetic.

Yunhee Min, who works and lives in Los Angeles, has re-established this vocabulary in her work over the past decade. *I Am Curious Yellow*, 2000 not only recalls the Swedish film by the same name of 1967 (the color in the title refers to the yellow of the Swedish flag) it is also a exploration on the color as it is paired with two other colors where yellow is in the mix. Min's parts are color arrangements generally contained within the framework of a shaped canvas. Akin to Mangold's painting, Min separates parts by means of flat color either on shaped canvases or on shaped freestanding walls that she constructs for her room size installations. She arranges color so that there is a harmony between the tones and though each tone suggests and represents a part of the whole they are subtly balanced so that the painting remains an even-tempered, highly inventive geometric form.

Luke Frost from the southwest coast of England paints with bright, luminous colors; what one critic called "optical buzz" underscored by their titles as with *Supervolts #4*, 2010 in this exhibition."Why do these paintings now?" asked one frustrated commentator on a recent show. "Why not?" may be one reply. Or the reason lies in the need to look back and then look forward find a format and a structure that is still useable and adapt it to an environment and culture where the bright and shiny are the most appealing where the color used is borrowed from street signs and billboards and advertising not paint charts. Frost uses a dividing line much like Newman or Mangold in his multiple part pictures yet his line is more of a demarcation between parts balancing the

horizontal stretch of color with the vertical arrangement of canvases. And his color or “voltage” matches those considerations.

Maybe he wants to bring to mind something like an expressive coherence back to painting. While Kuwayama might propose a spiritual experience through his exercise of a minimalist scheme, Frost sees in the structure the means to an end that is both public and highly provocative. His buzz if we call it that can echo through space and call to us to look and enjoy the pleasure of an electrically charged color and reductive form to create what has been termed “artificial chromatics.”

Anne Appleby paints with a palette inspired by the observed colors of her native Montana environment. The reductive format in her works, like *Red Oak*, 2007, (usually sets of four or six or large scaled triptychs) allows her to focus foremost on color. Less romantic than one might imagine in her attitude toward nature Appleby is instead a pragmatic appreciator of the environment around her and about the subtle shifts changes and nuances of colors in trees, seasons or flowers. Color is a corresponding agent marking time and change and Appleby’s paintings focus on this on going cycle of change in nature. As critic Kenneth Baker described them these are, “highly compressed notations of landscape experiences.”[6] And as a result perhaps what we find in Appleby’s work is more akin to Impressionism of Monet and the tracing of light flickering over a natural surface and both seeing and then painting how that color is always altered by temperature and time of day and finally one’s own temperament.

From this selection and mini survey of paintings and painters one can perceive an on going tendency and a curiosity amongst this group to further explore and expand the definitions of a movement now already four decades in the making. The variations within the perimeters of this aesthetic seem in the end to be neither restrictive nor limiting. Instead the emphasis on color and form sets the terms and allows for vigorous possibilities to unfold.

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Robert Mangold. *Triangle Within Two Rectangles (Red)*, 1977. Acrylic and charcoal on two panels (masonite). 20 x 28 inches. Courtesy of The Michael & Ilene Salcman Collection.

Yunhee Min. *I Am Curious Yellow*, 2000. Acrylic on canvas. 60 x 36 x 48 inches. Courtesy of James Harris Gallery, Seattle WA.

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