



REVIEW BY MARIA LACRETA

If classification is another way of sorting out generalizations, then I'm guilty for generalizing. At the Barbara Krakow Gallery, local artist Bill Thompson has 13 of his newest paintings on view, and they are an example of how classification has its duty. Namely, minimalism.

We sort things out into compartments, whether prescribed by others or previously by ourselves, and it is always a challenge to step outside of this and experience something new. Bill Thompson calls most of his current work "species," because he approaches his paintings as objects. They are cut from mammoth hunks of polyurethane foam or solid epoxy blocks, and then layered in bright, colorful automotive paint.

"Color is a really difficult thing," he says over the phone. "It's not tangible. It shifts on you. You have to have a lot of reverence for color to even begin to deal with it. It's not something you can control and master. It's kind of a living thing."

There is little doubt the work is minimalist, and like the long line of its practitioners—Donald Judd, Richard Serra and others—Thompson is an artist entranced with materials and process, and making the two into objects.

"After about 6 months of me banging my head up against the wall," he says, "I realized going for the glossy, automotive paint was the best option, to really see the physicality of the work." His hybrid paintings, somewhere between sculpture and

painting, have an immediate presence upon first glance, almost like merchandise. They are perfectly packaged in their shapes; they are shiny and they are new.

I never would have guessed that they were not made by say, a design shop. "I like that I can make with my hand what a machine can make," he says. "But there's a very personal approach to how I come up with the shapes and forms that a machine can't possibly do. I wanted the paintings to look like they were created by a machine and by a person—I like that it is not delineated."

I appreciate that aspect, but ultimately I find myself with not much else to contemplate beyond how each piece was made, and the love and fascination for materials. The work is intensely reflective—geometric, proudly colorful and seemingly fun—but is also a bit taxing, so solid, stable and terribly precise. Thompson is both identified and identifies himself as a minimalist—or reductivist, or minimal-reductivist, whichever. "You don't just start making abstract paintings, you get there in a methodical way. And with monochromatic work especially."

Thompson has been making work for a long time, and sorting things out for himself. In turn, he has also sorted them out for his viewers. "If you saw the work that I did when I was younger and the work that I'm doing now, it wouldn't make a whole lot of sense," he says, "but if you saw the actual progression and the incremental

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BILL THOMPSON:
DIALECTS
BARBARA KRAKOW
GALLERY
11.30.07-01.16.08
10 NEWBURY ST.,
BOSTON
617.262.4490
BARBARA-
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changes, it would make perfect sense." What's missing is that link between Thompson's real inspiration and the charge he gets from the materials. Talking with the artist, it is there. Looking at the work, though, I feel like I've missed over

a hundred steps, which is both intriguing and annoying.

He described his early works as "matte and arid," and when he finally got used to painting with one color, the flatness did not suit his personality, wanting to be more physical with the work. So he took to painting and repainting them in gloss and sheen. It is clear that the artist views the work as some kind of energy harness. According to Thompson, the paint (acrylic urethane, if you must know) "exploits" the color and is a "vehicle" for the color.

"It looks slick," he says, "but where it comes from and where it comes from within me is a different place. I intentionally leave it so that it's not touched by my hand." It is nice to see the language of Thompson repeated and explored in various ways, though it is still hard to believe that someone hand-crafted each one, with their even rises and falls, extremely clean edges and seemingly perfect surfaces.

There is a rounded, rectangular piece that is big, red and shiny. It is named *LOLA*. This made perfect sense and in fact made me laugh. At the same time it worried me. I still can't help but think about just how a work gets all the way from point A (the natural world) to point B (the complete annihilation of the natural world). I guess that is the exact nature of the minimalist enigma. ☺

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