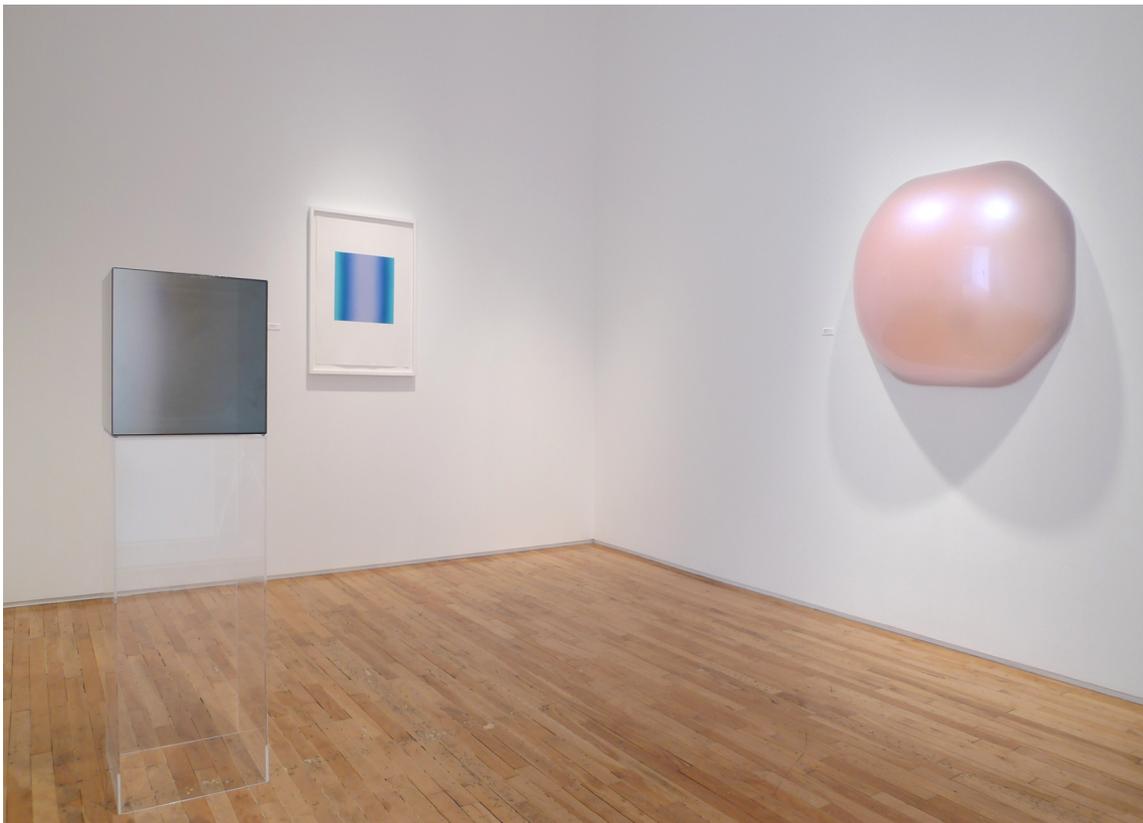


COUNTERPOINT

Edward Cella

As a gallerist, it is a rare and auspicious opportunity to present and help document an entirely new sequence of work by an artist that one has a long and outstanding relationship with. More than a year ago, at the infancy of this project, Ruth Pastine shared with me the first few pastel drawings on paper. At once, I recognized that her latest undertaking was a distinct departure from the work I had come to know well. Drawings on paper, in my mind, always offer the artist a chance to chart new territories for themselves. Their outcome is investigatory, and preconceived practices and positions give way to new gestures and movements within the studio. To a consummate and deliberate painter like Pastine, the pastel media is altogether different in how it is handled, applied, unites with and transmits light.

Over the course of a year, I am startled to be witness to the expanded series of works that has amplified the project's initial achievements. Now, it is with delight, that my gallery presents, *Counterpoint*, a new series of pastel works on paper by Ruth Pastine. In marked departure for the artist in terms of media and technique, the new sequence of drawings conveys a renewed sense of immediacy and expanded polychromatic range. While the artist's earlier work made known her formal preoccupation with the seamlessness and the homogeneity of the monochromatic surface, *Counterpoint* explores the "edge" and beckons us into the margins of color.



Ruth Pastine's *Cool-Light Blue-Violet*, 2012 featured with work by Larry Bell and Craig Kauffman in *Cool Calm Collected*; Courtesy: Danese, New York, 2012.

Pastine's practice to date has focused on the phenomenological investigation of color, and its optical invocation of temperature, light, and space. The artist's work belongs to a larger historical dialogue relating to the atmospheric explorations of color field, the abrupt chromatic transitions common to hard edge abstraction, and the interest in perceptual phenomena central to the Southern California based *Light and Space* movement. Living in Ojai, California for more than a decade now, her New York roots in color field painting have given sway to an altogether different understanding of light and color.

In *Counterpoint*, we are invited to experience a deliberately divisive color field, defined by the perfect geometry and finitude of the square. This serial body of work cites the compositional discipline and fascination with the "edge" central to Josef Albers' (1888-1976) oeuvre, an artist famously dedicated to a prolific study of the chromatic square, and whose conceptual tenets deeply influenced the movements cited above. The works engage this tradition of formal seriality, and can stand alone, or engage one another in compelling pairings and groupings. Likewise, *Counterpoint* is an evolving project.

Pastine's use of pastel in this body of work bestows it with a new materiality. While the artist's practice has hitherto been dedicated to concealing material investigations in favor of the immaterial impression, *Counterpoint* becomes more about disclosing the surface, revealing the shift, and uncovering the edge. The artist's use of soft pastels on a paper ground stages drawing as a departure from her painterly practice. The luminosity and coverage of the pastels is built through composite layers and an "under painting" application technique. Executed through a drawing medium, the work becomes less about coverage and uniformity, and rather more about mark making and disclosing parameters. While still beautifully executed as graduated expanses of color, the pastel work reveals the texture and tactility of the paper beneath, and feels less mediated by the process of its application. This material variability, in combination with the more abrupt chromatic shifts, results in work that feels more expressive, less restrained, and less preoccupied with the imperceptible, while still holding to Pastine's refined minimalism. Change is more vibrant, color more experimental, and the surface more dynamic and shifting.

As others come to experience *Counterpoint*, I am confident that Pastine's achievement will be further recognized and appreciated. Now is your chance to reconnoiter and seize a new way forward.

To Ruth, I would like to express my gratitude for holding fast to our initial conversations and for developing what has become, in my estimation, a benchmark project in your oeuvre. Your friendship, support and patience have been unfaltering to me and ECAA. Thank you.

Additionally, I would like to express my appreciation to James Van Arsdale of Myopia Design for creating this catalog. I am further indebted to both William Dewey and Tracey Landworth for their contributions in photographing the work. Lastly, the exhibition would not have been possible without the substantial contributions of my Associate Director, Marieke Trielhard.