

Introduction

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I am nowhere and everywhere in front of a Ruth Pastine painting. They prompt the irreconcilable in an experience of pure color: presence and absence, materiality and immateriality. Somewhere in the hum of color, I realize the universality of physical color and the singularity of perceiving it.

I've always cherished Light and Space art. I suppose that working where the movement was formed has exposed me to its inspirations and its artists, but really, I love that a single aesthetic act bespeaks both hard science and subjective experience. Physics, the machinery of matter, can be experienced as more than theory and equation under the artist's hand. And we have seen light and space in verse: the resin monolith, the glass cube, the sky in negative space, the configured florescent light, and the flooded room. But with only hand and brush, Pastine is as eloquent in the colloquy of light and perception.

The dialogue in Pastine's work begins as quickly as you can observe how the brain automatically interprets pristine color: the color implies light, light implies depth, depth space, and space location.

But by knowing that it is only paint on surface, the mind questions sensory experience and you're left vacillating between the presence and absence of light, space, and matter. In so doing, you've drifted into contemplating perception and consciousness, while never unmooring from the aesthetic.

Her traditional hand-and-brush technique and focus on philosophical aspects of consciousness make it hard to place Ruth Pastine squarely into Light and Space. For as reductive as Light and Space is, light and space are still *things*, concrete and measurable. Ruth Pastine's paintings are not simply about color, or deconstructing perception, but the dichotomy of objective reality and subjective consciousness: light exists before and after us, theory and equation describe what it is, how it works; yet understanding color is singular, you must be conscious.

While Ruth Pastine's work engages the mechanics of perception, we can *feel* the math of it. Spend time with her paintings. Enjoy color at its most fundamental. Look how Pastine can scalpel glow and engineer aurora. Listen well and you can hear the thermodynamic "aum." ■