

## Kayne Griffin Corcoran HYPERALLERGIC

### The Illusive, Intimate Nature of Mary Corse's Paintings

One must spend time with Corse's paintings, which evolve depending on whether the paint applied to the canvas is thick or thin, whether the work is in natural or artificial light, and whether you are close or far away from the painting itself.



Mary Corse, "Untitled (White, Black, Red, Beveled)" (2019) glass microspheres in acrylic on canvas, 78 x 19.6 x 4 inches (courtesy Kanye Griffin Corcoran/ Mary Corse)

In her current exhibition *Recent Paintings* at Pace Gallery, Mary Corse demonstrates that she is an active progenitor of multiple male-dominated movements of the sixties and seventies including Hard-edged abstraction, Minimalism, and the West Coast Light and Space movement. It is precisely her place at the center of this art-historical Venn-diagram and her penchant for blurring the lines of these movements that make her work innovative.

Take, for instance, her new color canvases, on view in a separate room in the center of the gallery. Three of these paintings feature a primary-colored square at the center of the canvas with bands of white and black on each side. The black bands are matte with no visible brush strokes. The white and colored sections of her works are characterized by an impasto-like surface which modulates and reflects light, an effect produced by Corse's use of glass microspheres — minuscule glass beads that are often used to make the white lines on highways luminescent — which she scatters over the surface of her canvases. As you move across the width of the canvas the beads highlight the subtle yet perceptive ripples of her brushstrokes.



Mary Corse, "Untitled (White, Black, Yellow, Beveled)" (2019) glass microspheres in acrylic on canvas, 78 x 19.6 x 4 inches (courtesy Kanye Griffin Corcoran/ Mary Corse)

Corse's work operates in the contradictory space between materialism and phenomenology. Corse is a materialist in that she is interested in the specific application of paint on canvas, yet she is also a phenomenologist, interested in the subjective experience her material affords. In some ways, these are opposing ideologies. Artists who participated in the discourse of phenomenology, like Minimalists such as Donald Judd, eschewed the canvas altogether in favor of interventions into the embodied space of the viewer. Light and Space artists like James Turrell got rid of the object altogether, opting to alter the space of the viewer itself. This begs the question: why is Corse still so committed to the materiality of paint? Wouldn't it make sense to turn toward sculpture or installation which has more of an embodied relationship with the viewer?

It is precisely Corse's commitment to materiality that precipitates a more subtle, intimate, and novel experience. Rather than being confounded by the experience of Judd's "Specific Objects" or overwhelmed by the environments of James Turrell, one must spend time with Corse's illusive paintings, which evolve depending on whether the paint applied to the canvas is thick or thin, whether the work is in natural or artificial light, and whether you are close or far away from the painting itself. Like the lens of a camera, you must adjust your own eyes in order to focus on the different layers of Corse's work. The theatrical experience of Corse's painting makes you more aware of the subtleties of your own perceptual experience.



Mary Corse, "Untitled (White, Black, Diptych, Beveled)" (2019), glass microspheres on acrylic on canvas, 2 panels, 78 x 234 x 4 inches overall, each 78 x 78 inches with 78 inches of interior space when installed (photo by Dessane Lopez Cassell for Hyperallergic)

In 2019 it may seem like the current discourse around painting has moved past the theory of objecthood and materiality but such reflection is critical to understanding Corse's body of work. It functions as a form of restorative justice, no restorative modernism, demonstrating that many different types of artists contributed and still contribute to the twentieth-century history of abstraction. Corse's exhibition is also emotionally restorative; focusing on the mere act of perception provides a sense of relief, a moment to pause. Put another possibly dramatic way, as sexist biases still pervade the art system, as the impeachment trial of Donald Trump gets underway, as the hills of California — where Corse's studio is located — burn, just taking a moment to meditate on the dispersed light distributed across Corse's canvases, is in some ways a political act in and of itself.

Mary Corse: Recent Paintings *continues at Pace Gallery (540 West 25th Street, Chelsea) through January 11, 2020.*

- Brock Lownes