

LAYERS OF FORCES

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The formation of an artist's creative approach always entails serendipity. *Ju Ting's* began when she discovered a leftover wooden board in her studio, and aimlessly applied a layer of paint on it each day. As the paint accumulated, the artist's impressions of the layers beneath the surface began to fade. When she decided to take a carving knife to the surface of this image in order to examine the inner structure, it appears she had suddenly found a visual language she could sustainably push forward.

If we look closely, we can distinguish the faintly visible layers the artist embedded into the *Pearl* series. As the viewers in the exhibition space move sideways, they are more likely to perceive the shifting colors of the vertical lines cut into the picture. Optical rhythm catalyzes a once plain two-dimensional space, creating motion within the picture. The interactive relationship brought about by the texture does not stop at the surface but opens up an expansive space. The faintly visible horizontal divisions in the *Pearl* series are produced by the rows of parallel lines cut perpendicularly into the painting. Hoping to extend the painted space outward, Ju Ting has peeled back half-cut strips of paint and laid them on the surface. Along these lines, the +- series forms a clear division line which presents the transition between positive and negative space.

From the *Pearl* and +- series to the *Untitled* series, the artist has progressively opened up her work process to the viewer. Having undergone years of professional training in printmaking, Ju Ting tends to preserve the textures of experimentation in the lower layers, with the surface maintaining smoothness as layers of paint are added atop one another. The artist began her medium research with more familiar water-based materials, such as acrylic. With diluted acrylic, it is possible for the water and oil to separate. This means that if the neighboring layers of paint are not applied tightly enough, they will crack open their own accord in the carving process. The splitting that took place in the *Pearl* and +- series showed Ju Ting the potential for completely opening up each layer of paint. For this reason, she has continued to use water-based paints in the *Untitled* series and encouraged the division between water and oil to its fullest. In this series, a wooden panel is fully coated in layers of paint, which are peeled away whole, then draped over a slightly smaller panel in succession. The random damaging of the creative material across various series, as well as the controlled stacking of peeled or unfolded layers all embody the artist's unconscious, or even active presentation of her work process to the viewer.

Let us shift our focus from the front of the artwork to the side, where the artist provides a thread for herself and the audience to trace back the creative order, like an index of key terms. Ju Ting often lays the wood panel flat on the ground. The paint that is poured over it spills out over the edges and solidifies in that form. The colors exposed outside are a reminder of the types of paints covered over by the artist's work, while the flatness of the picture is pulled apart and indexed along the sides. Along similar lines, Ju Ting will selectively cut open portions of the painting during the creative process as if taking a sample of its inner structure. Through the extraction and testing of information, she achieves a balance between control and serendipity. In other words, the presence of the artist's hand causes the apparently orderly composition to deviate from mechanical uniformity. Adjusting the thickness and evenness of the paint applications, changing the depth and width of the carved lines, tearing away layers at different levels of force and speed... These different elements of manual control influence each other across layers, with the operator sometimes intentionally damaging the picture and producing texture, and sometimes happily accepting the unconscious aesthetic of glitches.

If in the *Pearl* and +- series, the knife took over the role of the paintbrush and formed brushstrokes, then in the *Untitled* series, the traces in the picture are largely produced by the acts of the artist herself. The evolution of a series of painting actions is the thread that weaves the experiments of the *Pearl*, +- and *Untitled* series together. At first glance, it would seem that a major leap took place in Ju Ting's creations from the *Pearl* and +- series to the *Untitled* series. In comparison, the works from the *Pearl* and +- series mainly use mixed gray tones, while the colors in the *Untitled* series seem to have higher purity and a lighter

rhythm. In fact, the preparatory process for each series included applying and covering layers of paint, while in each series, the artist chose to manipulate the stacked layers in different ways. The *Pearl* series engaged in spatiotemporal compression of what began as a rich array of colors, cutting and extracting moments. The +- series fixed a pending status within the path of lines being carved open. The *Untitled* series presents the transition from carving to broad tearing of inner chromatic structures. Once the paint has reached a certain thickness, its plasticity allows for the formation of the positive and negative space generated in the +- series, and the multilayered colors in the *Untitled* series. From this we can see that what appear to be creatively disparate series actually maintain internal continuity on the levels of conception, material and technique.

It is hard to simply classify Ju Ting's practice as abstract painting. She previously carved graphic patterns in the early series *Concentrated Majority*, but as she transitioned from student to independent creator, she gave up on concrete forms. Ju Ting attempted to exclude representational narrative or symbolic content from her work process. Yet the layers of color and the various forces applied to them both by hand and by tool have visualized an indescribable, even obscure reality. In other words, formal exploration has formed minute shifts and variations between and within each creative series, while the progression of the artistic language has come to approach a systematic material reality marked by constant uncertainty. The fluidity and lightness of acrylic paints brings the viewer a sense of immediacy and visual intimacy, while the artist and the physical properties of the materials achieve interplay between stillness and motion. This is especially the case for the *Untitled* series, with the covering, peeling and stacking of entire layers of color demonstrating destructive violence and sagging weight. The preparatory process for stacking layers of paint is evocative of the principle of image layers in Photoshop. The user of the image manipulation software can choose to fill a layer with color, change its transparency, switch its background (the bottom image layer), or rearrange the order of the layers at the click of a mouse, and compare the effect of multiple layers stacked together with ease. Unlike the flattened production of digital images, Ju Ting's creative approach applies external forces on each "image layer." The cut, folded, and torn picture is expansive and sculptural, as if form is organically generating from within the image. In the end, the artist's creative structure manifests in time, space and conception as layers of force.