

In a Slippery System of Reference

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“A chain of perceptible restrictions indicates the existence of a rule in the work,” according to Wei Yu, “a set of rules and their restrictions is the heart of Shiau-Peng Chen’s paintings.” This analysis points out that Shiau-Peng Chen’s paintings follow some sort of rule. The artist has also stated herself that this rule is a gestalt approach and satisfies the demand for wholeness.

However, in Shiau-Peng Chen’s milieu, this so-called gestalt opposes important conditions of visual composition, such as acknowledgment of integrated images and backgrounds. What is made prominent is not necessarily the pairing relationships between geometric compositional elements and their background. Actually, they have more of an event sequencing intention—from looking back at the artist’s creative process we learn that composition and morphology in Shiau-Peng Chen’s first work can be regarded as the starting point for reflection in her second. However, this in no way signifies the intention of a certain development in style. In later works, aspects of the transformations aren’t re-paintings of previous results in order to create a new pinnacle. Links between earlier and later paintings don’t only rest in the nearly neutral seeming pictorial forms in her game strategies, but actually exist more in the time contrasts of discrete creative events.

These consistent forms devoid of human traces are recoded by non-visual maneuvering. They “possess a certain start and stop point and linear movement for observation” (Wei Yu’s words). In another way, the artist’s fanaticism for puzzles—she goes so far to create a website wholly devoted to them—leads to her scattering puzzle pieces and rearranging them into new compositions, which brings about various extemporaneous or sometimes carefully orchestrated transformations. However, because throughout the entire process there is no rule to enforce completion of the game, we see the game as a process of finding solutions, and actually, the artist places even more attention on the process of discovering and interpreting her topics, and not bringing forth final solutions. This not only implies that the artist purposely creates the problem, but also that her consciousness around them is focused on psychological difficulties. Although Shiau-Peng Chen composes her paintings with modules, all of the aforementioned factors cast a shadow of hysterical obsession over a seemingly rational process. Under this unsteady shadow, the paintings and the planes which create feelings of space like unfolding boxes are following visible rules controlled by a kind of slippery system of references. Actually, Shiau-Peng Chen’s rules allow these fragments to adjust freely before she completes a work. These puzzle-like manipulations, which seem to have their own initiative, appear more emphatically free of her conscious control in the shadow of obsession.

(Originally published in *Quantification/Metamorphosis*, Taipei: R.O.C. Council for Cultural Affairs, pp. 63-68, 2003.)