

The Silent Construction of Space

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At first glance, the triangular shapes cut at the corners that form Shiao-Peng Chen's paintings seem very ordinary, nothing special at all, but as you slowly get into the work, you will be profoundly affected by its unique compositional strategy and use of color. The work may look ordinary, yet is attractive due to the degree of regulation created by its extreme logical reductions, use of color gradation, brightness and composition. Together these qualities transform two-dimensional space into familiar three-dimensional scenes, and then guide us into a pure and silent aesthetic realm.

Shiao-Peng Chen adeptly uses diagonal lines to create layered space, and furthermore, multipoint perspective to consider familiar spatial scenes. Similar surfaces extend into series that create movement and are like continuous poetic re-combinations that bring us into a multifaceted space.

Painters of the cubist school use different viewing angles to consider and paint the same object, and in this way present a locus of shifting perspective and time. Shiao-Peng Chen's paintings carry on this tradition, but in a different way; she extends her reductions to their extreme limit, and in other words, she takes away every object leaving only spatial scenes on her paintings. This specific property makes us to think of Piet Mondrian, as they both take familiar spatial scenes and reduce them to their limit, and transform them to the point where only vertical and horizontal breaks in forms are left. However, Shiao-Peng Chen's reductions are naturally different than Mondrian's; the two artists form background elements in different ways and their concerns are different.

Points constitute a line, lines delimit planes, planes make up forms and forms build space; no matter how large of an object is divided into parts, or units are multiplied, they manifest the specific property known as space. This property allows Shiao-Peng Chen's paintings to escape from the flat and unidirectional sense of a tangram. Although her paintings are two dimensional, they present a layered spatial depth which of all the elements found in the paintings is most life-like. In addition to this, there is a feeling of being wrapped in drifting time that moves through the paintings, turns inside out and then comes to a rest. As we spend more time in Shiao-Peng Chen's paintings, we discover that this allows us to enter her work, from here to there and then back again in a continuous fashion. The sensory quality of layered patterns in the paintings aren't lost when compositional elements are simplified, rather they establish a definite starting point from which we can embark on Shiao-Peng Chen's well traveled road.

Kant said not to regard space and substance as identical things and not to regard space as a vessel, void or absolute reality in the external world. Furthermore, as our soul passes through and perceives space, it projects our subjective concept of space into a pure meta-experience to organize a pure non-spatial experience.

Shiau-Peng Chen's paintings illustrate the essence of what Kant said. Reflecting a subjective concept of space through an individual's pure experience. The empty spatial quality of the paintings is carefully orchestrated to eliminate all substance and return to a primitive state. Space painted by Shiau-Peng Chen doesn't rely on descriptive techniques or perspective, rather the paintings are composed of flat fields of color, and their spatial qualities are generated by the audience's experience.

In her work, Shiau-Peng Chen takes a basic language and reflects it in varying scales and media, like canvas or cement walls, with scales ranging from a couple of meters square down to works that could be held in the hand. This allows us to experience multiple and divergent properties of space. Architecture uses gravity-defying construction materials to frame up empty spaces for human use, and there is sufficient reason for Shiau-Peng Chen's artwork to find a niche in these spaces; the system of vertical and horizontal lines in her paintings are alternately an amplification and miniaturization of architectural space, and even the diagonal lines suggest three dimensional space.