



Shannon Finley: "Paintings for the Future"

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It should go without saying, but I'm going to reinforce it: never believe that a digital image is a true representation of a piece of art. This is especially true when it comes to the richly layered paintings of Shannon Finley. His process is time consuming because not only are his works large – this show features his largest yet, "Googol," comprised of four panels totaling 95 x 189 inches – but they are also precise and include upwards of forty very thin layers of paint. The artist begins by conceiving his compositions on the computer. Then he moves to the canvas and begins by laying down an undercoat, which in many works is a bright pink, and builds from there. So thin are the layers at some points, the base layer seeps through and, especially in the cases where it's pink, it creates a glowing effect that is absolutely captivating. It's as if the piece were lit from behind. And throughout, the overlayers vary in thickness and thinness, creating subtle color shifts and textures. Further, Finley also applies clear gel, giving the surface a gentle shine. The resulting impact evokes the lofty, ethereal feel of stained glass.

When layering the paint, which is done by dragging very sharp, custom-made palette knives across the canvas, the artist tapes off areas to create repetitive forms: orbs; geometric, prism-like shapes; and overlapping curved, or rib-like lines. These sometimes start at the edges and meet mid-canvas to form a spine-like feature; other times they radiate from the middle, creating a flower-like image.

The color palette is most frequently black and white, with shades of grey (a result of the spreading of the paint); or black and white with layers of neon orange, turquoise, green, yellow and blue. In some instances the colors are bold, and in others they are muted or almost hidden beneath overlayers of white and lines of black. The neons lend a psychedelic mood. The complex but concise repetitious compositions have a mesmerizing, reverberating effect. These works move. Curved-line works bring to mind sound waves. It's not surprising to learn then that the artist is also a musician in the electronic genre, and he plays electronic music in his studio while he works. (To enhance your experience, the gallery has provided the artist's playlist on their website; I'd recommend putting that in your portable music player and viewing while listening). While we can certainly see that these works are informed by Op Art and Cubism, Finley's paintings resonate long after they're out of site.