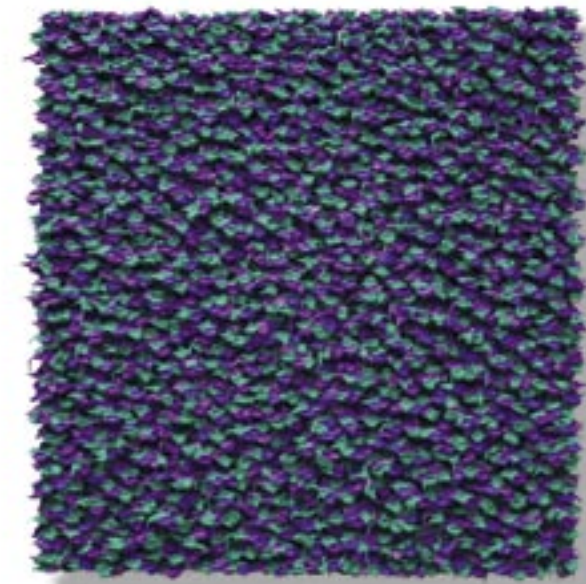




„1,253“ - 2008 - Öl auf Leinwand - 30,5 x 30,5 cm
„1,253“ - 2008 - oil on canvas - 12 x 12"



„15,799“ - 2008 - Öl auf Leinwand - 122 x 117 cm „15,799“ - 2008 - oil on canvas - 48 x 46"



„3,622“ - 2008 - Öl auf Leinwand - 53 x 51 cm
„3,622“ - 2008 - oil on canvas - 21 x 20"



„2,411“ - 2008 - Öl auf Leinwand - 30,5 x 30,5 cm
„2,411“ - 2008 - oil on canvas - 12 x 12"

Robert Sagerman Pathways to Presence

My painting process is dominated by two features, the exploration of the specific coloristic potentiality of each painting and the gradual building up of the painted surface. Through these two features of my painterly activity, I seek for myself a level of immersion in each work. There is by now a long art historical tradition of abstract artists' perceptions of a transcendental nature to their work's focus. Indeed, there is a strong argument to be made that this focus lies at the heart of the earliest impulses toward abstraction in art. Certainly, I place myself squarely in this tradition. In this, there is a pointedly paradoxical element to my work; I guide each piece, as I see it, toward the embodiment of that which lies beyond perception, yet I amplify the material and sensual nature, the objecthood, of each painting. The time-consuming, contemplative element of my activity I arrived at long ago in the effort to replicate in my painting process, and in my consciousness itself, the painting's own directedness toward that which underlies its material dimension.

When I am asked how I know when a painting of mine is finished, I do my best to explain that a finished piece radiates its own identity. It possesses, with any luck, a resonance, a particular strength. It has, in a word, its own presence. Yet, though a painting can be finished only when it comes to possess this quality of presence, nevertheless,

one can see that a finished piece comprises more than just this. A finished piece is as well the visual record of the specific route taken toward the ultimate realization of its presence. The visibility of each layer of paint, down to the original canvas, highlights not only the painting's material presence, but its temporal one as well. Part of each painting's identity resides in the fact that its presence is caught and preserved in the process of its unfolding. In this manner, the

pathway that leads to a painting's consummation is an indelible feature of its realized presence. Accompanying each of my paintings is a ledger. Each ledger consists of a series of color swatches, one for each color that is a part of the corresponding painting. Each color swatch in the ledger is associated with a number. Each of these numbers represents the sum of the marks of the given color that was applied to the paint-

ing. These ledgers, then, are as well records of the pathway taken toward the realized presence of a given painting. The ledger's numerical counts are tabulations of each step of this route, culminating in the concretization of the finished painting. The sum of these numbers, the painting's title, encapsulates an important dimension of the painting's presence. This title points to the intangible substratum to the painting's sensual presence. In some sense, the numerical tabulations capture the essence of the painting in a way that the painting's visual presence cannot.

In the medieval Jewish mystical tradition of which I am a student, an earlier philosophical conception was carried forward, to the effect that numbers partook of the immaterial heart of the material world, of the world's true nature. Jewish mystics took this philosophical position further than did the philosophers, making numbers the focus of religious meditative activity. Because Hebrew letters all have numerical values, these mystics assigned to numbers textual significations. Numbers were seen to represent letters, words and phrases. This conception was applied to Scripture, in such a fashion that numerical equivalences between ostensibly unrelated words could become the basis for potentially endless scriptural reinterpretation and exegesis. Just as Scripture for medieval Jewish mystics

could open itself up endlessly through numerical associations, so too does my own enigmatic numerical exercise provoke for myself continual reinterpretation of the meaning of my work. Indeed, one can see that what I have written here is ultimately but one more step on a larger, all-encompassing pathway, one that spans all of my paintings. The discussion of that essence that gives rise to presence is, perhaps, just another passing landmark upon the pathway upon which I am embarked.

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