



Richard Arnitz

DEC 4, 1949 - SEP 9, 2018



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Richard Arnitz

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(b. St. Louis, MO) Received a B.A., M.A. and M.F.A. from the University of California, Berkeley. Rick Arnitz's work has been exhibited widely in the Bay Area since 1975, including a solo exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1989, and is included in numerous private and public collections including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the San Jose Museum of Art, the Berkeley Art Museum, the Oakland Museum of California, and the Crocker Art Museum.

Arnitz lives and works in an old macaroni factory in Oakland, California with his wife Mia Chambers and dog Arlo.

Maria Porges /ARTFORUM NOV 2002

SAN FRANCISCO

STEPHEN WIRTZ GALLERY

In the tradition of eye-dazzling abstraction, there is something both satisfying and slightly mysterious about Rick Arnitz's adroit manipulation of paint. In "Backdrops," the artist's most recent body of work, shimmying stripes or interwoven patterns of contrasting lines alternately pop forward and recede, lock in to a single plane, or jostle one another in an undefinable space. Although several canvases are essentially black-and-white, others feature brilliant, almost shocking reds, blues, or yellows. Color, however, isn't really the key that reveals the meaning of these works. Instead, it is the means of their making. For fifteen years, Arnitz has painted almost exclusively with a roller. His choice of tools is neither a gimmick nor a strategy, but rather a means for expressing his heartfelt affection and admiration for Abstract Expressionism—while acknowledging the impossibility of such painting in the twenty-first century. Since Arnitz is the master of his method, his paintings could become as celebrated for the way they are made as for the result. What prevents that from happening is Arnitz's gift for tempering his own virtuosic mark-making with an idiosyncratic deadpan humor. Something is slightly off-kilter about these canvases,



expressed through ironic titles and unusual proportions. Bylines and Obit (both 2001), each about the size and shape of a closed newspaper, are covered with random allover patterns of black and white. Yet what text, regarding author or subject, is to be read in these cryptic lines? The title of Choir Girl, 2002—a three-by-three-foot square of oscillating, blondish hatch marks—might have been inspired by Arnitz's memories of his childhood Catholicism. In Canon, 2001, densely packed rows of black and white bars have a pleasurable claustrophobic intensity. But is the painting's name a reference to religious music or (recalling the artist's radicalism in the 60s) a joke about the impenetrable work of dead white men that is supposedly at the core of our culture?

If clues are to be taken from titles, the most obvious one is in Letters from the Earth, 20-2002. Mark Twain's book of the same name, written in the form of letters from Satan to the archangels, makes fun of most organized religions, though it reserves particular scorn for Christianity. In its own way, Arnitz's painting resists order (and the geometry of any grand plan) by confounding the eyes' expectations. A peculiarly tall rectangle, Letters is dominated by juicy stripes of cadmium red running continuously from top to bottom. On closer examination, these scarlet lines break and stutter, slipping behind and then in front of a patchy field of pale gray. Bits of canary yellow added here and there in the bottom half of the canvas emphasize the improvisational nature of Arnitz's technique, as do the stripes of red that lean slightly to the left as they fill the canvas. There is something enjoyable about the implication that one thing led to another, and not always in the way either artist or viewer might have expected.

Arnitz once said that he likes the way a roller "repeats mistakes." Though such a remark suggests a lack of pretension, it also embodies a kind of stubborn pride. His patient mastery of the pedestrian rollers so-called accidents has brought his work to a level of extraordinary refinement. In the end, it doesn't really matter what the titles refer to, if anything at all. Even in the most troubled times, there is a need for painting that is just painting, and for the pleasure and solace that beautiful things provide.

-Maria Porges



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