

## STANLEY WHITNEY: Untitled '10

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TEAM GALLERY

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Stanley Whitney has been exploring the fundamentals of painting for over 30 years. His recent geometric abstractions flow from one to the next and then back again through color, line, position, surface, and depth. Anchored in their physical substance they transcend mere matter-of-factness and open the mind to complex geometries of thought and feeling, what Agnes Martin once referred to as “non-objective experiences.” Although these experiences are highly personal, they remain accessible to all. As such, they embody a radical freedom from the delimiting agendas of politics and fashion—those inquisitional arms of the status quo.

The artist’s process of making has been well documented throughout his career. He works on square canvases ranging from 12 to 72 inches, which he divides horizontally into four, or so, unequal bands. A borderline separating these horizontal bands consists of one or more lines the width of a paintbrush, each a single color. The bands demarcated by these borderlines are filled with a series of non-uniform rectangles and squares. These individual shapes, each a single color, bump and bleed against and into one another running across the canvas edge to edge. Whitney has made it clear that he approaches the blank canvas and, starting at the top left, puts down a color, then another and another, working down to the bottom right. The colors are chosen intuitively, that is, within the act of painting. It’s this process that determines the structure of the paintings, which is ultimately unpredictable and unknown.



Stanley Whitney, “First Fire” (2009). Oil on linen, 60” x 60”. Courtesy of the artist and Team Gallery.

Through his adherence to certain formal processes, and his insistence on keeping them open to intuition and change, Whitney reveals the basic *mystery* of painting as a referential openness onto the depths of a particular tradition, and into conversation with other traditions. This state of connectedness is fleeting, and can only be glimpsed in the interstices of the form, in the tension between color and line, surface and depth. In other words, once you think you have it you’ve lost it.

This is achieved formally within the paintings themselves, through the structure of their making, and eventual unmaking. Whitney’s process of working left to right invites us to “read” the painting, following the hues and learning their material densities, one after another, into the next painting where we repeat our movement. However, we are equally instigated to reverse the flow of our understanding, to unmake what we’ve just established, back through the channels we initially traveled, witnessing the reflection of the red/blue coincidence that earlier seemed so clearly blue/red. It’s here that the paintings move towards the trans-referential. They cannot dispense with reference, but their constant turning back into their own delimitations suggests a momentary liberation from those very delimitations. A spiraling motion infects the linear referential motion usually applied to horizontal structure.

In the simultaneous flow back and forth through these paintings the vulnerability of reason and logic is exposed for its interrelation and interdependence with intuition and mystery, forming a kaleidoscopic equality of disparate factors. It is a paradox surrounding a nothingness that colors our experience, non-objective as it is. Or, as Marguerite Porete stated before she was burned in the inquisition, “that which is equal to nothing is equal to all things.”