

*Let us attempt to see.*¹

— Robert Delaunay
French abstractionist

I have been a fan of William Lane's painting from the moment I first encountered his work nearly thirty years ago. Among the many things that amaze me about Bill's work and his long career is his devotion to abstraction. An unapologetic formalist, Bill seems able to tease an infinite variety from his carefully pared-down vocabulary of luscious colors and plane geometric shapes. Most often the shapes within his paintings are rectilinear as are the surfaces upon which he paints. Within these self-imposed constraints, Bill's studio practice has flourished for several decades.

Bill Lane is a painter, first and foremost. In my eyes, he is a painter's painter, by which I mean that he achieves a level of refinement and grace in his work with such seemingly apparent ease that it often takes another painter's absorbed observations to notice the richness in each painting's interplay of color deep beneath the surface and across every inch of it. Yet to the casual observer, Bill's work can appear deceptively simple.

The paintings ask a lot of the viewer if one is to recognize their complexity. They do not reveal themselves immediately. They take time, a precious commodity in our hyperconnected world. But the payoff is worth every quiet moment of close attention. "Opening up to abstract values is an adventure," explains art critic Matthew Collings, "and you start by being willing to look."² Yet Lane's geometric compositions give the viewer no foothold, no "thing" to hang onto by way of recognition while embarking upon this journey of looking. Searching for associations and meaning only frustrates the experience. This is because the adventure to be had in viewing Bill Lane's work is in the very act of looking itself.

Paintings that demand direct experience as Bill's do, evade description. To settle for a verbal summary of his work without standing before it is akin to reading the ingredients of a delicious sauce without ever having delighted in the taste of it. The intellect alone can only feebly comprehend the opulence of Bill Lane's work. The pleasure is in the sensing: noticing each color harmony as it slowly emerges, each redirection of a seemingly resolute line, each initially invisible texture as it becomes palpable once the mind is quiet enough to see.

"The less there is to look at, the more important it is that we look at it closely and carefully," Kirk Varnedoe once told an eager audience at his poignantly named lecture series, "Pictures of Nothing." Varnedoe, former Chief Curator of New York's Museum of Modern Art continued, "This is critical to abstract art. Small differences make all the difference."³ Bill's work is bursting with small differences. To savor them is simply a matter of time and attention: taking the time and paying attention.

Bill Lane is an intellectual—a devourer of memoirs, foreign films and Westerns, political essays, books on architecture, and an unending list of tantalizing food for thought—but in his studio, Bill gives full sway to his intuition. His paintings do what architecture does, what music does. They employ structures of harmony, balance, rhythm, and texture to effect a visceral response. From his many travels, Bill revisits visual and spatial memories that he uses as jumping off points in his work rather than as literal

references. The atmosphere of a colorful plaza in Xalapa, Mexico where he once lived, the memory of light falling upon a Tadao Ando building in Japan, or the sensation of the narrow streets of the Oltrarno in Florence, Italy all work their way into Bill's studio in one form or another without imposition. Bill has made pilgrimages to see the studio of Piero della Francesca in Sansepolcro, Italy and to Marfa, Texas to see Donald Judd's vast array of minimalist sculptures. Bill and his wife Connie, fellow artist and constant companion, have made several such pilgrimages and have still more in store.

Having weathered the shifting tides of the art world, from Conceptualism to Postcolonialism and the multiple "isms" in between, Bill has remained true to his chosen course of abstract painting. Yet he continues to hone his skills of observing from nature, as he has done for many decades, by attending life-drawing sessions with fellow artists regularly. His boundless love of and sensitivity to color is for Bill a powerful elixir and his delight in the delicate interplay of light and shadow serves as his lodestar. He is constantly engaged and is, likewise, endlessly engaging. How lucky we are that Bill Lane's deep affection for art means he will always be drawn to create his sumptuous "Pictures of Nothing."

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Work Cited

1. Delaunay, Robert. "Light, 1912." *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, by Herschel B. Chipp, University of California Press, 1968, p. 319.
2. Collings, Matthew. *The Rules of Abstraction*. BBC, air date 04 September 2014
3. Varnedoe, Kirk. *Pictures of Nothing: Abstract Art since Pollock*. Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2006, p. 8. (Kirk Varnedoe, former Chief Curator at the Museum of Modern Art, NYC, gave this lecture series at the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. during the last months of his life.)