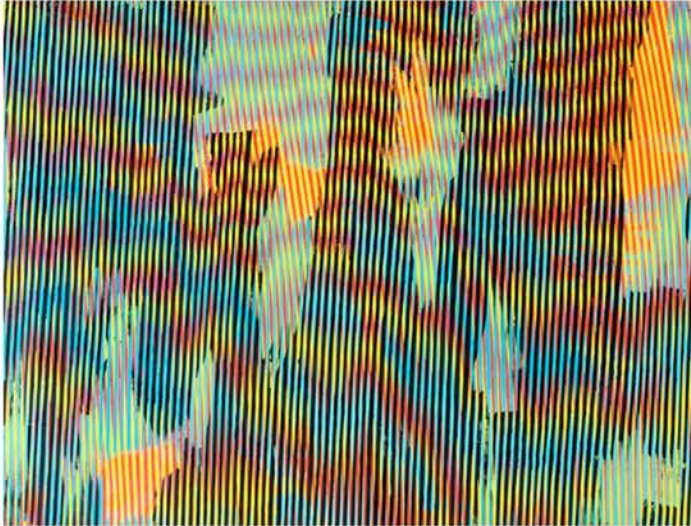


IN CONVERSATION WITH JULIE OPPERMANN

Friday, 31 Jan 2014 By: David Molesky



On the sidewalk just outside the Miami Projects art fair, I could immediately recognize a colorful painting by Julie Oppermann, as it pulsed waves of color through the window from the Mark Moore booth. Standing in front of the large work, my mind worked to establish comprehension of an all over pattern. Then in a flash, the painting worked its magic on me. An optical flicker rose like a wave through the painting and erased the line pattern, revealing a soft focused halo whose color was different from the original painting and then in a blink I was back to the experience of the line pattern.

Later reading the placard next to her work, I was surprised to see that we shared a similar path: departing from Neuroscience at Berkeley and launching fully into life as a painter. From 2007-2009, Oppermann studied Neuroscience at Cal. She was on track to get a Ph.D., studying brain development in tiny worms. In truth, however, she was splitting her time three ways between outdoor swimming pools, the art studios, and the lab – and time-wise, the lab was losing out.

She ended up writing a Master's thesis, while simultaneously applying to graduate Art programs, ultimately returning to New York to complete her MFA at Hunter College. Following a semester exchange program in the spring of 2012, she fell in love with Berlin and decided to move there after finishing school. Luckily, with her dual citizenship from her father, relocating to the German capital, famous for its cheap rents, crazy techno party scene, and young, thriving artist community was an effortless transition. —David Molesky



DM: Did your interest in painting come out of science or visa versa?

JO: They started as disparate interests; it wasn't until much later that I was able to see the connections.

DM: So how do you make these things? Are they in oil or acrylic?

JO: I mostly work in acrylic, but I started working in oil last year and want to continue.



DM: Do you find that the drying time of the oil slows you down?

JO: Sort of, but it also gives me time to really evaluate what I want to do. With acrylic I can move ahead almost immediately.

DM: Do you use a computer to figure out the compositions?

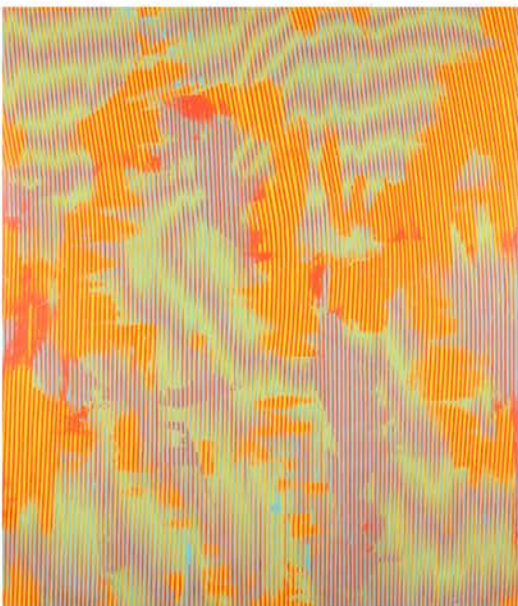
JO: No, not to determine the line patterns. Those develop spontaneously while I'm working, following a few guiding principles. I sometimes use a computer to work out color systems: to figure out if the blue should come before the green and if the yellow needs to be darker or more saturated. The computer let's me fine-tune my choices so they are deliberate, not random.

DM: So without a computer, how do you get such precision in the line width?

JO: I use a lot of skinny tape to mask out the line patterns. I tape, then paint, then take the tape off, and then repeat with the next layer... It's kind of meditative. There's a shop here called Klebeland (literally "tape-land") where they cut tape to any width. Because it is skinny I can tape curvy patterns without running into problems such as buckling.

DM: The lines look very parallel, you just eyeball it?

JO: There's no measuring or rulers involved. I tape a line and then work my way up and down taping more lines, in parallel. Because it's a full field, your eye is tricked into reading it as perfect. So I tape one set of lines, paint, remove the tape, then I tape another set of lines on top. And then I can decide how similar or different the next layer of lines is to the last.



DM: Would you call your paintings moiré? What distinguishes them from others?

JO: There's definitely moiré going on, but it's not necessarily what is messing with your head. There's other people making moiré paintings whose work looks really different. Some are more geometric and precise, others more mechanical with less jarring color schemes, fewer layers and less complexity. My moiré patterns are really weird. And moiré is just one element in my work.

DM: I saw a video interview where you talked about “stretching the line pattern”. How do you manipulate the moiré pattern and what do you mean by “stretch”?

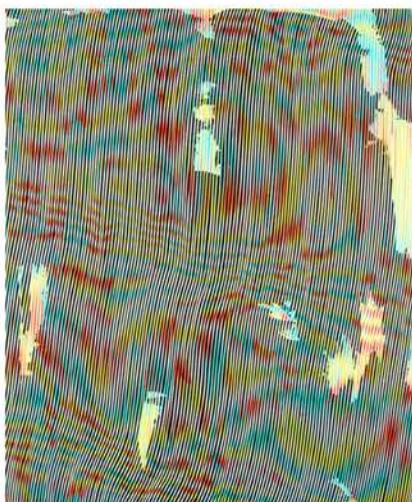
JO: The moiré effect looks different depending upon how similar or dissimilar the patterns are. The smaller the rotation/difference, the stronger the moiré effect, and the larger the resulting pattern. I can vary how straight or curvy a line pattern is along the canvas, I can play with the slope of the curves and the angle of one pattern in relation to the next to make it appear to stretch out, or contract.

But I don't plan it out ahead, I work it out as I'm going, with each layer of lines being a response to the previous.

DM: In terms of the interference effects, would you say that the line pattern and color choice contribute equally or do they play a distinct role that you could break down?

JO: They have distinct roles that reinforce each other. Line pattern creates the moiré effect and helps the colors to mix together in your eye as opposed to mechanically mixing color on the paint palette. Seurat uses a similar kind of optical mixing with his dots of adjacent colors. In my paintings, the thin lines criss cross to create an optical color mixing effect that is not dependent on moiré.

Depending upon the specific color combinations, the paintings can also produce simultaneous contrast that results in after images or bleeding edges where colors seem to melt into each other. Sometimes there are optical flickering effects at edges between colors, ephemeral bright flashes of color that occur for an instant as your eye moves frantically around. It really gets pretty wild if you spend enough time with them under good lighting...



DM: Yes, within a few seconds the after images start to set in, and get stronger the longer you look. If you fixate on any given area of color long enough, you'll start seeing the opposite color in the periphery. And if you try to look at this halo effect, it moves away.

JO: That's a really nice description of it.

DM: Switching topics, what about those marks under the lines that almost remind me of Clyfford Still?

JO: I think you are talking about the disruptions in the line pattern, where I leave sections unpainted, so that some areas of the painting there are no black lines, or no blue lines, etc. Leaving one color out in certain areas results in very different color effects, and frequently it looks like someone has stabbed into the painting, cutting through into it's space. I call them breaks because they stop the pattern and in a way rupture the surface. It also gives your eye a place to stop.

DM: Last question: What will you be working on in the near future?

JO: I'm keeping it a surprise, but I have some very exciting ideas to work on this year. Going to really shake things up.

Oppermann is represented by Mark Moore Gallery in Los Angeles and Galerie Stefan Roepke in Cologne.