

X

I am writing these words at a time when I feel a kind of slowing down, as if I have come up against some kind of painting block. What is the problem?

These paintings are based on the concrete, yet perform within the realm of abstraction (lately, I've been thinking that abstraction has arrived at a dead end, where it has been stuck for the past decade – because it drifts toward arbitrariness and involves no new conception. In the end, one always returns to the question “What is it?” and this question is an Archimedean point without which things might spiral into boredom).

I realize that these painterly strategies must have a code. There is no “form,” there is a “thing.” This issue becomes difficult and demanding, and I feel like I'm wasting my energy; what, after all, is the concrete?

Take for example a “door,” “gate,” or “obstruction.” The X is an obstruction, as well as an enigma. An enigma, or mystery, is an obstruction. An obstruction is a negation or a refusal. In my sketchbook, I wrote: “Structures of negation.” This idea is also manifested by the diagonal, the 45-degree line – perhaps as an act of effacement, or an indication of “either/or.”

Paint should also be understood in the same manner – not only as a suggestive factor, but also

as a cultural sign: “law” rather than “arbitrariness.” I would like to believe that a symbolic reduction of a cultural system is possible, that the “world” can be reformulated in a visual language, on a flat surface. I believe that painting can constitute a totality – that it can be not just itself, not just formal, but also allegorical, transparent and exact, like Borges’ map.

Lately, my painting has completely changed, and this has become difficult. I use enamel paint because it forms a crust, and I am still fascinated by that cold crust, like cold lava poured over a “hot” canvas. The enamel paint is like silent marble, and I love that “silence.” This is really what I’ve been seeking for the past four years, ever since that night at the Hillel Yaffe Hospital [in Hadera, Israel] when, for the last time, I touched my dead father’s cold forehead.

After that I didn’t paint for a long time, and then I started to observe white. I would collect (I don’t know why) white Formica boards and enameled stove tops, refrigerator parts or blinds. What is in front and what is in the background? A crust covering what? A cold crust on hot lava – or, when the spirit wanders in the eternal fields of death, the crust solidifies as it cools down, covering over a void. What is death? A crust or curtain or closed blind, or enigma, and a door that both opens and shuts.

And what does the painting show?

Over the last few days I’ve been thinking again about Blinky Palermo. I also looked at Günter Förg. I looked at Brice Marden. Yesterday I took the books to my studio. There is already a high stack on the desk, but nothing in it filters into the experience. Painting demands its own logic, without leaning on precedents. It must stand alone, like a tree in a field, while simultaneously relating. The green line (outside the map) is the hospital corridor wall bisected at waist height. To prevent spots of dirt. The shining green, matte whitewash and “Hapoel blue” are Jewish, and the turquoise is Arab. Like a cultural Law of the Father.

I must know in order to forget. So that the world, matter, will return through the unconscious as a necessity. If I succeed, the painting will be a “thing.” Not “a painting of,” but a thing that existed before me and will remain after me, like an indifferent door.

That’s how I want it: like an indifferent and beautiful door.

Tsibi Geva