

Another Sun—The Paintings of Gabriele Evertz

by Jacob Cartwright



Gabriele Evertz, *Another Sun*, 2018, 72 x 72 inches, Acrylic on canvas

Encountering Gabriele Evertz's paintings, one of the first things to strike a viewer is that, while her methodology is consistent from work to work, the effects arrived at in individual paintings are remarkably diverse. It's for this reason that I believe it will be fruitful to both consider the broader context of her paintings while also honing in to examine the workings of a specific piece. To that end, I hope to demonstrate that her painting *Another Sun*, 2018 exhibited in her show *Exaltation* (Minus Space, Brooklyn, NY, 2020) is at once representative of her practice and its own, wholly unique, statement.

Surveying Evertz's oeuvre, a clear commonality is the sense of uninterrupted verticality. The paintings themselves are all square in format but their lack of horizontal elements delivers this upward thrust. When it comes to her own work, Evertz is a reliable guide and she remarks that the bilateral arrangement of our eyes provides the horizontal component. This observation is borne out when, standing in front of her paintings, the eye scans the vertical bands of color from left or right and back again. This horizontal surveying of the paintings is the primary way a viewer activates the alternating bands of pure color and gray shades arranged within the works. The use of gray intervals isolates individual colors while, at the same time, the narrow width of all these units encourages the eye to group colors together as chords or passages.

The variety of effect in Evertz's paintings tends to be arrived at via the way neighboring colors interact - one painting may have a pulsing rhythm by virtue of alternating bands of red, yellow, and blue while another painting may feel like a slow exhalation in the way that a group of deep reds gently gives way to dusty pinks, apple greens and, finally, sky blues. At times the chromatic arrangements yield what Goethe referred to as the "physiological aspect of color"; certain colors appear to flicker and vibrate up and down the surface of the canvas - a feature that tends to reveal itself when the viewer is situated in close proximity to the work. These are works that play out in real time, revealing new aspects at various distances.

The painting *Another Sun* utilizes Evertz's modular process to arrive at a particularly unified vision. The unity in this painting may appear pictorial at a distance (or in reproduction) but when drawing nearer it has a decidedly bodily presence. The way that the values are clustered in the painting creates the impression of two brighter sections flanking a central darker area, not unlike curtains parting. These brighter margins prompt a heightened awareness of the role that peripheral vision plays in painting at this scale.

Having noted that Evertz's paintings invite your eyes to drift across the banded surface, strumming the strands of color, the darker central section of this picture instead commands a focused stillness. The meditative center of the painting is fixed in place by a single brighter and more vibrant maroon band that divides it. Surrounding the maroon stripe are shafts of nocturnal blue that grow in intensity as the gaze lingers, not unlike eyes adjusting to a darkened room. This aspect summons up a kinship with Barnett Newman and the way his "zips" would boldly bisect the vast areas of color that they were suspended within. The painting

also displays, via its own distinct language, a Newman-esque embrace of monumentality and drama.

A lifetime student of color, Evertz has remarked that this composition surprises because conventional wisdom tells us that dark blues and grays recede relative to yellows and lighter shades of gray. Contrary to these expectations, the huddle of dark shades and cool colors wants to push out in front of the bright and warm areas that flank it. The central positioning of the darker passages surely contributes to the impression of a backlit figure coming towards the viewer in space.

Another surprising feature of the painting is the way it makes explicit one of the subtlest parts of Evertz's paintings: the attenuated diagonals that often read like vertical stripes in her paintings at this scale. Evertz typically utilizes this structure as a way to make nearly imperceptible change to the value distributions from the top to the bottom of the canvas. While there are diagonals throughout the painting, in this more reductive context the darker central column is the one area that tilts perceptibly, even after the other surrounding diagonals are noted.

Summing up the nature of her work, Evertz cites the idea of Presentational Painting, a phrase coined by fellow color painter Sanford Wurmfeld to describe visual art that emphasizes the interpretive presence of the viewer. When perception is both the subject and organizing concept, the role of the viewer takes on a performative role. Extrapolating from this, I would also describe Evertz's painting as notably durational. Because of their sequential color organization, these paintings create a heightened awareness of the time it takes to scan the picture plane from side to side. There is a tempo to these paintings, and we're aware of the painting's meter as we move from one color sensation to the next.

Even in a painting with a unified image such as *Another Sun*, there is development across the picture plane. The composition broadly implies symmetry but placing the axis off-center allows for an asymmetric drift into cooler colors on the right side of the canvas. A painting which at first seems to present a self-contained and fixed image opens up to imply further elaborations as the pervading warm hues give way to purples and blues as the eye travels rightward. The outwardly stable image becomes unfixed upon examination.

Another Sun also contains a fundamental tension. On one hand the grouped values create the visual equivalent of sculptural mass - there is a classical sensibility that evokes the unadorned columns of Doric architecture. On the other hand, the stability of that connotation is undone by the way the middle figure lists rightward, resulting in a subtle but unmistakable pitch to the whole painting. Knowing that Evertz is an admirer of jazz, the work's effect could be likened to Thelonious Monk's aesthetic language, a musician whose solid, blocky compositions were also endearingly off-kilter. It's the kind of painting that asks for the visual equivalent of sea legs - the viewer actively works to find the balance within the composition.

Compelling painting commonly trades in a particular kind of paradox: the presentation of an image that is at once graspable and yet resolutely irresolvable. Evertz is a firmly modern painter so, while the works avoid pictorial or illusionistic space, they actively engage with what Meyer Shapiro, writing about Mondrian, called “spatial intuition” - the triggering of purely optical depth. Color space is a uniquely mutable kind of dimensionality, one that moves and changes for as long we’re willing to look. It’s in this way that the paintings draw attention to perception and, in so doing, create an invitation to heightened awareness.

Evertz talks about her color paintings in terms of “increasing and decreasing light” and I believe her title “*Another Sun*” succeeds in its own succinct interpretation. This particular work, and Gabriele Evertz’s paintings in general, offer their own unique light - an act of creative generosity that serves as an ideal artistic model: a patiently attentive practice, entirely devoted to sensorial abundance.