



Carolyn Forrester

VOO

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Press Release

The history of art is the becoming of spirit, an eternal cycle of the creation and destruction of forms driven by internal necessity and a yearning for the absolute. Thus spoke Kandinsky, like a good Hegelian, in 1912. Impressionism freed technique from realism, then Expressionism freed form from mimesis; conceptualism freed art from form, and then postmodernism freed art from art. "Only through freedom can that which is coming be received," to quote Kandinsky, and so the 20th century proceeded by recursive abstraction, continually liberating itself from its previous bounds as it approached the horizon line where art and life would be reconciled.

Meanwhile the economy was creating new forms too, otherwise called financial instruments. Nixon freed the dollar from the gold standard, the Caymans freed income from taxes. You buy a home and take out a mortgage, which gets sold as a security, and a hedge fund profits on a derivative if you foreclose. The boys are buying and holding and calling and selling. *All that is solid melts into air*. Thus spoke Marx, who saw that from the process of exchange arises real abstraction.

Enter Carolyn Forrester. The works shown in this solo exhibition engage seriously with the contradictions inherent to the dialectical progression of the medium — color's relationship to shape, a point's relationship to motion, a form's relationship to the space around it — while understanding that a painting is one system for information among all the others that encode our world. The show's title, *VOO*, evokes the name of a movement like Dada, a sign untethered from signification. It is instead the ticker symbol of an investment fund, its own kind of representational medium, showing the rise and fall of the S&P.

At first glance, the paintings seen here are all surface and noise, a surfeit of marks yielding no focus or depth. But their subjects are specific, conveyed in figures that remain barely perceptible: in several works, this subject is *Wall Street*, Oliver Stone's 1987 film capturing the spirit of Reagan's America. *We make the rules pal* takes its title from a Michael Douglas line, and the text was painted from photographs Forrester took of the automated captions on her laptop screen. Where impressionists before her painted from life, Forrester indexes a picture's compression. *Wall Street* rests uneasily between a morality play and a snuff film; these works are more disorienting, less legible, perhaps less human. You can get a better sense of financialization from them than you can by watching Charlie Sheen develop a conscience.

Forrester uses various moments in the foundation of modernism as essentially readymades, as seen in the compositions lifted from Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Bridget Riley in *Skip recap*. Where pointillism used marks to create dimension, her marks highlight the flat surface that lies beneath. The prints featured in the show bring this flatness to its apotheosis, gestures converging on the same plane as logos and market trends. Duchamp saw art in commercial forms, and Forrester sees commerce in the forms of art. This was always the ambivalence of the avant garde, as seen in Forrester's study of Picabia: a kind of autonomy born out of machinery, transcendence from the banal. Like the hidden figures in Forrester's work, what image emerges depends on where you stand.

Picabia was called a Funny Guy, and it would be easy to see Forrester's work as a deadpan joke. But to do so would be to reduce these pieces — in which each square inch is comprised of countless details — to a single gesture. Perhaps paradoxically, I think this is what is at stake for Forrester: how to see the work in front of us, not as a reference, nor as a cipher, nor as a commodity, but rather as what it is and what it does.

This is, as Kandinsky put it, “the question of form,” and at a time when the whole of art history is a dataset dredged to create images by its average, it’s a question that is as pressing as ever. *Man looks in the abyss, and there's nothing staring back at him. At that moment, man finds his character.* Thus spoke Charlie Sheen’s schmucky boss at the end of *Wall Street*. It's Nietzsche, but he gets the quote wrong. It doesn't matter; in the next scene, Sheen is seized by the SEC.

— Will Weatherly