

WHY PAINT
MARCIA HAFIF, 1989

Having taken into consideration years ago the consensus decision of the art world that painting was no longer acceptable as an art form, it seemed necessary to move my awareness to a second level. Accepting the idea that one could no longer paint in good faith, I thought it could be possible to paint on another level, one providing a certain distance in order to look at the paint rather than at its subject. It would be possible to paint “as if” one were painting, using the materials and techniques of painting, without referring to a separate subject. This thinking led me to monochrome. Thus I do not paint with the intention of making a painting as such, but I work from the outside using traditional methods and materials to discover a new image.

The use of this monochrome format is of course not new either. Many artists in this century have chosen to use it as an ideal abstract form if for very different purposes. Monochrome, along with the grid, has been one of the major forms of painting in the 20th century as well as one which, it is now clear, presents innumerable individual possibilities. The difference between the various monochrome painters becomes more evident as we see more of this type of painting.

An interesting point of this work is the independent discovery different artists make of similar processes and attitudes. Within the scope of the form decisions made by one artist necessarily overlap with those made by another to the degree that the question of originality vanishes. One can wonder if it is any longer relevant to ask who did what first or if one work is too much like another. In fact it becomes interesting to find that certain works are very much alike.

After years of apologizing for “monochrome” as in imprecise term for speaking about the kind of one-color painting I do, I have come to accept it as a means of referring to paintings which are not necessarily of just one color, but whose predominant characteristic is that of a square or rectangular, flat, painted surface without geometric divisions, depicted images or the suggestion of deep space. The absence of these devices is what makes certain paintings not only monochrome - other paintings may be as well - but also radical, that is, going all the way toward a unified surface.

The work that interests me is not just any single-color surface but is one that is aware of the reduced color of Abstract Expressionists such as Rothko and Newman, has passed through the hard-edge of Color Field and the grays of Minimalist, adding the irony and distance of the Analytic period of the late 60s and the 70s, and, after demonstrating its relation to the tradition of painting, has reintegrated itself as serious painting making use of a central device of abstraction, the one-color painted object.

On January 1, 1972 I took this step eliminating the juxtaposition of colors in order to make a painting which uses the methods and materials of traditional painting, but which was not really a painting in the usual sense. In this way I hoped to find a new image,

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and a new meaning for painting. It was a situation of coming to the end of painting and yet being confronted with the need to start again.