

### **Chinese Red 33 x 33**

One painting out of hundreds by the same artist, one one-color painting out of thousands by hundreds of artists. How does one understand this flatly painted red square? Why is it painted with household enamel? And why on wood, why plywood?

First the painting functions as itself. It is red. It is square and not very big. It is placed conveniently at eye level on a wall with enough clear space around it to be able to become a figure on the ground of the wall. It has a title: the name of the commercial color with which it was painted. Looking at it one reacts to it as to any other thing in the world. One sees it and responds silently to its size and shape, to the shiny red surface and the bare plywood edges, to the distance between it and the wall. Then the mind comes and asks, what is it?

The object is fixed to the wall as though it were a painting. In fact it is a painting. What kind of reference does it make as a painting?

By now this fracture of its meaning has produced multiple references: it is seen in the privileged space reserved for a painting, the wooden support comes from the Renaissance (a base for egg tempera), the household enamel comes from our everyday lives, the matter-of-fact paint application with a house painting brush could be used to paint a table, the plywood too is very ordinary, not precious, the one color surface belongs to the tradition of monochrome painting, the square shape is neutral and modern, the size is human, being neither large nor small, the one painting is a sample one artist's work . . .

What we do not immediately see is the relation of this painting to the other paintings by this artist though knowledge of these will add to the meaning of the work. This particular painting is the fourth in a series of Enamel on Wood paintings. The series is the fifteenth in an on-going project which set out in 1972 to use a monochrome form to recapitulate the materials and methods of traditional Western painting.

This painting, then, takes its ordered place in a stream of some hundreds of paintings and exists for itself along as well as in the contest of the rest of the work.

Marcia Hafif, New York 1990

From the catalog RED, for the exhibition of the same name curated by Robert Nickas, Galerie Isy Brachot, Isy Brachot Editeur & Imschoot Uitgevers, 1990

Cited in Arthur C. Danto, AFTER THE END OF ART, Contemporary Art and the Pale of History, Princeton University Press, p. 167-8