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Newport Beach, CA

Tony DeLap

Orange County Museum of Art

In an age of ultra-baroque narratives, Tony DeLap continues to explore formalist themes. Now in his 70s and feted with a 40-year retrospective, DeLap remains one of Minimalism's quintessential, irreverent poets. Rather than insisting that art is solely an object, this California artist became interested early on in the shadows of illusion that always haunted and eventually trumped the didactic, non-illusionist rhetoric of Minimalism. Playing with optical illusions, DeLap's reductive objects are more complex than Frank Stella led everyone to believe when he quipped of Minimalism, "What you see is what you get."

While often marginalized in canonical accounts of Minimalism, despite having been included in MoMA's "The 1960s" exhibition of 1967, DeLap has spent a lifetime exploring reductive form. Though his unwavering commitment to formalism's rigors and encrypted silences recalls that of the late Donald Judd, his images differ considerably. Whereas Judd's mature works endlessly and compulsively reify the cube, DeLap's works investigate interrelations between forms, and between form and space. *Faro Fool* (2000), for example, presents an ellipse impacted by a perfect square, while *Blue Equivoque* (1977) presents an ellipse graced with a curious triangular "clam's leg" by which it clings to the wall.

Like Richard Serra and Ellsworth Kelly, DeLap simultaneously adopts and challenges Minimalism's premises, defining and destabilizing the relation between art and industrialization. On one hand, his sleekly finished objects bespeak the perfection of industrial surfaces. But unlike Judd and Carl Andre, who extended abstraction mathematically and mechanically while focusing almost exclusively on rectilinear shapes, DeLap never stops inventing forms. Exploring circles and ellipses rather than merely squares and rectangles, he constructs works that combine rectilinear and curvilinear forms. This opens paths to an array of iconographic musings, including the Greco-Roman belief that the square and the circle represent micro- and macrocosmic spheres respectively. With the exception of some early '60s works, however, one looks in vain here for completed or perfected forms. Rather, DeLap presents parts of such wholes, be it a slice of a circle or the arc of an ellipse, conversing with Postmodernism's uncertainties regarding knowledge and truth.

Often DeLap underscores the uniqueness of his objects with colors that bear no definitive names. There is, for example, an entire exhibition room filled with gray works that toy with the concept of institutional gray. The violet-gray *Caesar's Palace at 4 AM*, for example, alludes to morning light, while the dusty green-gray *Florine, Child of the Air* recalls the color of the sea at dusk. Customized rather than standardized in form and color, DeLap's works challenge Minimalism's dogmatic fixation on the industrial world.

It is this inventiveness that makes DeLap's work simultaneously poetic and subversive. Underscoring the ongoing dilemma of the handmade object's validity in the postindustrial age, his images project a rarefied presence because of their nonconformist yet reductive appearance. Paradoxically interjecting illusion into the non-illusionistic creed of Minimalism, DeLap evolves a formalist oeuvre that is poetically enigmatic, lyrical, and lithe.