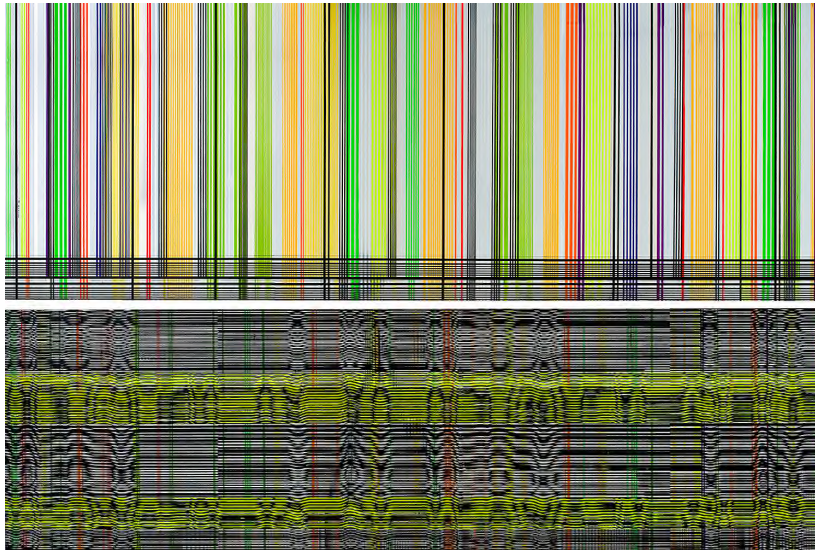


ART PAPERS

March/April 2009

BEVERLY FISHMAN

ST. LOUIS



For several years, Detroit artist Beverly Fishman has painted abstract works predicated on the pervasive, yet complex and cryptic, graphic imagery of medical technology. Understanding the visuality of hard science and her place within a historical continuum as an artist, Fishman has developed a practice that places the viewer in a symbiotic relationship with meaning. Fishman's works appropriate EKG, EEG, and genetic code graphs, which she stencils, silkscreens, and occasionally restates with cut vinyl, to create whirling abstract forms that alternately evoke and disguise their sources. Even the titles can suggest a pharmacological directive to divide dosage—

Dividose. Others incorporate a recognizable color schema— Y.O.R.G.B.— that evokes the recognizable three-letter genetic codon, such as AUG, ACG, and so on.

Mark Cheetham has discussed contemporary abstraction as an opposition to the autonomy of formalism as though it were literally "infected" with a purposeful immersion in society and its ills. The pathogenic analogy seems particularly accurate in Fishman's case. There is such an enormous profusion of information in these works that the result is at best an open-ended narrative in a perpetual state of flux between pure form and transformative patterns implying significance. While

this incessant input of information may well incite multiple interpretative options, it also results in a forceful reminder that our societal interaction with ubiquitous pharmaceutical and medical graphs is a veritable fetishistic visual embrace of linear reasoning.

While the works' primary focus is to call to awareness that we are constantly interacting with a vast body of information from the world of technomedicine, it also relies on multiple layers of meaning and images. The larger paintings are typically comprised of two or three rectangular, highly polished stainless steel panels. Fishman's use of multiple panels is reminiscent of the absolute interrelatedness of painted rectangles in Rothko's work. The mirrored surfaces recall other renowned predecessors: Michelangelo Pistoletto's early self-portraits, Robert Morris' *Unfitted (mirrored cubes)*, 1965-1971, Robert Smithson's early steel/plexi-mirror sculptures and several non-site works, and especially Gerhard Richter's glass and enamel paintings, such as *Mirror Painting (Gray)*, 1991.

In *Beverly Fishman: New Paintings*, the most recent paintings, like *Dividose: wavebulgeyellow*, 2008, are deftly hung to reflect the viewer's entire body—the one-inch separation between the panels supplies a visual bisection at the waist, an anthropomorphic head-mind/body split [Bruno David Gallery; January 23— February 28, 2009].

That slight separation seems at the heart of this work: the paintings can be read as both highly refined, purely formalist, intellectualized pattern painting or as visceral revelations of scientific source material. The vertical orientation of *Dividose: purpleyel-lowpurple*, 2008, forces an empathetic and apperceptive response as duality seems to subside, coding the body and its portrayal as essentially fused.

Unfitted, 2008, reads as though one were looking into a mirror overlaid with micro-circuitry. Here, a futuristic-looking, transparent, floating computer screen calls to mind sci-fi movies. More importantly, the illusive effect requires a constant shift of our attention, oscillating between surface image and what lies beyond. We become aware of the diverging acts of looking and not looking. The painted mirrored surface both reflects us and serves as a catalyst for reflection on our personal interfacing with the visual language of science. We're culturally and actually reliant on those who can break these recondite scientific codes, but we're also often removed from both that discourse and even effective resolution—the U.S. still doesn't have the universal health insurance originally championed by FDR. Gerhard Richter had once written of the ephemeral, unfixed nature of the reflected glass surface: "*alles sehen nicht begreifen*"—to see everything to understand nothing.

—Jeffrey Hughes

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ABOVE: Beverly Fishman, *Dividose: Flour Y.O.R.G.B.*, 2008, silkscreen on polished stainless steel, 2 panels: 55.75 x 84 inches (courtesy of the artist and Bruno David Gallery, St. Louis)

ABOUT THE BRUNO DAVID GALLERY

Established in 2005, the Bruno David Gallery is a contemporary art gallery and one of the most important places to see art in Saint Louis. The Gallery represents some of the best artists that Saint Louis has to offer, along with artists of national and international reputation. The editors of the St. Louis Magazine awarded the Gallery: *Best Gallery in St. Louis* in 2008. The gallery is located in the heart of the Grand Center arts district, directly opposite the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts and the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis.

3721 WASHINGTON BOULEVARD SAINT LOUIS MO 63108 314.531.3030
INFO@BRUNODAVIDGALLERY.COM WWW.BRUNODAVIDGALLERY.COM