

Negotiations and Meditations  
Chantal Grech, 2008

'Colour speaks on its own terms the way a trumpet sounds its own notes...' When asked to talk about the first influences on his paintings it is with the early work of Wassily Kandinsky that Peter DeLorenzo begins: '... the Blue Rider paintings in which colour operates more like music and those points of transition when the colour lifts itself away from what it starts out to represent and becomes something else, that's what was so vital'.

It could be said that this fascination with colour has not only informed the last thirty five years of Peter DeLorenzo's painting but also lies at the heart of this present body of work. Here the viewer is met, in one work, with an intense flicker of colour rippling across the surface of the canvas the way reflections in water are constantly shifting, while in another a stillness takes over requiring a more contemplative viewing. In both cases the potential for colour to evoke emotions is heightened by the fact that all external representation is excluded through the use of the grid. If colour can be employed in a way that parallels music then music also answers to mathematics and in turn to a set of geometries which orchestrate pattern and movement. The surface of the paintings are divided into evenly distributed units which relate both to the whole and the edge of the canvas. The initial decision is arbitrary, but from that point on the rules of engagement are set. The game is finished when the last square is completed. The strategies are minimalist, an interplay of two factors – colour and geometry – but the result is far from the cool intentions of minimalism.

Peter DeLorenzo is both a painter and a film maker. One of the things that distinguishes painting from film is that in painting the surface is there to be read simultaneously or selectively according to the viewer while in film the 'seeing' is sequential and dictated. The carefully nuanced variations across this surface court a different sense of time and contemplation. If the Modernist surface, having relinquished perspective, was a flat, 'no holes through it', 'real' surface, then the game here is to project the space of the painting forwards into the viewer's space while maintaining a surface that is still essentially flat. (1) Cancellations and erasures used in earlier paintings maintain this surface yet at the same time infer something hidden or concealed.

In earlier paintings the motif has been a fragment or part of an image, a gate or a grill placed against a coloured ground. In the present works the motif is a geometric pattern, a set of vectors, or diagonals, a frame within a frame. It is these motifs which suggest movement, pattern and provide the structures for the rhythm and orchestration of colour which in turn suggest emotive possibilities. Another more recent influence on these paintings comes from Moroccan tiles with their limited palette and infinite subtle variations of colour, a result of the organic way in which they are made. These variations are obvious close up but from a distance what is seen is a complete picture in which the imperfections are invisible yet integral to the richness of the whole. In Peter De Lorenzo's paintings the inflexible logic of the grid is subverted through borders that are less than perfect, whose edges nudge one another through erasures or changes. The end

product is the result of a series of negotiated moves in which the process of making is as much a part of the subject of the work as is the emotive quality of the colour. This notion of series which involves repetition not only within the canvas but between canvases refers back to the ground of mathematics and the serialism of some contemporary composers. It uses a minimalist strategy with a visibly expressionist aim. This would place the works clearly within a Modernist context if it were not for the equal attention given to the autonomy of an open-ended process which, on occasion, produces the incomplete, the fragmented, image as a finished product.

It need also be said that though these paintings find their origins in European and American Abstraction -in the layered transparencies of Morris Louis, the gestured and serialised images of Alechinsky, the cancellations and erasures of Richter, they are also grounded in the colours of the landscape, in the brilliant and ephemeral sunsets of the Southern Highlands of New South Wales in which Peter DeLorenzo has lived for the last ten years.

(1) Greenberg, Clement, *Towards a Newer Laocoon, The collected Essays and Criticism.*

Ed. John Obrian. Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1986