

On Edge

Krystie Wade paints with a deliberateness that is not caution. She is intellectually and artistically adventurous and curious, and the clear, sharp colours of her paintings burst in their frames, like some live thing aching to go for a walk. They breathe life into what David Batchelor cites as the “voluntary poverty” of any white space.

Wade is a philosopher and a scientist. She carefully explores and expands her methodology by altering single variables at a time and observes how she, and the paintings, react to nonverbal stimuli - like an academic argument, just without words. Variables are sometimes chosen deliberately or rise from lived experience - a walk, music, a TV show or a movie, or can be the distillation of the day's mood. The resulting forms are unexpected, sensitive and deliberate, like topographical contour lines on an imaginary landscape. Wade maintains only one control variable: “colour is what prompts me - it's where I start”.

One of Wade's guiding texts is Batchelor's *Chromophobia*, in which the artist and critic chronicles the long history of “extreme prejudice” against colour in favour of the unimpeachable rationality of line and form. “But hang on a minute,” Batchelor pauses. “Since when was ‘random’ associated with colour and ‘definite’ with drawing? Since when did drawing and colour become ciphers for order and chaos?” In meticulously dismantling the historical injustice, Batchelor cites Moreau's small concession: “Note one thing well,” he instructed, “you must think through colour, have imagination in it.” Where controlling colour is concerned, Wade is at the very worst a benevolent dictator, but at best she is a conductor and an advocate.

Wade presses on with scientific perception. Thin strokes give her forms translucence and space to breathe - an atmosphere. There is nothing chaotic about these works, and the titles, which are bestowed after a work is complete, are equal parts lyrical, literary, and fantastical. There is discipline in the pursuit of an experience of colour; it's not all hedonism as Corbusier would have you think.

These paint-scapes are completely immersive, even the smaller ones. Each brushstroke is a controlled movement just to an edge: “shape is the distance that colour goes securely”, as William Gass put it (or as Wade herself puts it, “the edges are where everything is great”). Wade has a finger on a pulse, is tuned into some other frequency, that allows her this precise visual vernacular. What the rest of us see emerges, recoded, as something completely different at her hand. The paint is thin but the effect is vast, and the resulting textures are so evocative you can almost hear them, like fingertips on velvet.

Wade's work is a kind of self care, not just for herself but for viewers too. She generates completely unique visceral morsels that really have to be seen to be believed. She is an active, contemplative image-maker - long may she continue to inject her ethereal colour into this grisaille world.

Amy Stewart