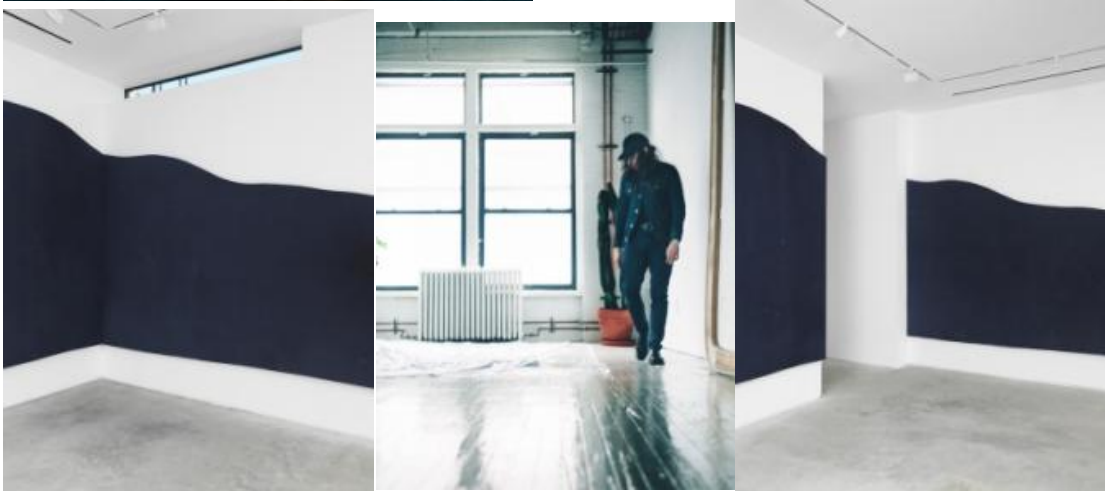


SEANKELLY

O'Reilly, Adam. "Active Space," *Interview*, February 17, 2015.

Interview

ACTIVE SPACE



In his self-titled exhibition at James Fuentes on Manhattan's Lower East Side, emerging artist Landon Metz's most recent work activates the gallery space itself, using the walls as important negative space between the deep indigo hues of his stained canvases. Metz effectively creates a

disorienting space for the viewer, making it appear as though he copy-and-pasted one asymmetrical shape onto the gallery walls with intentional disregard for corners and doorways. The original shape is thus interrupted, broken, and distorted into new forms.

Following his show at Retrospective Gallery in Hudson, New York and a multi-floor installation at the ADN Collection Residency in Bolzano, Italy, "Landon Metz," which is now on view, marks both the artist's first solo show in New York City and a visual departure from his previous work. Metz's former works often consisted of large-scale paintings displaying abstract forms, not dissimilar to those implanted on the walls at James Fuentes. The difference is his shift from the canvas to the gallery wall, making the canvas into the shape instead of presenting the shapes on the canvas.

Prior to the opening of the show, we sat down with Metz at his studio in Brooklyn and discussed his new approach to the one of most defining aspects of his work.

ADAM O'REILLY: I walked into your studio and was immediately struck with these new canvases—not so much conceptually, but visually, the way they overtake the space. Obviously, they're not rectangular stretchers anymore. What has changed in your approach?

LANDON METZ: All of the work in this show is made to activate the space it's exhibited in. The paintings function as symbols that point toward their environment and have this open-ended relationship with the setting to the point where forms have been built and structured to be plastered onto walls rather than nailed into them. The wall remains intact.

The problem with this particular space is that it's perfect, unlike the house show upstate [at Retrospective Gallery]. It's a perfect white cube. What I've been addressing in these past few shows is trying to find a resolution through the architectural problems of the space: How can these walls and the movement of a person navigating through the exhibition become part of the work?

O'REILLY: Right. The white cube is sort of a defining challenge for so many artists, especially painters, but for this show it challenged you to the point of stepping outside of your previous work. What prompted this move for you?

METZ: I really just broke it down: what is specific to these individual walls? How can I interact with this space in an interesting way? Initially, I considered building canvases to match the scale of the walls, but if I did that, it would cover them completely. I want to keep the space in a non-obstructive state. I had to figure out how to activate the space and make it a functional part of the work, which led me to these shaped canvases. The work itself lies in how the object occupies the space and how the viewer pieces the work together visually. The final form is unique to one's own experience.

O'REILLY: Where does the initial form in these new works come from?

METZ: The forms are pulled from previous bodies of work, which similarly explored ideas of repetition and installation. The real difference here is that the image is willfully fragmented, left incomplete. What's on display is not really a beginning or an end. It's something that exists more in experience, where the wall becomes perceived not just as background setting but as a canvas in itself. The piece is only complete in being experienced, as opposed to merely being observed.

O'REILLY: In many ways this work is dealing with chance, where the viewer really becomes the re-creator of the image.

METZ: Right. Although it's not so much about arbitrary chance, like John Cage tossing coins to compose, but more of how the work can be intentional and still allow for a variety of experiences and readings. With this new work I'm acknowledging the viewing experience as part of the creative process, rather than this culminating gesture that comes after the fact and thinking about how that idea upends the traditional roles of artist and audience. I'm embracing the idea that a

work isn't complete when the artist hangs the canvas; a work requires an audience to acquire meaning and retain longevity. As the artist, I'm part of it. Of course I'm producing these objects, framing this experience, but I also accept that if the work has any value, it's going to lie in the viewer's perception rather than my own expectations.

O'REILLY: Is this a site specific piece or could these same works be exhibited in a different location with different sized walls?

METZ: I'd say that it's site-dependent rather than site-specific. While it was initially formulated in response to these particular gallery walls, it's meant to be viable in other settings as well. With each of these shows, it's about how the object responds to the environment it inhabits and that experience of the negative space shifting between the mounted pieces. It's not meant to be limited to a particular place and time.

O'REILLY: Earlier you mentioned exploring formal and personal aspects in the work. Where does the personal come in for you?

METZ: For me, it has a lot to do with my own approach to philosophy. These ideas of non-duality and mindfulness that I address in the work are things I try to practice in my daily life. Both in and outside of the studio, it's about trying to be fully present, to accept things as they are, to frame your experience in terms of a continually unfolding moment. I feel like that's directly reflected in my formal approach: utilizing a literal use of materials, emphasizing the more ephemeral aspects of the artistic process, and so on.

O'REILLY: In this exhibit, you are using the viewing experience as a formal approach, which is not normally a mechanism of painting.

METZ: Right. On one level, I'm interested in how the space dictates the effect visually—how the composition of a given work changes depending on the nature of each wall. But I'm also trying to emphasize less tangible elements: the amount of time it takes to walk the gallery's perimeter; how one's physical distance affects his or her sense of the overall composition; how the size of the space creates a sense of visual rhythm. It's really a matter of seeing how much structure is necessary to impose for those things to become apparent.

O'REILLY: The expression becomes one of authorship rather than mark.

METZ: Exactly. It's not even a matter of expression, per se. None of the more apparently expressive elements involved in my work—color, form, application, and so on—are important or instructive in themselves. They're all just a means of entry, markers pointing beyond themselves towards something broader and less controlled.

I feel it's important, in presenting a work of art, that everything ends up serving a purpose. There are all these variables involved—large and small, obvious and ephemeral—and each has the potential to become an active, considered part of the work. So my goal is simply to approach each step as an opportunity to produce work that carries visual weight but retains this sense of openness and possibility.

O'REILLY: Do you feel like you can still make paintings, like the ones in your previous exhibits, in tandem with this new sculptural work?

METZ: At this point, I don't consider myself a painter. I think of myself more as an artist who uses paintings rather than simply makes them. Especially with these latest pieces, the work may be informed by conversations surrounding the medium, but it's not in any way fixed or limited to them.

What I think confuses things is when people approach painting as an inherently expressive or personal medium. Even in 2015, we still tend to have this expectation of purity with painting, this idea not only that the artist must be reflected in his or her canvases, but more importantly, that

this is where one finds meaning. As I said, I don't feel like my work is impersonal—it is, in many ways, a reflection upon me—but that's ultimately not the point, particularly with this new work. I'd rather each piece be seen as part of a larger experience, and that each installation be approached as a point of departure. As open as I am trying to keep things in my practice, I want the audience's experience to be as well. That's what keeps things exciting.