



Julian Martin, Untitled,
2018, pastel,
22½ × 15 in
(57.2 × 38.1 cm),
JMART 294

Julian Martin: Color Forms

September 15–November 5, 2022

Reception: September 15, 6-8pm

Julian Martin has been integral to Fleisher/Ollman's program since 2013, exhibiting in several group exhibitions and many art fairs. It is with great pride that we open our Fall 2022 season with his first solo exhibition at the gallery. Martin (b. 1969, Melbourne, Australia) began working at Arts Project Australia—a studio and exhibition program devoted to artists with disabilities—in 1988, creating acrylic paintings of abstract monochromatic figures on paper. In the early 1990s, he adopted his trademark medium, pastel, and took up in earnest his investigation of the fertile zone where abstraction and representation coalesce.

Throughout thirty years of experimentation with pastel, Martin has not only demonstrated astute formal sophistication, but has paid keen attention to surface, texture, and how accumulative and reductive strategies might be explored in drawing. Rarely are the surfaces of Martin's drawings pristine. Many show evidence of Martin's engagement with the process of applying pastel to paper. It is a sensitive medium that reveals scars easily, especially given the way Martin works, covering the page so densely that his drawings become sheets of pure pigment. Smudges, fingerprints, tool marks, and layers of pastel dust accumulated on Martin's easel edge and on the studio floor below are testimony to the artist's vigorous process. At times, Martin has applied so much pressure with pastel that the support has become abraded, scoured, and pitted. In other instances, Martin uses a blending stump as a kind of embossing tool in order to give elements of his drawings both relief and depth. From the compass needle, Martin has moved on to outlining his drawings with etching implements, further evidence of taking drawing into a physical realm.

Martin's practice has always been one of translation and interpretation as he usually looks to things that exist in the world as the foundation for most of his drawings, no matter how abstract the outcome. From the figure and portrait, he has gravitated toward exploring a range of subject matter and objects. He uses images of Hollywood stars, art historical imagery, sports figures, and politicians all sourced from newspapers, magazines, and books as the basis for drawings: abstracting,

flattening, and transposing them into signature expanses of color and form. Other source materials include letters, logos, kitchen utensils, tools, and animals; returning on occasion to figures and faces. However, many drawings also reflect an exploration of pure abstraction in which the viewer might find it difficult or impossible to recognize the “real things” from which Martin has based his creations. What remains steady is Martin’s emphasis on surface and compositional reduction. While Martin achieves remarkable results in color and texture through both careful delineation of borders and edges of the forms he creates, he sometimes subverts this hard-edged strategy by blending pastels directly on the paper, creating subtle gradations of color. With the exception of embossing his surfaces, Martin never attempts to achieve depth or illusion in his work—his drawings are always flat.

The most resonant context for Martin’s pastels is the fertile period of American abstraction during the 1930s and 1940s—the period bridging Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism. In particular, paintings by Adolph Gottlieb, William Bazotes, and Ad Reinhardt provide a background for understanding Martin’s work for their development of pictographic, biomorphic, and hard-edged abstraction, all of which make appearances in Martin’s art.

Martin’s work is in public collections including the National Gallery of Victoria, Deakin University, Monash University Museum of Art, and the City of Melbourne (all in Melbourne, Australia); The Museum of Everything, London, UK; Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY, among others. In 2019, his drawings were featured in the exhibition *Nicolas Party: Pastel*, The FLAG Art Foundation, New York, NY.