

Chrononauts in Chromotopia: Toward an Erotics of Abstract Painting's Materiality in the Works of Lynda Benglis and Katharina Grosse

By
Noemi Yoko Molitor

This dissertation analyses the abstract painterly works of two artists, Lynda Benglis and Katharina Grosse, through an experiential-materialist lens. It contributes to the interdisciplinary field of 'queer abstraction' by arguing for an erotics of abstract painting's materiality. In recent years, queer abstraction has moved 'queer art' beyond common tendencies to either equate queer aesthetics with figurative representation (the depiction of LGBTIQ subjects or themes) or to base queer readings of artworks on the biography or identification of their authors (works produced by LGBTIQ artists). While these lenses are crucial given the problem of gender- and heteronormativity in art history, they risk reducing the question of queer erotics to taxonomies and morphologies of 'otherness' once again ('this is what a queer person or object *looks like*'). Scholars in the field of queer abstraction have noted the capacity of minimalist sculpture to represent bodies as malleable and multiple and, in turn, to re-visualize gender as equally multiple and transformable precisely because bodies are not rendered in definite, decipherable form.

In this dissertation, I take a different approach to queer abstraction. Grounded in an *epistemology of sensation*, I consider how abstraction heightens our perceptual awareness for an artwork's materiality. Rather than centering abstraction as a means to conjure metonymic bodies and gender expressions, I turn instead to the level of viewer experience in order to understand what a response to art *feels like*. I argue that *being in sensation* with an artwork affords viewers erotic material pleasures. This approach takes the erotic seriously in its expansive sense. Eroticism in art involves (sexual) desires and pleasures, but also sensual modes of producing and responding to artworks and their material qualities more broadly. Centering viewer responses to color and liquidity, painting's unique material qualities, I argue that both Lynda Benglis and Katharina Grosse utilize and build upon these qualities in sensually excessive ways.

I locate visual pleasure as deeply embedded within Benglis's pigmented paint pours and as abundantly spread over Grosse's painting fields. Witnessing the particular materialities at play elicits physical empathy in viewers that binds them to these artworks in intimate, visceral ways. Benglis's voluminous pours appear as *deep paintings* filled to the brim with paint and play with lingering liquidity, thereby conjuring erotic temporalities that hold the viewer in a state of anticipation and suspension. Overpainting walls, windows and imported heaps of soil, Grosse creates vast painting-environments covered in paint and conjures *fields of visual painterly pleasure* that culminate in eroticized modes of sensory contact: viewers feel the ways in which color intensities relay over objects and expand spatiality as haptic bodily echoes.

Through these readings, this dissertation expands the question of 'queer abstraction' by offering insights into post-minimalist painting (Benglis) and contemporary spatial painting (Grosse) and by contributing to a second, less explored lens of 'queer abstraction': intimate forms of spectatorship that account for the kind of queer relationality that unfolds when we let ourselves be sensually moved or 'acted on' by an artwork's material qualities.