

## Nola Zirin's "The Sound of Color"

By Cynthia Nadelman

It isn't just a footnote that Nola Zirin is a longtime member of American Abstract Artists, the group that formed in the 1930s to speed along American acceptance of abstraction, especially - at the time - abstraction of a somewhat geometric bent. It might seem an unnecessary alliance in this day and age, but what membership symbolizes is an enthusiasm for being part of a continuum and a tradition, one that Nola Zirin perfectly carries forward.

Zirin's fertile and prodigious decades-long output of vivid, alternately hot and cool paintings echoes the efforts of founding members such as Josef Albers, Alice Trumbull Mason, and John Opper (with whom she studied), as well as teacher-mentors from her time at NYU, such as George Ortman, with his attention to geometry and constructivism, and Milton Resnick, a master of all-over texture and paint handling. At the same time, she joins recent peers to move abstract painting in a slightly more detached direction.

A case in point is Zirin's exhibition "The Sound of Color," at June Kelly Gallery, where her longtime gallerist has always made a welcome home for abstraction. Nola doesn't disappoint. Acknowledging her inspiration in music, especially jazz, she brings her own reliably entertaining flair to a new batch of paintings. It's a sure bet that one won't be bored by this painter's work. Although she can be found in her studio working on a few paintings at a time, they don't tend to arrive in series or variations on tight themes. In fact, it can feel as if they might be reactions to one another: a controlled canvas or canvases of vertical or horizontal stacks or layers followed by a canvas of more free-wheeling gesture, or of deep, colored-drenched space. Or, as has recently been the case, these elements may do battle within the same canvas - careful straight-edge framing disturbed by internal, free-form brushwork, for example. And for color, there are generally no half-measures: it's blackest black, reddest red, or blue-greenest blue-green - and in one glaring case: YELLOW!

The above should be tempered by saying that Zirin has always been adept at a broad range of subtle blacks, grisailles, and fades. As the work has moved a bit away from architectural or structural forms and focused more on the painting matrix, it seems to have become more about pigments and the act of painting. In "The Sound of Color," the interplay of Zirin's different approaches is interesting to contemplate. It could be argued that like paintings should be paired with like, but the mixing is much truer to the way the artist paints. The paintings *Framed Heat* and *Staccato* flank the welcome desk and are, in a way, mirror images. Each of these paintings, with defined, near-square parameters, frames an intense area of interior painterly activity, with opposite color systems obtaining - the former has heated shades of red and orange; the latter is cooler, almost silver and cream, yet still roiling underneath.

Another wall holds the “Dune”-like spatial expanse of *Divine Light* -- all sulfur yellow in its upper half -- and *Silhouette*, a tall, surprisingly serene red canvas ripped by a Franz Kline-like slash of darkest black. On the same wall, layered and stacked or columnar paintings add a more cerebral, hard-edged counterpoint. Their color panels of varying sizes, sometimes with the addition of patterning, as in *69 Hamilton Avenue*, bring to mind visualizations of bandwidths, with their implications of music and sound.

Not to neglect the geometry that has always been present in Zirin’s work, the opposite wall includes *Sixteenth Street* and *Geo*, paintings that juxtapose the classic and the dramatic in updated fashion – squares versus triangles, the very touchstones of geometric abstraction, in a laid-back, coolly jazzy palette of greens, blues, and blacks. In “The Sound of Color,” with its nod to Kandinsky’s exploration of visual art and sound, Zirin takes us on a merry and inclusive romp through the capabilities of abstraction, adding her own distinctive voice to the chorus of groundbreakers.