



### ***Paula Crawford: Paintings***

Paula Crawford is an abstract painter. Her work, like all abstract work, is what it is; paint applied to canvas, solutions to aesthetic problems worked out within the confines of the picture plane. References may exist, but they are unintended, the domain of the viewer rather than the artist. Like many abstractionists, she would prefer not to put words to her images, believing they should speak for themselves and that the viewer should come to the painting alone and on their own terms. To this end, she usually leaves her paintings untitled.

Understood in this light, the expectation might be that Crawford's paintings would read either as meditations on the formal elements of painting in their many permutations, or celebrations of color and gesture and of the process of painting itself. In fact, both the solid strength and the elusive magic of her work lies in how it manages to embrace both these approaches at the same time and with equal rigor and commitment.

If it is possible for a thing to be at once itself and the opposite of itself, Crawford has tapped this root. Her process is somewhat reductive: she strictly limits her palette, standardizes the size of her works, she uses no unusual materials and employs no flashy techniques. These are paintings that almost defiantly claim their status as simply paintings. Yet the works are fecund, full to bursting with life at its most exuberant, mysterious and chaotic, and at its most structured and pious as well. Crawford is a master of the embodied juxtaposition.

She is able to achieve this by embracing dichotomy. Her paintings begin with an underlying structure, usually a grid of some sort. To this she adds a ground (or sometimes it is the ground that comes first) which may be solid and simple, or

may be improvised and painted with emotion. She will then add another element, a series of marks, rhythmic scribbles, or points of light. By building her paintings layer by layer like this she presents the viewer with a visual depiction of both chaos and control. She is simultaneously constructing both an interesting, varied surface and a deep sense of space. The eye then is able to perceive both surface and depth at the same time in a gestalt-like experience.

Crawford's restrained use of color is another notable aspect of her paintings. Almost, but not quite black and white, the works are actually full of purples, reds, yellows, blues and green. The colors are worked into an overall, nearly monochromatic color scheme so that you must hunt a little to find them. They create a strong emotional response in the viewer, sometimes, somber, sometimes exuberant, dichotomies working again in tandem.

One of the most distinctive qualities of Crawford's work is its strong sense of space and action. Her paintings, while they remain painted objects, also very clearly lead the viewer to another place. In so doing, they incite a physical reaction. They affect the body by offering an opportunity for entrance. This is achieved through their large format and by the deep space depicted. In addition, the motion or action that overlays the ground presents a sense of activity ripe for exploring. The paintings beckon you to walk towards them, to move closer and closer in order to enter and experience what is happening between the edges of the canvas and perhaps beyond.

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