

## What is Abstraction Now?

As I stare at the computer screen in front of me pondering the question, any definitive definition I throw up doesn't seem to come close to covering the amorphous nature of Abstraction Now. The phrase running on a repeated loop in my mind only seems to transform the blank Word document in front of me into a white minimalist monochrome, feeding me an endless loop of "nothingness", as the anxiety builds from overthinking and analysing and the brain fog starts to kick in. I realise the phrase itself is a double entendre, not just referring to the current state of abstraction but to a kind of in joke and mantra that taps you into the "Now" of abstraction. I get a flashback of the episode of Seinfeld where Frank Costanza finds the phrase "Serenity Now" on a self-help tape which he uses in testing situations, but instead of saying it calmly he yells it in frustration.

Abstract painting emerged in western art a century ago, where it became the defining mode of expression for the period of Modernism. For the pioneers of abstraction, the move away from representation wasn't a move away from meaning, but an effort to draw upon deeper and more expansive levels of meaning. Abstract painting has a rich thematic history, the political idealism of constructivism and suprematism, Mondrian's utopian geometry, the mythopoeic aspirations of Pollock and Newman, Bridget Riley's perceptual shifting OP art, and the psychologically loaded gestures of Abstract Expressionism.

Modernist abstraction, in pursuit of purity and self referentiality, became a restrictive and closed dogmatic ideology, bringing about the so-called death of painting. Abstract painting has since been proclaimed dead on multiple occasions, but rather than just refusing to die quietly, or quietly refusing to die, it re-emerges with a pulse allowing artists to breathe new life back into the medium.

Abstraction Now exists not as a singular style or approach but as a rich and varied trove of formal languages and ideas upon which artists can draw, deliberately or

indiscriminately, opening up new possibilities. And where we see the introduction of new innovative materials, processes and methodologies that often extend beyond the boundaries of art to popular culture and design. This is where contemporary abstraction differs from all previous incarnations. Where modernist abstraction buried itself and brought about its own death in pursuit of purity and self referentiality, contemporary abstraction opens itself up to the outside world, and in contrast sees itself as a hybrid and polluted visual art one that is beyond any radical dogmatism and ideology.

Contemporary abstraction frees itself to utilize an expansive range of strategies and methodologies, sampling and remixing, appropriation, quotation and referencing from a vast array of styles, subjects, motives, material strategies and periods that exist now simultaneously on the art historical timeline. It sits within the hugely expanding catalogue of visual information offered by the internet, allowing free-flowing connectivity to vast networks of data and visual information offering the potential to create new synergies and emergent properties and hybrid forms. But while the internet supplies us a source of boundless information, it also leaves us addicted to hyperstimulation. Painting works to quieten thought, creating a counterpart to the animated digital screens that bombards our mind with waves of information. The abstract painting is, in a way, speechless, non-verbal, not a ready transmitter of information, in contrast to the constant digital stream that separates body and mind, leaving us numb. We are constantly shifting between the past and the future. Abstraction painting content is ambiguous and attempts to bring us back to the moment. It short circuits our rational mode of thinking; content is sustained in the vibe of the work. To experience abstract painting, we have to take time to develop a sensibility to receive it and connect with the feeling that's stored within it to work our way into the space through feeling not thought. Abstraction doesn't attempt to represent what the world looks now; it shows us how it feels. This is abstraction NOW.