

TWO COATS OF PAINT

Alan Prazniak's kaleidoscopic view

October 25, 2021
By Jonathan Goodman



Alan Prazniak, *With a View*, 2021, oil on canvas, 20 x 24 inches

Alan Prazniak now lives and works in Brooklyn, but he was raised on a horse farm in rural Pennsylvania and his ties to nature are strong, as evidenced in his fine solo show “Field Recordings” at Geary in its NYC and Millerton, NY, locations. Drawing on sensibilities for both abstraction and natural figuration, his work is accessible and meticulous. Roughly geometric forms, mainly squares and rectangles, of luminously bright colors, fit together like parts of a puzzle. The small paintings align with one another, offering a kaleidoscopic account of open meadows and grasslands, perhaps informed by early memories. To a more limited degree, the tradition of urban abstraction – in particular, perhaps, Color Field painting – also seems to come into play.

In *Warm Valley* (2021), trees are easily seen. There is a group of branches on the upper left, a tree trunk and a few angled limbs on the far lower right, and just above them an evergreen. Occupying the center is a mass of inchoate shapes, many roughly rectangular, variously colored mango, orange, green, black, mustard, and brown. Behind the two trees is a background of light purple. It is a lovely work, infused with a lyrical sense derived from the natural world. Its contained bursts of color are unabashedly charming, and the salient of two styles of painting reflects not confusion or indecision but rather nuanced integration.

Veery (2021) gets its title from a variety of thrush. There is no bird to be seen, only a series of abstract color passages – green, yellow, and purple, again mostly rectangular – and a set of brown vertical stripes suggesting the back of a chair at the bottom of the painting. The piece, like *Warm Valley*, suggests meadows seen from above, but rendered lively, nearly ecstatic, by vivid colors. In *Distant Weather* (2021), the abstract shapes are simpler and arrayed closely together, so that the composition coheres more tightly. The colors are also more muted – red, white, black, a light blue, two shades of green – and simply occur in the gray space between rather than finding more definite embodiment in geometric or representational forms. In this quality, Prazniak recognizes color's largely independent ability to stake out its own ground.

Blue Weaver (2021), a beautiful painting, consists of a jagged shard of black cutting across the canvas like a knife, with expanses of blue and white on the top and bottom. Though not terribly expressionistic, this piece, owing to its singular assertiveness, does not suffer from diminished lyrical force; instead, it acknowledges the tradition of lyrical abstraction while establishing its own gloss. If that tradition threatens to wear out even a dedicated audience with repetition, Prazniak seems to be doing his level best to keep it fresh, compelling and very much alive.