

# VAN DOREN WAXTER

## **BROOKLYN RAIL**

CAMERON MARTIN:

*ABSTRACTS AND RETICULATIONS*

by Robert R. Shane | September 7, 2017

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JUNE 28–AUGUST 25, 2017

Cameron Martin is known for his black-and-white landscape paintings informed by semiotics, but for the last three years the artist has been working on a new body of nonrepresentational paintings and drawings. These works have made their first appearance in two simultaneous exhibitions this summer: *Abstracts*, at University Art Museum in Albany, NY, which includes new paintings; and *Reticulations*, at Van Doren Waxter Gallery in New York, which includes new drawings. With no agenda according to the artist other than “just to make for the sake of making,”<sup>1</sup> Martin fearlessly explores a range of painting techniques—spraying, stenciling, sanding surfaces, and occasionally even using a paintbrush—to produce moiré patterns, hard-edge abstractions, and iconic forms in small-scale but formidable works. His marker and ink drawings, in which intersecting sets of fine parallel lines form tightly knit networks, demonstrate astounding optical effects.



Cameron Martin, *Untitled*, 2016, permanent marker on paper, 4 1/2 × 3 1/2 in.

Martin’s new work, informed by the aesthetic of virtual technologies, is a distinctly contemporary form of abstraction. At *Abstracts*, the painting *Prom Song* (2017) could be mistaken for a printout of an image composed

on a computer given its fracture-less surface, unmodulated color, and the geometric precision of the gray sprockets and blue and yellow triangles rotating in different directions. At times, Martin introduces abstract icons, such as the erratic zigzag bounding across the otherwise static composition of *Finis* (2017). Its exaggerated frenzy seems to parody the contemporary fetish for big data—appearing as a line chart gone berserk. With a focus on perceptual movement, Martin's drawings at Van Doren Waxter force an inevitable comparison to Op Art, but their scale, luminosity, and hyper-intense color reflect the contemporary world of portable screens, tablets, and smart phones.

At the University Art Museum, ten of Martin's paintings hang sparsely, sometimes only one work per wall. It's an effective curatorial decision, as these pieces (even at a mere 20 × 16 inches) display a commanding presence with their electric color and hypnotic patterns. As each has its own internal logic, they need space to avoid competing with each other. Works like *Vibros* (2016) pull the viewer from across the room toward a sensuous, cool garnet rectangle with gray wavelengths delicately interlaced across its surface. Martin's work exhibits this magnetism even when the color is quietly understated, as in *Sensate* (2016), whose crisp lines of white paint rise from the surface to form a ramified tracery that holds together pale, nearly monochrome, interlocking shards—like blanched stained glass—whirling around the composition.

In the untitled drawings (2016–2017) at Van Doren Waxter, Martin uses tight, linear patterns (sometimes twenty-five or so lines per inch for each layer of color) to create surfaces that appear to vibrate and shift over time. When conflicting sets of patterns interface, seams or scars form and rupture the stability of the surface. While in all of these works Martin uses a single motif—the serial repetition of straight lines, drawn either vertically or at a slight diagonal, with a straight edge and a fine point marker—the results are tremendously varied. Many suggest electromagnetic interference or scrambled satellite feeds. In a trio of drawings—each red, orange, yellow, and violet on white—the two smaller works visually echo the larger one they flank, as if they are fragments of a transmission repeating through space.

Other densely drawn works resemble tightly woven textiles.<sup>2</sup> Glimpses of light red and blue peek through the deep purple warp and weft of one drawing, giving the impression of peering at daylight through fabric. Still others, belying the precise geometry of Martin's craft, embody an organic vitality, suggesting, in one case, neon woodgrain and, in another, a microscopic view of magenta and orange epithelial cells.



Cameron Martin, *Untitled*, 2017, permanent marker on paper, 6 × 4 3/4 in.

Martin's former work, such as the *Bracket* series (2011) of grisaille landscape paintings based on photographs, probed questions about images, representation, and phenomenology. Executed with the aid of computer-generated stencils, abstract gray or white bars seemed to slide across the flat terrain of the picture plane, shimmering with silvery patterns of light. Martin's new work, in color and devoid of representational imagery, has evolved the artist's repertoire of scintillating optical effects. It is not so much that theory plays an increased role, but rather, retrospectively we see that Martin, even when he was working with representational imagery, has *always* been committed to the experience of painting,<sup>3</sup> with unorthodox techniques, mesmerizing surfaces.

#### Notes

1. Cameron Martin, interviewed by the author in Albany, NY, June 8, 2017.
2. Dan Nadel, *Cameron Martin: Reticulations* (New York: Van Doren Waxter, 2017), p. 3.
3. "In Conversation: Cameron Martin with Greg Lindquist," *The Brooklyn Rail*, March 2011.