

Linda Geary

RENA BRANSTEN GALLERY

As evinced by her recent exhibition, Bay Area painter Linda Geary has embarked on an entirely new phase in her ongoing investigation into the language of color. This may sound rather dry, but Geary's exquisite compositions, constructed from tendrils and pools of watery pigment, are anything but. In each of the thirteen paintings shown (twelve on paper and one on canvas), vaguely eccentric forms—as boldly conceived as they are meticulously rendered—are spread across a field of pristine white.

With a juggler's adroitness, Geary uses both color and scale to manipulate the pictorial weight of the different elements in each painting. In *Salt to Sea* (all works 2006), blots and loops of saturated blue or dark violet-gray hover around the periphery of larger areas of green. Fat strokes of orange and yellow create a kind of complementary syncopation. The familial relationships created between these components suggest a shimmering movement, like the constant jostle of molecules (or siblings). This impression is reinforced by the way in which certain hues have been allowed to flow into neighboring colors while others remain distinct. Spatial relationships are formed between these various parts through their relative brightness, coolness, or degree of definition, as well as through Geary's simultaneously disciplined and intuitive approach to shape and line.

Colors in many of Geary's works appear subtly different depending on whether they are viewed in the context of the picture as a whole or studied in isolation. In *Not Dark Yet*, two broad swaths of grayish cobalt become much bluer when one's eye shifts to the patches of orange-brown that Geary has placed around them as a kind of punctuation. In other works, the artist seems to ask how closely green can approach a different color while remaining essentially itself.

Many of Geary's titles are formally descriptive: *Roman Orange*, *Pinkie*,

Tangled Blue, for example. Others, though, like *Not Dark Yet* or *Trust Yellow*, are more subjective. They allude to feelings (the pensive melancholy of twilight; the reassuring warmth of trust) that are sometimes associated with particular hues. Such titles are reminders that even though science is the cornerstone of color theory, an element of mysticism tends to creep in. As Bauhaus teacher Johannes Itten put it, "Color is life, for a world without color seems dead. As a flame produces light, light produces color. As intonation lends color to the spoken word, color lends spiritually realized sound to form." Color, in other words, speaks to us all—though it does not say the same thing to everyone, despite the fact that many have tried to prove otherwise. Geary's work, though, isn't about any particular interpretation, theory, or rule. In a serious and systematic way, she sifts through all the data, but is guided toward her solutions as much by instinct and sensation as by scientific fact. The paintings that result from this process may leave some observers questioning what makes Geary's project any different from that of the Color Field painters of the past. It's true that there's nothing glamorous here, no deconstruction, appropriation, or self-conscious irony. Like fellow painter Amy Sillman, Geary isn't interested in achieving a kind of immediate stardom, but rather in finding her own idiosyncratic way. Like painters in the not-so-old days, she is in this for the long run.

Linda Geary, *Salt to Sea*, 2006, watercolor and ink on paper, 22 x 30".

