

versione italiana

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Maggie Siner, Galleria d'Arte Arké, San Marco 3211, Salizada Malipiero Venice

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One observes, on your canvases, a great deal of work on colour and colours. Red stands out in particular. It is the colour of what can be considered the 'cover' of your Venetian exhibition, the red dress. Does red have a particular value for you? Are the colours on your canvases 'your' colours? How do you obtain them?

Painting is the art of arranging colored shapes on a flat surface into something meaningful. After a lifetime of visual study, one develops an extremely sensitive, finely tuned eye, able to see the smallest color gradations, and to manipulate and control their interactions. The creation of light, space, air, three-dimensional form - all attributes of the real world that do not exist on the flat surface of a painting - depends heavily on the color relationships of each area and every stroke of a painting.



Little red Dress, 2020, cm 33 x 38, (©Maggie Siner)

All the colors in my paintings are made from a limited palette of six basic colors, plus white, from which I can mix an infinite range of variations. Due to the way the human eye functions, every color calls forth its complement and brings about certain reactions and consequences. For example; strong saturated colors (such as red) dominate weaker colors (such as gray) and force them toward the complement (green). Dark colors make other colors seem lighter. Pure white makes neighboring tones look more saturated. The introduction of any single note of color will

change the appearance of all the other colors in a painting. Color is a creation of visual perception – the eye and brain – the result of light reflecting from objects in the environment and then hitting the light sensitive cells of the retina to be passed along as neuronal signals to the brain. Color is alive and always changing as our eyes scan the world constantly re-evaluating and responding, trying to make sense out of the chaos of visual stimuli.

The success or failure of a painting depends on the minute difference between one color and another, barely visible to the untrained eye. I paint from life, meaning I paint from what I can see in front of my eyes – not from my imagination, or from photos – and therefore I paint the colors that I find, the colors that I see. The problem is to see them! They are constantly changing! Color mixing is a slow, laborious, trial and error process because even after a lifetime of practice, you can't know if the color is exactly right until you see it on the canvas in the context of all the other colors, and watch the reactions that occur. I might have to mix a color 20 or 50 times. I don't have a 'favorite color' any more than a musician has a favorite note. It all depends on context and relationships. Each painting is a structure of colors and shapes, weights and tensions, lines and surfaces, organized into a beautiful experience of life.



Red on Red, cm 26 x 44, (©Maggie Siner)

Red is an interesting problem in painting. Of course there are many shades of reds, but when we think of a bright stop-sign red, it is a strong saturated color, one which always stands out to the human eye (and has a great range of symbolic meanings in different cultures) but is never

bashful. However it is also quite a dark color (if you were to see it in a black and white photo) and therefore making it appear bright in a painting requires changing all the other colors. It is exciting to work with a saturated color because unexpected things happen and one has to be quite inventive to figure out how to make the intensity of the color as it appears in real life, come across on a flat surface with that same intensity, using only the greasy mud of oil paint. The color range of paint is much less than the color range of light from the real world so the painter has to make a translation rather than a copy. Therein lies the challenge!

White is also a 'colour' that can be seen on your canvases, it is not simply the background against which objects and colours stand out. What colour is white?

White, when speaking of light, is the combination of all the colors (as Newton revealed with a prism). When speaking of paint, it is also a neutral combination of all the colors, but more importantly, it is the lightest color possible - the one that reflects the most light and therefore is the most energetic in terms of stimulating the eye. Light itself is a great organizer of our visual world. It is mostly through light and shadow that we perceive the three-dimensionality of objects and their relationships to each other. Light falls on parallel planes, meaning, if the light comes from above, then all the top parts are facing the light and thus illuminated more than the sides which turn away from the light. This applies indiscriminately to all the objects in the scene (unless they are transparent, in which case some other interesting things happen) and therefore light is a unifier of objects that are otherwise dissimilar. Knowing where the lightest planes are is critical to making a convincing image, as is being able to measure the amount of light reflected from each surface relative to the purest white. White serves as a measuring tool. White also, when working on a dark ground, behaves like the conductor of the orchestra. It guides and determines where the eye will move.



TP Pile pink, 2021, cem 18 x 22, (©Maggie Siner)

You often paint objects, many are commonplace, as well as classic painting themes. Also in this exhibition you see clothes, dishes and glasses in disarray on a table, even toilet rolls... Yes, why toilet rolls?

It's true that I paint things I see, including objects (as well as figures and landscapes and interiors) but this is mostly because objects sit still whereas most of the world is whizzing by and can't be painted! Still life objects are really just an excuse to paint colors and shapes, which is what all painting is about. It's not really about the objects themselves. Objects can be arranged and combined by color or shape in so many ways offering endless possibilities. Juxtaposing objects that are related by color and shape but not by meaning or use, will introduce wonderfully surprising scenarios and sometimes complicated plots or suggestions. The smallest change from one position to another changes all the shape relationships. The empty spaces between objects are frankly more important to the structure of the painting than the objects themselves. My paintings start out by being arrangements of colors and shapes rather than portraits of objects.



Tangled Up in blue, 2022, (©Maggie Siner)

For example, the turquoise shirt taking center stage in a number of paintings in this current exhibit, inspired me because of the beauty of the color changes and rhythms in the folds, the way gravity can be felt as the fabric falls and pulls against the hanger, the magnificent changes in the shadow on the wall and how those flat shapes bring out the volumes of the shirt, etc. Of course it's also a shirt, worn by a human being, probably a particular kind of human being, and has a sense of being used or placed on that hanger by someone, and all those references to human life,

feeling and nostalgia are contained within the object and end up in the painting, if I am being sincere and truthful, but those things are not my first reason for making the painting. They are something I discover along the way. My inspiration is primarily finding beauty in unsuspecting places, which in itself is thrilling. The beauty is in the colors and shapes.



Melon Half, 2022, cm 30 x 46, (©Maggie Siner)

Another example is the melon slices. These were painted because for a few weeks in August in the south of France we eat freshly gathered melons every day. What an explosion of color there is when cutting into that wet orange flesh wrapped in a thin layer of green. The wedges wobble on the plate like boats on the water, or like living creatures. The color and rhythms are hypnotic. I painted them over and over because each days grouping, or the addition of some new object, suggested a different set of relationships.

As for the toilet paper, it isn't a completely new subject for me. I've always loved painting white objects because of the subtle color changes (so very challenging to paint and sensual to see), and therefore paper, in its many different shapes and forms, has been an element in my work for years: folded bits of paper, envelopes, letters, a roll of kitchen paper towels. In 2020 the pandemic inspired such an urgent run on toilet paper those objects were brought into my view - all that white stacked up in a pile! -the almost perfect geometry of soft white cylinders - square of contour yet round of form. Those unassuming objects of daily life suddenly contained the weight of

symbol and some such needed humor.



Cups & Red Ribbon, 2022, (©Maggie Siner)

You have been spending long periods of time in Venice for many years. What is there of this city in your work, I am not necessarily referring only to landscapes?

It's hard to say, it's difficult to analyze one's own work. One needs a long space of time to look back on before being able to see changes in one's work. I originally came to Venice to paint in the city, to experience new visual stimulation after years in the French countryside, and knowing what Venice had to offer in terms of art and architectural beauty, the carless lifestyle, etc. Putting aside all the possible landscape configurations I discovered - the stab of light in a narrow dark calle, the geometric reflections of bridges in water, the red walls, hanging laundry, seeing through a sottoportego, the ever-changing relationship of sea and sky divided by a thin silhouette of domes and spires- one big influence has been the size of my studio space. I live in a piano nobile with tall windows and large rooms. Because of all that space I see across distances, and thus can see, for example, beds or tables from a point of view I otherwise wouldn't experience. This has inspired a lot of complex paintings of tables cluttered with dinner detritus or beds piled with pillows and disturbed blankets. It's allowed me to scale up the size of what I see as well as



the layers of complexity to be organized. Because larger size is more like a stage set, I enter into more of a lived scene where although human beings aren't actually present, their presence is powerfully felt.

I know that you pay maniacal attention to light in your work. Why is that? Is there a particular light in Venice?

There is no seeing at all without light, so of course light is very important to any visual art. Light comes in many different colors - the warm light of late afternoon, the harsh light of midday, and a range intensity changes, as well as changes of direction. Our brains are able to ignore the differences in lighting so that we can continue to identify objects which look different in different lighting, but for a painter, the tiniest variation of light makes enormous color and shape changes and therefore it is important to be attentive.

Regarding the light in a specific place, the sun is our source of light and it is the same sun everywhere, allowing for differences of angle, atmosphere, latitude, time of year, etc. What creates different light in different locations is mostly the atmosphere, and the surfaces that the light bounces off. These surfaces color the light and affect its strength. In Venice it is the reflecting surface of water that makes for a strong shimmering light, and there is also a warm tone to the light from all the red buildings and rooftops.



Best Friends, 2022, cm 56 x 66 (©Maggie Siner)

Your exhibition takes place while the art biennale is in progress. There is a clear contrast between your style and the style prevailing in the biennale. But you do not only notice a stylistic or aesthetic difference. There is also a political air at the biennale, the big issues of our time are present in modern art, but not in your work. Why is that?

Whether art is political or not has nothing to do with the quality of a work of art. For me art must

be made with the utmost mastery of materials, a deep knowledge, sensitivity, and ability to use that particular medium and that particular language in a unique way so as to translate something of the human experience into that language. I don't judge the quality of a work of art on its political content. Although every artist is a product of their time, great works of art speak across centuries to human concerns which are always with us. In my painting I'm more involved with those than with political issues of the day. If an artist wishes to seriously pursue a personal niche for oneself and an original voice, it's probably better not to be involved with all the dialogue and constantly changing trends of the day.

I know that during your time in Venice, you are part of a choir. What relationship is there in your life between music and painting?

A very big one!



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