



ANN WALSH

"Recent Work"

November 6th through November 28th, 2015

OPENING:

Friday, November 6th, 2015 / 5pm to 10pm



Alexander / Heath Contemporary Art Gallery
425 Campbell Avenue SW / Roanoke, VA 24016
Alexander-Heath.com

Highlight, 2014, Vinyl on Plexiglas, 32" H x 24" W

It is an axiom that art as a whole does not improve over time. Art changes but good art is always good art.

However, it is clear that modernist innovation over the last 150 years has brought extreme changes, vastly enlarging the range of what will be accepted as art, and this, in turn, gives artists freedom to choose what form their art will take. This freedom does not mean art gets better; it is more a burden than a gift. But it does mean that a painter's most fundamental choice - what and how to paint - must be worked out from a great number of choices at the inception.

All painting - one could argue that Ann Walsh's are more collage than painting, but it is inconsequential - especially innovative modernist work, asks that you accept the artist's formal choice as a precondition for judging their success. Walsh has always been inventive with materials; I recall her "reverse" pictures painted on clear polyethylene. In recent years she has been making pictures that juxtapose 2 or 3 carefully adjusted shaped and abutted sheets of colored vinyl, originally rectilinear and recently beginning to curve internally somewhat. Everything is subsumed by color. In fact, these pictures can almost be said to be nothing but color; her brilliant choice of colored vinyl sheets rather than paint amounts to working with a vehicle as close to dematerialized color as anything could be, and recalls Jules Olitski's wish to spray color in the air and experience it as such.

Dematerialized color is a physical impossibility and monochrome - a simple one-colored surface - is an ineffective cliché and by now overdone, so the prerequisite for a "color artist" such as Olitski or Walsh, or perhaps Morris Louis, who threw color against the edge to keep it pure and unmixed, is to contrive a work that insists on color as the primary expressive vehicle *as such*. Olitski did it with low-variation sprayed surfaces and edge-drawing that proclaims the work as a painting, and Walsh does it by putting forward uninterrupted expanses of pure color in carefully adjusted combination. Recently she has introduced mild curvature into an originally rectilinear format, eliminating real-world intimations of stability, and turning structural dynamism into casual delicacy - less a "tough" visualization of lateral tension than the sudden beauty of a windblown curtain.

Color in a Walsh picture may be separated from its usual role of area differentiation but this only activates their pictorial function. They talk to each other in the language of color, and once you adapt to the radical intentions of Walsh's art you enter into the discussion. *Guess* (2014), for example, centers a highly saturated green in a surround of a highly saturated red/pink - close opposites on the color wheel - surrounded in turn by a less saturated tint of the red/pink color as a kind of buffer or coda. It's like a discussion among friends presented in a format that allows one to "hear" it visually.

Walter Pater said, "All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music". Ann Walsh's pictures, like music, sensuously adjust and contrast singular elements of visual art for your delight. They are wonderful pictures. Enjoy them!

Darby Bannard September 2015