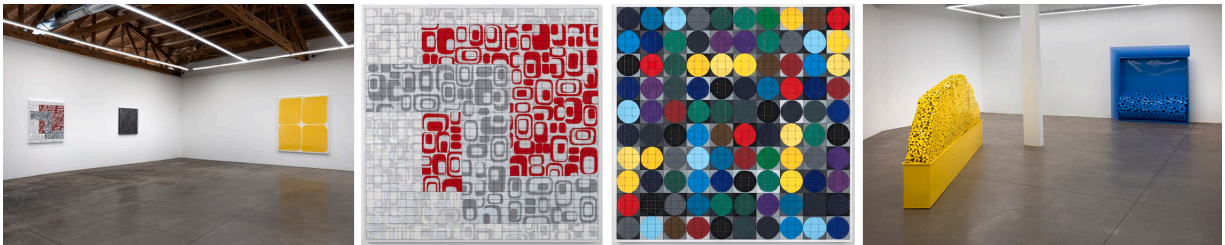


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Rachel Lachowicz: 'The Gravity of Color'  
*Combining Materials in Surprising and New Ways*  
Shoshana Wayne Gallery  
February 3 – March 16, 2024

by Jody Zellen



Throughout her thirty-year career, Rachel Lachowicz has been celebrated for her inventive experimentation with non-traditional materials. In the 1990s, she began to use cosmetics—specifically eyeshadow and lipstick—to remake Minimalist forms created by iconic male artists such as Carl Andre or Donald Judd. Using a seductive combination of wax and red lipstick, her sculptures “feminized” these hard-edged works. Lachowicz also appropriated sculptures by Kurt Schwitters and imagery by Chuck Close and Andy Warhol, recreating likenesses of their pieces with grids of eye shadow containers. She also crafted geometric abstractions and pieces that recalled the works of California Light and Space artists with subtle colors of pressed eye shadow.

In her current exhibition *The Gravity of Color*, she presents a series of colorful geometric wall-based works. What stands out in these pieces is their imprecision and melding of hard and soft edges. Each work is comprised of small pressed-eyeshadow tins in large grids where each rectangular element is a two- or multi-toned section that creates the overall pattern when combined. Seen close-up and individually, each “container” is a tiny abstraction.

Works like *Deep Weave*, *Radiofrequency* and *Ocularity* (all works 2024) pay homage to artists like Josef Albers and Victor Vasarely, whereas the yellow and white *Pistil Stamen* references the pollen producing parts of plants. The anomaly is the more diagrammatic *It From Bit*. In this work, Lachowicz combines different pastel-colored diagrams of seemingly impossible three-dimensional shapes on a white ground. The title *It From Bit* comes from physics and “symbolizes the idea that every item of the physical world has... an immaterial source and explanation,” according to physicist John Wheeler.

While Lachowicz’s latest eyeshadow pieces conceptually draw from scientific theory and optics in an attempt to “make sense of the systems and laws that define our existence,” they are first and foremost formally elegant and visually dynamic works that demand attention and close examination. While still drawing from art history, there is real visual pleasure in looking at the disparate pieces contained within *Radiofrequency* or comparing and contrasting the color circles and backgrounds in *Ocularity*.

Two large sculptures occupy a back gallery: *Packets of Light (Yellow Field)* and *Granularity of Space*. In these more confrontational and flashy works, Lachowicz has welded together hundreds of eyeshadow tin plate pans (powder-coated yellow triangles in *Packets of Light* and bright-blue circles in *Granularity of Space*.) Again, Lachowicz draws from past artistic movements — in this case the “Fetish Finish” group prominent in southern California in the

1960s that included artists like John McCracken, Larry Bell and Ron Davis.

Their abstract, non-objective works often had a glossy, slick machined surface. Where Lachowicz's *Cell Interlocking Construction* from 2010 re-interpreted Schwitters' *The Merzbau* with plexiglass boxes filled with pigment, these new works have no specific art-historical referents and emanate more from her imagination. That being said, both pieces have wave-like auras and allude to the climate and surf culture in Southern California.

*Hardcore*, *Core* and *Legal Whip* are monochromatic wall works made from a combination of lipstick and oil paint applied to the surface as thick gestural marks to create an impasto effect with the appearance and consistency of cake frosting. Once again, Lachowicz combines her materials in surprising and new ways to create the unexpected. While many of Lachowicz's earlier works had clear art historical referents and could be easily placed in a canon of feminist critique of the male-dominated art world, these new works are more nuanced and personal, while being inspired by more existential and scientific ideas.

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