

CURATORIAL ESSAY

JON GROOM | THE SURVEY SHOW

Jon Groom: The Geometry of Spirit and the Alchemy of Color

In a career that spans almost five decades, Jon Groom has steadfastly engaged with the lineage of modern painting while forging his own, deeply personal dialogue with color, form, and space. His work, characterized by a relentless pursuit of abstraction, resonates with the intellectual rigor and transcendental aspirations that defined early modernism. It is fitting, then, that this *Survey Show*, mounted at *PULPO GALLERY* in Murnau—a site forever linked to Wassily Kandinsky and the birth of abstraction—should present a comprehensive examination of Groom’s contribution to contemporary art.

At first glance, one might be tempted to draw facile comparisons between Groom’s work and that of his predecessors, from the structured chromatic explorations of Josef Albers to the reductive purity of Barnett Newman. However, Groom’s paintings do not function as postmodern citations or mere exercises in stylistic homage. They constitute, instead, a profound meditation on the role of color in the articulation of human consciousness—a meditation that brings together the intellectual discipline of the geometric and the spiritual dimension of the ineffable.

Kandinsky’s Heir: The Convergence of the Material and the Spiritual

In Groom’s work, there is an ongoing dialogue with Kandinsky, but it is neither nostalgic nor derivative. Rather, Groom extends and expands Kandinsky’s pursuit of art as a spiritual act, grounding it in the chromatic and structural imperatives of his own time. Like Kandinsky, Groom rejects the notion of art as a decorative or formal exercise. For him, painting is a site of metaphysical inquiry, a space in which the material world and the spiritual plane converge.

It is no coincidence that this *Survey Show* takes place in Murnau, where Kandinsky found his visual language. For Groom, the proximity to this place is more than symbolic; it is a return to the conceptual terrain where abstraction first announced itself as a mode of spiritual expression. Groom’s engagement with color recalls Kandinsky’s assertion that “color is a means of exerting direct influence upon the soul.” But Groom, shaped by his own intellectual and cultural experiences, approaches color not only as a symbolic tool but as a living force—dynamic, mutable, and deeply rooted in perception.

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The Discipline of Geometry: Albers, Barragán, and the Golden Section

Groom's practice, while anchored in abstraction, is marked by an acute awareness of the architectural dimensions of painting. His long engagement with the geometric structures of Albers and Le Corbusier is not a matter of superficial design. Geometry in Groom's work operates as a framework through which color is allowed to transcend its physical limitations and enter the realm of sensation and spirit.

Consider Groom's own words: "I impose limits, i.e., the geometry, in order to have the colour transcend it." Here, Groom signals his departure from the more programmatic aspects of minimalism, which sought to strip art of emotion and reduce it to an object of pure visual experience. For Groom, geometry is a vehicle for transcendence, not a constraint. His use of the golden section, a proportional system that links art to the natural and spiritual order of the universe, signals a deeper commitment to the metaphysical possibilities of abstraction.

In this sense, Groom's work owes more to Luis Barragán than to the New York minimalists. Like Barragán's architecture, which uses color to humanize and spiritualize space, Groom's paintings use geometry as a means to liberate color, allowing it to act as a force that transforms the viewer's perceptual and emotional experience.

The Metaphysics of Light: Newman, Martin, and the Unseen

Jon Groom's understanding of color is inextricably linked to light, a preoccupation that aligns him with Barnett Newman and Agnes Martin, two artists who sought, in their own ways, to make the invisible visible. Newman's vast fields of color and his insistence on the sublime in art resonate with Groom's belief in painting as a medium for profound experience. In Groom's work, however, the sublime is not an abstract idea imposed upon the viewer; it is something that emerges slowly, almost imperceptibly, through the act of looking.

Groom's paintings demand time. They do not yield their meaning to the impatient viewer. Instead, like Martin's delicate grids, they unfold over time, revealing layers of meaning that oscillate between presence and absence. The

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viewer is invited into a meditative space, one where the boundaries between the self and the painting blur, and where the act of perception becomes an act of introspection.

It is no coincidence that Groom is drawn to Eastern philosophies, particularly Buddhism, with its emphasis on emptiness, mindfulness, and the dissolution of ego. His paintings often evoke the stillness and quietude of a Zen garden, where the simplicity of form belies the complexity of the experience it evokes. Groom himself has spoken of his interest in creating paintings that are “both full and empty at the same time,” a paradox that speaks to the deep spiritual undercurrents running through his work.

The Influence of India: Color as Meditation

In the early 1990s, Groom’s travels to India marked a turning point in his career. Immersed in the intense, almost overwhelming palette of the Indian subcontinent, Groom began to see color not only as a formal element but as a spiritual force. His exposure to Indian music, architecture, and religious practices deepened his understanding of how color can act as a conduit for emotional and spiritual experience.

This period in India opened new avenues for Groom’s work, allowing him to connect the intellectual rigor of his European training with the more intuitive, sensory experiences of Eastern spirituality. The colors of India—its vibrant reds, deep blues, and radiant golds—are not simply imported into his work as exotic motifs. Instead, they become part of an internalized system of meaning, where color operates as a form of meditation, a way of transcending the material world and entering a space of pure sensation.

The Unspoken Influence of Nature

Though Jon Groom is often associated with the intellectual traditions of modernism, his work is also deeply rooted in nature. His time in Umbria and his long residence in Bavaria have given him an acute sensitivity to the subtleties of light, atmosphere, and the landscape. His paintings, while abstract, are filled with allusions to the natural world. The play of light across a canvas, the shifting tones of color, the subtle gradations of form—all evoke the experience of being in nature, of witnessing the slow, imperceptible changes that occur over time.

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But for Groom, nature is not a romantic ideal or a pastoral escape. It is a site of metaphysical inquiry, a place where the material and the spiritual coexist. His work, like the landscapes of Giorgio Morandi, is concerned with the spaces between objects, with the invisible forces that hold the world together. In Groom's paintings, the relationship between color and form mirrors the relationship between matter and spirit, between the seen and the unseen.

Jon Groom: A Legacy in the Making

In bringing together the works of Jon Groom for this *Survey Show*, we are reminded not only of his technical prowess but of his intellectual and spiritual depth. Groom stands as a crucial figure in the ongoing conversation about the role of abstraction in contemporary art. His paintings, with their restrained geometry and luminous color, invite us to slow down, to look carefully, and to engage with art not as a mere visual experience but as a profound encounter with the self.

Like the great modernists before him, Groom understands that painting is more than a formal exercise—it is a means of articulating the complexities of existence. In his hands, color becomes a language through which we might grasp the ineffable, the unseen forces that shape our world. And in this *Survey Show*, we are given the opportunity to witness the full breadth of his achievement, to trace the arc of a career dedicated to pushing the boundaries of what painting can do.

Jon Groom's work, like the finest examples of modern and contemporary art, demands something of us: it requires that we look beyond the surface, that we consider the deeper questions of existence, and that we, too, engage in the process of seeing, thinking, and feeling that defines his extraordinary practice.

„In the future, art forms will eventually return to where they started - toward a sacred force, a sacred power.“ - Jon Groom