

## ON FREEDOM AND CONTROL

It is rare in today's fast-paced, media-centered art world to discover paintings that display a clear spirit and a coherent direction as Linda Saccoccio's do. Their dynamic lines, streaking across bold fields of color, soothe as they electrify and seduce as they cajole. Emerging from the state of physical and mental lucidity that the artist consciously fosters, they read to the viewer as essays in freedom. Their aesthetic of jubilation and grace is the unintended outcome of the artist's search for transcendence.

Saccoccio's paintings look deceptively simple. They employ limited means that avoid confusion and congestion. They delight the eye, yet they trouble the mind. Refusing easy categorization, they exist in an anxious space between abstraction and decoration. Their style is strongly two-dimensional and toys with becoming pattern. While the play charms the eye, it also causes one to look more carefully. The process of comparison that the paintings demand reveals the artist's risks. Her forms are consistent, but never repetitive. The ease we feel in looking at them is the result of her carefully developed patterns of control. Saccoccio's formal strength is the exuberance of her lines and colors. Her conceptual strength is the studied character of her experimentation. Together they produce her unique lyrical style. In the tradition of modernist abstraction, she has spent years establishing the formal limits within which she exerts control. Applying colors slowly, she adjusts them with focused attention, creating complex hues and frequent transparencies. Under examination, her surfaces open to undertones, recalling the effects initiated by Rothko. They are stable, but also soft—a little like the yoga mats the artist knows so well.

These planes of color relate like panels of a screen, reinforcing the artist's relation to decoration. Arranged sequentially, they instigate visual motion—up or down or right or left. Yet, their directional reading is curbed by the viewer's need to linger at the boundaries and compare the size of forms. Highly contrasting hues are equalized, as are Mondrian's, through a balance of intensity and extension. Again like Mondrian, they are often separated by lines of a third and equally different color, measured in precisely varied thicknesses. The panels' subtle differences, hinting at but never giving way to symmetry or pattern, allow the colors to expand or contract flexibly within the confines of their strictly controlled order. They breathe, at times pant, in sync with the quality of vibrations established at their points of encounter.

Working alone in the studio during precious hours of availability, Saccoccio ritualistically repeats her process. She herself advances through comparison. Two or more compositions are refined at once to clarify their differences of disposition. The mood of a given painting might be established in a single day or

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built slowly over a period of weeks as layers of paint accumulate and resonate next to adjacent compositions. This approach provides the visual discipline that allows the artist to risk her daring color combinations, straddle them conceptually, and finally shift into physical action.

Color provides the ground for the flight of lines that insist, defiantly, on staying above it all. Seeking transcendence, and carrying the viewer with them, they swoop and sweep as though measuring themselves against the winds of their surrounding fields. In the tradition of Pollock, their loose trajectories read again as freedom. Yet they are firmly controlled by the body of the artist through the ever present intermediary of the brush. The liberty they exhibit is that of the well trained dancer, generated by practice and characterized by precision. They race across color fields and transgress planar boundaries, all the time respecting one another's presence. Their paths harmonize, at times retracing or repeating. Unified by rhythm, extension, and quality of curve, they never challenge the prevailing flow. As signs of life, they seem equally cognizant of self, company, and context. In the height of dramatic motion, they exist in peace.

At times the lines tighten to hint at calligraphy, flirting this time with the option of communicating in a language that some of us might know. They are, in fact, a visual counterpart to the artist's emergence as a writer. Saccoccio long ago rejected symbolic action in her visual production, leaving it to the complementary art of words. The gestural lines of her paintings remain tightly linked to their origin in the physical and mental energy of her body. They are signature traces of her existence in physical space.

After a decade and a half of abstraction, however, Saccoccio is tentatively returning to representation. Her subjects, the ancient Indian chakras, are symbolic models of the body's centers of physical and spiritual energy. They are appropriate, as her life is sustained by the practice of yoga, which fosters the state of "bodymind" that she enters as a predisposition to art-making. Nonetheless, her return to representation is a risky venture. It marks her decision to pit her carefully defined formal language against the power of signs that are culturally received and instantly consumed. It has never been easy for abstract modernists to return to representation. For Saccoccio it means negotiating the freedom and control that abstraction has allowed her against the powerful constraints of representation, regardless of the subject's sympathy to her aesthetic. As her focus turns to the world outside the studio, the flood of common images that the world offers must be subjected to her strict control before entering her aesthetic of freedom. Representation marks a new stage of her engagement with the joy of life.

Sherry Buckberrough  
Chair University of Hartford, Art Department  
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