

BROOKLYN RAIL

Roy Dowell

D. Dominick Lombardi

8 March 2022



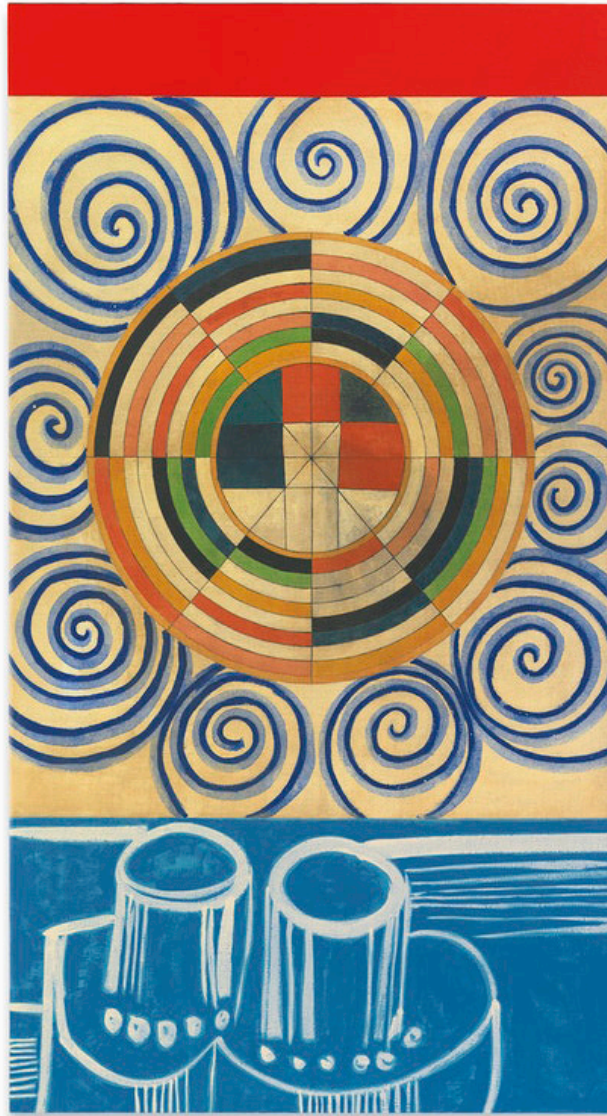
untitled #1137, 2020. Acrylic paint on linen over panel, 60 x 40 inches.

The first thing visitors may notice about Roy Dowell's paintings is the mystical aspect of the work—the ritualistic nature of the forms, even the otherworldly feel of the narrative that falls somewhere between the more abstract paintings by Marsden Hartley and the wild visions of the hallucinatory interstellar traveler Adolf Wölfli. Even with all this cryptic creativity, these paintings are grounded in something vaguely familiar that is equally as referential as it is sensorial. Each work has its own color theory, its own tenet of composition, mostly divided nearly in half by a central, powerful, symbolic thrust. Moving in more closely, viewers will find the virtuosity of Dowell's technical skills clearly visible in his repertoire of multiple methods of layering paint.



untitled #1171, 2021. Acrylic paint on linen over panel, 60 x 48 inches.

For instance, with *untitled #1171* (2021), there is this faint lattice line work in the orange area of the lower half of the painting that fades away beneath ensuing layers of color, patterns and symbols. By doing this, Dowell adds a tactile tinge that viewers might register subconsciously, as they try to read the more outstanding rhythms in the large, intricate black diamond floating above. In *untitled #1172* (2021) there is a second application of that cross-hatching pattern, only here, it is an upper layer of paint—a curious repetition, but a necessary compositional decision in this instance. Viewers may also wonder if the artist is working on unprimed linen, since the oblique diamond on the lower half of *untitled #1172* looks stained with thinned acrylic paint, compared to the upper circular area, of what looks like spinning clay pipes or ball-clubs, which is glazed or scumbled over a base of shifting, patterned diamonds. The suggestion of movement here is also quite strong, and the fact that these two dominant forms do not fit together like calibrated gears adds quite a bit of tension to this masterful, unconventional composition.



untitled #1181, 2021. Acrylic paint on linen over panel, 60 x 33 inches.

Untitled #1188 (2021) is a perfect example of how Dowell commands his compositions, despite the pre-set difficulty of the challenges of a central focus. From afar, you will notice the black, flag-like accent that comes off of a post at the top of the reddish pointed dome. Then there are the two tiny white dots or drops that the artist purposely placed or painted—one at the right shoulder, and the other near the bottom of the left-hand side of the sanguine dome. Together, these strategically placed elements put forth just the right amount of balance, while the somewhat camouflaged dueling arrows and the dark loops and circles add depth, movement, and distraction from them. Then there are the batik-like applications of golden embellishments on the main form in *untitled #1188*, and the variation between hard-edge precision and the more fluid inexact paint applications provides compelling contrast, a factor that is so prevalent throughout the exhibition and renders Dowell's art alluring and thought provoking.

More of the same, in the way of the distinction between the mechanical and the organic, appears in *untitled #1138* (2020), where what looks like an overhead view of a child's soap box derby design floats slightly slanted and off-center in a field of gray-blue dots. As one of the more unusual works in the exhibition, *untitled #1138* has the distinct effect of assuring us that there is representation here, much as it is in that pair of "binoculars" at the bottom of *untitled #1181* (2021).

Throughout Dowell's art, we can perceive that tension between the representational or familiar, and the geometric, hard-edge, or patterned symbolism that places these paintings in a unique zone of consciousness. Imagining with or without references, seeing past understanding and creating with or without pre-planned specifics. This is where this artist resides, where there is only openness and endless reach, where everything has its purpose in that particular piece, a subconscious visualization that evolves and grows as a burst of inspiration or a slow burn in meticulous technique.