

TWO COATS OF PAINT

MILES

McENERY

GALLERY

Lisa Corinne Davis and Shirley Kaneda: Different strokes

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Contributed by David Carrier / In the charming traditional galleries of the Studio School, Shirley Kaneda displays six large, vertically-oriented acrylic paintings. Lisa Corinne Davis presents seven oil works of various sizes. Where Kaneda organizes her pictures with playful vertical stripes of high-pitched pale blue or pink, Davis' pictures are based on grids, disrupted to form swelling nets that enclose but do not entirely capture her forms, which are underneath. These bodies of work thus reveal two distinctly different strategies for pictorial composition. In traditional terms, Kaneda is a painterly artist, a colorist, while Davis works like a draftsman, in a linear style. Art-historically speaking, if Kaneda renders exquisitely refined images reminiscent of Juan Gris or Sophie Tauber-Arp, Davis maps the structure of the city grid in ways that recall Julia Mehretu.



Deliberate Deceit, 2020, Oil on canvas, 50 x 40 inches

In *Compassionate Malice*, Kaneda employs a pale blue and white format, and *Ambivalent Resolution* is a similar composition in pink and dark red. Davis' more varied pictures sometimes impose a grid over most of the surface, as in *Deliberate Deceit*, but also can deploy fragmentary, irregular grids, as in *Disruptive Deductions*. In creating majestically harmonious compositions, Kaneda comes close to working in series. Davis finds repetitions more problematic and her grids wobble – indeed, they often bend – so that regular patterns are distorted or even broken. Ultimately her pictures do hold together, but tenuously so. In *Cerebral Calibration*, to take an extreme example, the gridded areas are almost submerged in fields of bright color.

Contemporary figurative painting usually reveals the gender and race of the artist. The sympathetic subjects of Alice Neel's paintings are recognizably feminine, in the best sense of that word. Kerry James Marshall's pictures show the everyday world of a Black man. Not only the subjects of these artists, but also their styles of art-making, are highly distinctive. Does abstraction also indicate an artist's gender and race? This exhibit prompts reflection on that important question.



Actual Adage, 2020, Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 inches

Born in Japan to Korean parents, Kaneda has a highly distinctive color sense which, she once told me, she associates with this personal background. She loves large areas of pale pinks and blues, and color is what holds her compositions together. In *Anecdotal Impartiality*, see how gracefully curved pink and red forms are set in front of the background stripes.

The unity of Davis' works is harder won. Eschewing the perfect grids of Sol Lewitt or Agnes Martin, Davis presents winding nets, often as irregular in shape as the streets of lower Manhattan. She has spoken of her "desire to explore and understand my Black self [which] lives in a visceral, tactile, metaphysical, and psychological place," noting that "these sensibilities are abstract ones...better expressed through abstraction rather than representation." An ambitious goal! I believe that the ability of her grids to fashion but not entirely control her forms constitutes an important political component of her art.

Compared with artists doing installations, performances or videos, Davis and Kaneda seem rather similar. Both are easel painters. But if we focus, as I am suggesting, on

the contrasts presented in "DUAL," we may be surprised to discover that these two highly accomplished artists present strikingly different worldviews. Gender and racial identities evidently do have a significant effect on how artists paint, so a fuller embrace of female Black and Asian artists like Davis and Kaneda stands to enlarge the field of painting and expand the criteria for aesthetic judgments. In place of the modernist ideal of monolithic, one-size-fits-all aesthetic theorizing, art now demands that visual multiculturalism be recognized.