

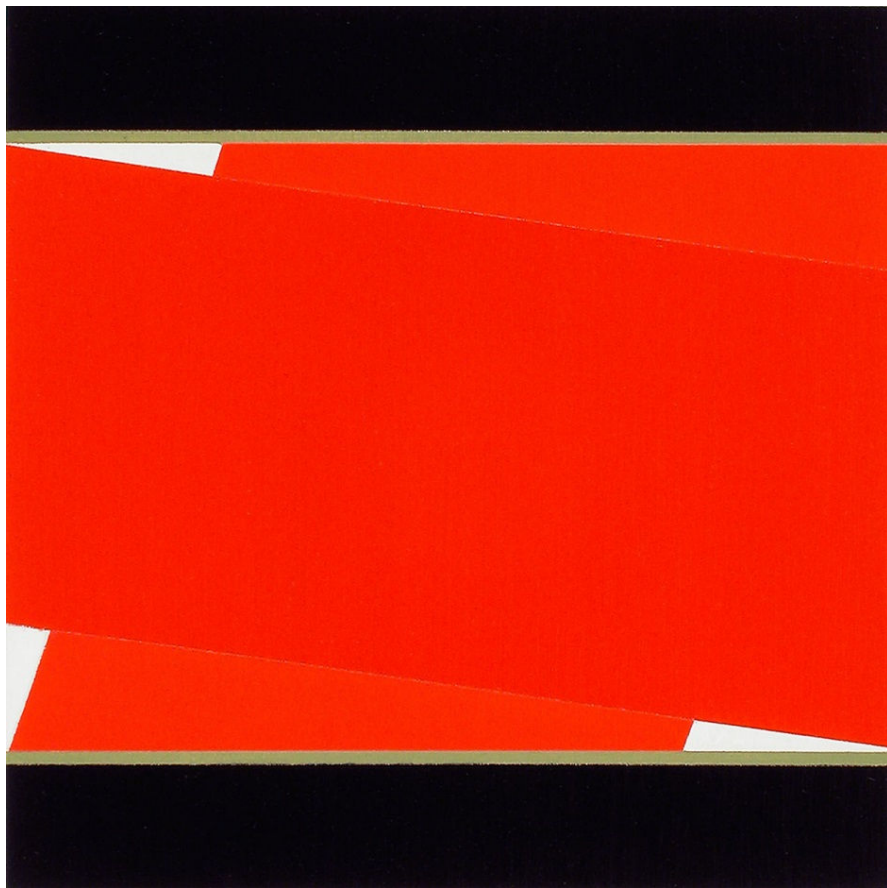
Paintings with Pizzazz, and a Rhythmic Edge

by John Goodrich on June 9, 2015

If painting were merely a style — just an evocative pose channeling the gestalt of a time and place — then Don Voisine's spare, elegant abstractions might be the equivalent of Leonardo DiCaprio in a tuxedo.

But for any painting of note, style is just a vehicle for expressions that are deeper: more complex, and more primal. This is what gives Voisine's paintings their unique, contradictory quality. Despite their crisply-pressed edges and smart, austere cut, the rhythms of his paintings feel more like Coltrane on a tear than a celebrity in a suit. They unfold in swift, measured movements and deft counter-notes. They have, moreover, subtly evolved over the years. The exhibition of nearly 20 recent paintings currently at McKenzie Fine Art may be his strongest yet.

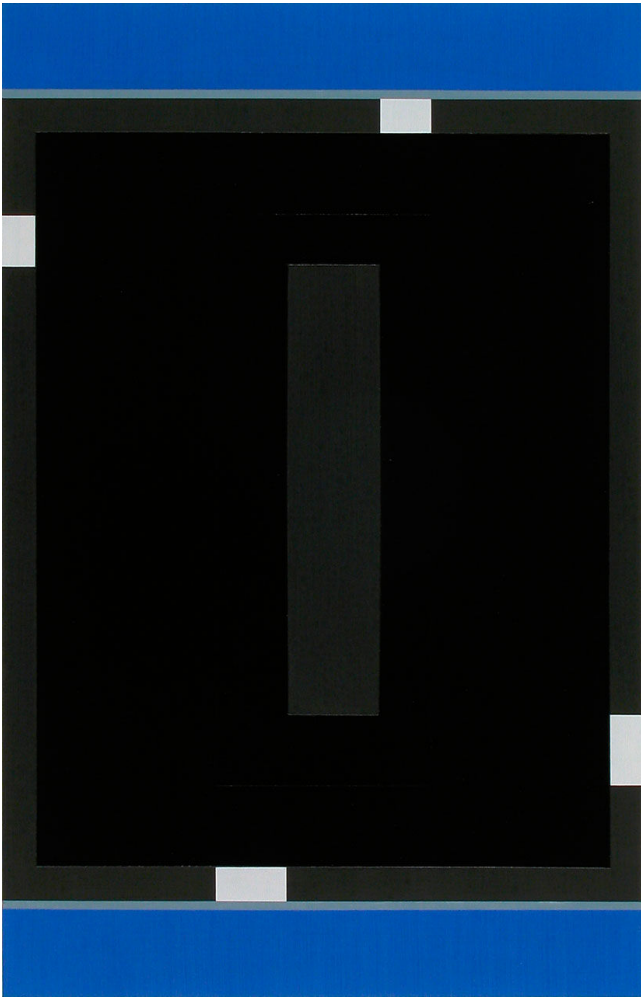
Followers of the artist's work will be familiar with certain pictorial strategies. Starting about a decade ago, he added a new urgency to his designs by angling broad, black bars across them; slightly offset from one another, their collisions start a centripetal motion that reveal shards of the white background. Outer bands of bold color bracket these movements, minutely separated from them by thin lines of contrasting hue. Possibly because of their rotational, rather than "reflective" (mirroring) symmetry, the designs feel extraordinarily non-static and unpredictable, restless but svelte.



Don Voisine, "Porter" (2015), oil on wood panel, 9 x 9 in (all images courtesy McKenzie Fine Art unless otherwise noted)

The newest paintings experiment with asymmetrical elements and broader planes of color. The small, 9-inch square "Porter" (2015), for instance, turns the usual color scheme inside-out, employing a burning light red for the crossing bands and black for the outer, hemming bars. Between the two, slim strips of gray — or perhaps silvery green — are sublimely keyed to the color rhythms elsewhere; blithely, steadily glowing along their entire lengths, they're the pitch-perfect response to the aggressive spreading of red and black on either side. And that black — could it really be an extremely deep blue? Like all of Voisine's "blacks," it functions as a color, advancing the sequence of other hues as they compress or expand across the surface. Notable, too, in this small panel are its asymmetrical rhythms, triggered by the omission of one of the white shards; the reds bars want to rotate, but they pile to one corner before springing across to the opposite edge.

A new painting, another venture. In “Ticket” (2015), concentric rings of black, some glossier than others, circulate around a gray rectangle. It takes a few moments for the off-center tensions to sink in: the gray hovers just above the center, the four fragments of white responding with minutely differentiated dimensions. In “Mercury” (2015), the bracketing red, slightly cooler than some other paintings, seems poured around the blacks, like molten, surfaceless energy.

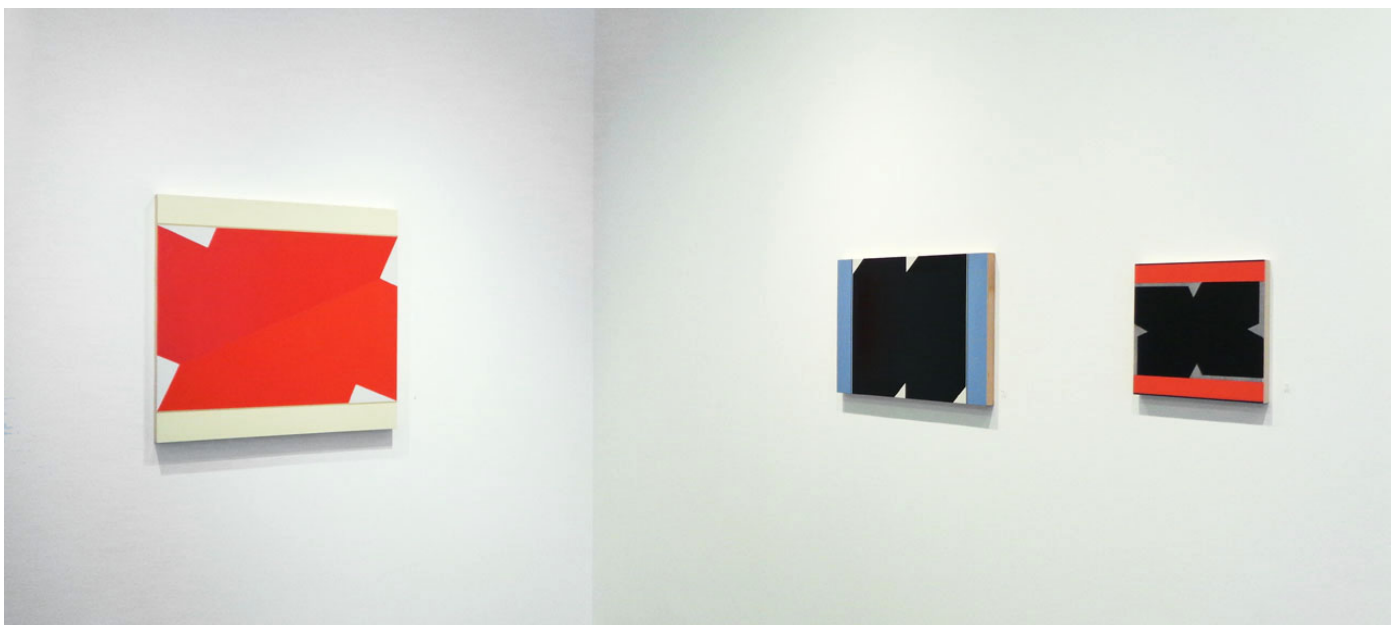


Don Voisine, “Ticket” (2014), oil on wood panel, 28 x 18 in

Voisine’s technique may be buttoned-down, but pictorially his paintings capture the jubilant journeys of shapes and colors. Is the central black shape in “Bluff” (2014) a void stirred into being by the march of white notches around it? Or are the notches just the cast-offs of the black’s relentless circulation? The truth is probably: yes, both, at the same time. After all, within any dynamic painting, neither demarcations of drawing nor floods of color dictate; they both proceed, qualifying each other at every point. In works like these, Voisine proves himself the complete painter.

For me, the high gloss of some black surfaces adds an oddly capricious note. They reflect warmer or cooler tones, depending upon one’s viewing angle, so that one hunts for the optimal view of the painting’s interior energy. But this doesn’t detract from the best paintings here, which to a remarkable degree update the eloquence — and not just the style — of a master like Mondrian.

Don Voisine continues at McKenzie Fine Art (55 Orchard Street, Lower East Side, Manhattan) through June 14.



Installation view of ‘Don Voisine’ at McKenzie Fine Art (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)