

SARAH CROWNER
HOT LIGHT, HARD LIGHT

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ON SARAH CROWNER'S *HOT LIGHT, HARD LIGHT*

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“Color deceives continually,” Joseph Albers wrote, noting that it is not a static fact, instead subject to the trials of perception and misperception, to the laws and the lawlessness of the world. It is therefore true that we do not see color as much as we are an audience for it. In “Hot Light, Hard Light” Sarah Crowner offers a new series of paintings and small bronze sculptures that together conduct a rousing contemplation of sorts on the temperature and temperament of color as alchemized by light. Edging their way toward monochromes, her abstractions—created by joining panels of painted and cut canvas so the seams double as edges—are rendered in assertive shades of orange, red, and magenta interrupted here and there by night black and bright white. Where the colors are hottest, they cast themselves into the room, gently glowing, and the paintings look as though they hover at a slight distance from the wall.

But when the sun streams in from the windows of her studio, bolstering and bleeding into its artificial light, it turns up the temperature on certain of Crowner’s paintings. Trying to pin precise words onto their shifting hues—and wanting to foreground color’s action over its affect—I note a buzzing red, a leering red, a punching red. Where the sun hits strongly, a smoldering magenta becomes a screaming magenta. Where the rays are more diffuse, there is a musing

magenta, a mourning magenta. Like colors, Crowner’s works aren’t static facts either. Dapple and spill sometimes supersede gesture and brushstroke, while the vibration of her saturated hues feels heightened by the sun’s comparatively languid travels across the room.

As ever, her paintings extend beyond themselves, performing other roles too. In this show, they double as both the subjects and foils for the bronze stones placed on low plinths throughout the gallery. The sculptures’ polished surfaces reflect and refract the paintings as their curves send light and color back across the canvases, the walls, and the floor. The stones artfully charge the space with an untamable energy while bending the reflections like a fun house mirror, or framing them like a looking glass through which we glimpse fantastical versions of ourselves, and of the paintings’ biomorphic shapes, and of their ever-changing colors. All this movement and shapeshifting also invokes the vitality and unpredictability of live performance, and can make one feel as though Crowner is summoning something like a pure dance for which she needs no dancer. Hers is the feral choreography of luminosity and beam.

A single piece in raw canvas subtly places the viewer at that threshold between a painting and its possibilities, the quietude of its ready-to-receive surface allowing for other contemplations of vision. Here, light reveals its truer colors, and color’s truest source: the eye itself. In this work, Crowner sets a stage for the afterimage, what we see when we turn our gaze away from the reds and magentas then watch as the retinal memory of their blaze and brilliance shimmers before us until it quietly, coolly, fades from view.

All photos by Sarah Crowner except top right verso by Charles Benton, bottom right verso by Marcelo Suro.

