

The Meridian paintings (2007)

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*" . . . when there is talk of art, there is often somebody who does not really listen. More precisely: somebody who hears, listens, looks . . . and then does not know what it was about." **

This was said in a speech by Paul Celan on the occasion of receiving the Georg Büchner Prize in 1960.

I only quote from him, not to compare, but to explain. That is, to try to explain the title of these paintings. The speech has become known as "the Meridian", because that is the concept that Celan finally arrives at to describe what he calls 'the mystery of the encounter', and to define the 'place' of poetry. And it is because of him that I choose to call these paintings, the paintings I am only beginning, "Meridian".

For him, that encounter was central to the practice of poetry, and for me it is a metaphor for all that takes place between the painting and the viewer. These are measured paintings, there is no pretence at boundlessness. Each represents a series of combinations in a precise, predetermined order: three tones of the one colour in bands of three different widths, or intervals. The series being static and rigidly delineated, wherein does the aesthetic reside if not in the viewing, and indeed in the viewer? That is, if the infinite exists for such paintings it does so only in the moment, or moments, of looking—just as God, for those who believe in him/her, can be said to exist at the moment of prayer, or the other to exist at the moment of our meeting, our 'encounter'.

The painting can only present itself; in this case it can only present the combinations in their apparently finite order. Whereas in music notes are recorded in the form of a system of notation, a painting is its own notation; and, whereas in music that notation must be performed to be heard as music, in painting there is no performance. There is only the fact of the painting, and the viewer. It is the viewer who must therefore 'perform' the painting, by his/her engagement, by the acuteness of his/her ability to read the 'notes'—an ability akin to negotiating our environment, to the everyday skills we are hardly aware of.

For me, this is the meaning of the title, and the reason I take the liberty of not only quoting Paul Celan but borrowing a concept he journeyed towards during the course of his speech on that October day in 1960. I borrow it, because I believe it describes the nature of my own 'encounter' in the painting of these pieces, and because I hope it may define the 'place' the viewer might find in front of them.

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*Translation by Rosmarie Waldrop

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