

Meneguzzo, Marco
"Jeff Elrod: Galleria Christian Stein"
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ARTFORUM

Jeff Elrod

GALLERIA CHRISTIAN STEIN

Jeff Elrod's work exploits some of the possibilities offered by digital graphics yet still maintains a traditional visual apparatus. At first glance, it even seems to exemplify a familiar type of abstraction that is cold and formally very composed. In fact, his extremely large canvases are made using an ink-jet printing technique, with marks typical of various computer programs (MS Paint, Photoshop, Illustrator) enormously enlarged so viewers can see the sequence of rectilinear strokes that make up every type of curve. Not everything in his work, however, is digital; in the long process that leads to the final, machine-printed image, Elrod introduces signs derived from his own gestures, placing them side by side with apparently similar but programmed images. For example, in the large canvas *Sonora Lights* (all works cited, 2016) a pattern of tiny black-and-white squares is superimposed on red shadings whose differences are as impalpable as those of a computer's color palette; part of the field appears to have been deleted using the eraser function of a graphics program, while fine marks made by the movements of a mouse alternate with fluid brushstrokes, the "true" gesturalism of the brush simulating the "false" gesturalism of the mouse.



Jeff Elrod, *Sonora Lights*, 2016, ink-jet print and acrylic on canvas, 90 x 70".

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It is my impression that Elrod’s underlying concept has little to do with the celebration of a new technological tool, but a great deal to do with the idea of finding an immediate emotional result, achieved through a process that is anything but direct or expressionistic. Over the course of the twentieth century there have been many examples of this type of approach to the use of technological tools. These have ranged from Man Ray’s airbrushed “aerographs,” to the “light paintings” on emulsified canvas made by a number of artists in the 1970s and ’80s, to what the curator and critic Vittorio Fagone has dubbed the “electronic brush” of certain video artists—not to mention the digital landscape paintings David Hockney makes using his iPad.

Elrod is not exploring the medium as a modernist might have done, but rather is simulating painting as it persists in our imagination, with its attendant baggage of gesture, composition, narration, and even genius. On the one hand, there is what we might call a pedagogical intention to reaffirm the idea that painting, and more generally art, is a mental process, and by nature a prolonged one even when the work is composed in one go. But if Elrod were to limit himself to this method, he would become a pedagogue who works through images, a critic who employs maieutics rather than words. Instead, he is an artist; before he addresses the public, in works such as *The Invisible Thread* or *At the Drive-In*, with their blurs and looping scribbles, he addresses the meaning of painting and its making, the search for that eternal alchemy of a sign that is not a sign, a color that is not color, a work that consists solely of itself, through its own inner necessity, for which the artist acts as an organizing demiurge rather than a creator. Thus every new tool available to the artist corresponds to a series of investigations, all with the same goal—to seek, and perhaps find, the limitations of painting.

The computer seems to expand the range of painting’s possibilities infinitely. Yet even as millions of internet users construct images every day, there are not many artists who openly avail themselves of these means. Why? In material terms, the response might be that in a socio-cultural context like the present, the aura of the artist has become dispensable. In artistic terms, the response is that, despite the medium’s potential, its formal language remains, paradoxically, meager and underdeveloped. Elrod is among the few artists working to remedy this.

—Marco Meneguzzo

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.