

ANDREA FESTA

what color is silence

Carla Accardi | Jean-Baptiste Bernadet | Ernesto Burgos | Günther Förg
Riccardo Guarneri | Dylan Solomon Kraus | Jane Swavely

Critical text by Elisa Carollo

Before color becomes color, there is light. Before painting becomes an image, there is silence: the silence of contemplation before a charged, luminous field in which everything is still potentially possible. For the artist, as much as for the viewer.

What Color Is Silence? gathers seven artists working in the realm of abstraction not as an escape from the world of symbols and forms, but as a way of approaching its most elusive conditions—light, perception, rhythm, vibrations and intuitions—which precede codified expression and represent one of the most primordial phenomenological entry points into our encounter with the world. Silence becomes a field of attention and attunement, a necessary condition in which perception becomes newly activated in a more imaginative and mythical realm.

Through pigment, surface, transparency, density and cadenced gesture, these works materialize what usually remains immaterial. In the alchemy of paint and materials, white space becomes a threshold between inner and outer realms: a field in which the invisible frequencies of light are received, filtered and translated into color, matter and sensation. Through the art-making process, the body becomes a vessel for this transformation, attuning itself to the electromagnetic rhythms that determine optical experience and turning them into traces, forms and images.

These artists' approaches to abstraction also touch what Julia Kristeva described as the semiotic: a pre-linguistic field of rhythm, drive and bodily intensity that precedes the symbolic order of language, structure and codification. At the same time, the exhibition remains deeply tied to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's understanding of embodied perception: the idea that vision is never purely optical, but always experienced through and within the body. Color, then, is not simply seen by the eye; it is felt, absorbed and translated through the whole perceptual body, in an indistinguishable unity of the physical, the emotional and the imaginative.

Balancing lyricism and language, imaginative and factual, Dylan Solomon Kraus uses luminous color, veiled surfaces and intuitive imagination-based composition to stage a painterly storytelling that seems to emerge from a subconscious collective realm. Drawing from a vast range of references, Solomon Kraus's images hover between symbol and atmosphere, as if archetypal presences were surfacing from the matter of painting itself—ghostly mirages, sudden illuminations or fragments of a myth still in formation. Developing his own cosmology of form in emergence, his paintings manifest images just as they begin to separate from inner vision, still unstable, still charged with the intuitive character that precedes formulation.

In the monochrome black and gray paintings Günther Förg developed early in his career, he tries to anchor the restless essence of a reality in continuous motion, searching for structure within density, repetition and accumulation. Resisting all strict stylistic categorization and moving fluidly between Minimalism, postwar abstraction and an architectural understanding of the painted surface, Förg never allows a full dissolution into abstraction. Instead, he exposes the very architecture of painting, the physical presence of the support and the matter of this potentially ever-evolving painterly formulation, embracing the tension between the permanence of the painted object and the instability of what perception otherwise continuously produces and reinvents.

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Similarly moving between the architectural, the cosmic and the almost immaterial, Riccardo Guarneri's pale chromatic fields represent a progressive dissolution of this tension. Emerging within the context of European postwar abstraction with his poetic investigation of light, color and perception from the early 1960s onward, Guarneri treats the painted surface as a threshold of appearance, where color becomes form to materialize the nature of light itself: a barely perceptible pulse fluctuating within subtle geometries and delicate chromatic shifts, always resisting condensation into a single fixed image and suggesting how everything can eventually dissolve into radiance, into vision, into an uncontainably expansive field of energetic waves.

Carla Accardi traces on canvas this rhythm, pure light and frequency before language and form. A central figure of Italian postwar abstraction and a founding member of Forma 1, Accardi developed a visual vocabulary based on repeated, calligraphic signs that appear at once spontaneous and structural, intuitive and coded. Her marks move across the surface like a luminous personal alphabet still in formation. Through the continuous interplay of opposing forces—positive and negative, opacity and transparency, control and freedom—Accardi transforms the sign into a living field of perception that already translates the main dichotomy of phenomenological experience, between void and appearance, emptiness and fullness. In her work, language returns to its pre-verbal origin, where the mark is still pulse, vibration, breath and gesture, fluidly inhabiting the white space of silence and possibility that precedes meaning.

In a similar way, Jean-Baptiste Bernadet translates this continuous optical drift into even more iridescent abstract surfaces. His paintings explore the countless variations that dissolve any illusion of the painted canvas's solid and stable state—with its dogged permanence as a definitive object—embracing instead the liquid state of sensation: the ever-changing field of perception, the fluid space of memory, the shimmering glimpses of meaning. Color in Bernadet's work remains atmospheric and unstable, suspended between dispersion and condensation, appearance and disappearance. Painting becomes less an image, turning into an expansive climate of both tangible and intangible sensations.

Ernesto Burgos's wall-based works embody the notion of "vibrant matter": dynamic and spatially complex forms that return to a fluid field of endless transformation. Matter and paint present themselves as a single form that continues to evolve, while preserving the existential tension between construction and collapse, control and chance. His works are ultimately manifestations of matter in motion, both as real phenomenology of perception as much as for the very nature of particles in continuous movement.

Last but not least, Jane Swavely's work represents, in the show, a kind of climax of this untamable phenomenology of existence. Her gestural abstraction manifests the physical rhythm of painting as a lived act, where the materiality of the canvas, the alchemical and metamorphic nature of pigment, and the boundless possibilities of the creative and imaginative act converge in pure light. Her works create expansive luminous fields that remain grounded in material process and in the physicality of the body involved, while opening up the canvas as a threshold, almost a portal, onto more imaginative realms, as surfaces that trigger psychological and emotional realignments.

Together, these works invite both the senses and the mind to inhabit the potential of intervals and pauses: the suspension between heightened sensorial intensity and evocative atmosphere, between definition and imagination, between emptiness and fullness, between silence and manifestation, as images emerge into and recede from consciousness. By embracing this space of pause, silence, and possibility, the works become experiential manifestations of the vital rhythm—the generative interplay between the visible and the invisible—that shapes both artistic creation and the act of viewing. They foreground the phenomenological and cognitive conditions through which perception becomes creation, and creation, in turn, acquires meaning.

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Opening in parallel in the project room, a solo presentation by Ukraine-born, U.S.-based artist Anastasiya Tarasenko extends this reflection into the realm of emotional landscapes, where figuration becomes a metaphor for internal states of unease. Confronting the precarious existential condition of troubled times, her work finds in archetypal and mythological figures new allegories for approaching the unexplainable present: what happens when reality becomes so tragic and absurd that it no longer allows for answers, only silence? In this sense, Tarasenko's work resonates with a Sartrean condition, in which human beings are thrown into a world without predetermined meaning and must nevertheless continue to act, desire and invent themselves within it. Often humorous, pastoral or deceptively idyllic, these vignettes reflect what the artist describes as the "dichotomy of existence": the unescapable coexistence of joy and pain, innocence and perversion, sincerity and performance, tenderness and cruelty. Through her both mythological and emotional landscapes, Tarasenko gives form to the absurd beauty of being human, where meaning is never given, but must be confronted, imagined and inhabited.