BACK ON TRACK
JAMES CANE
Galleri Artlab, Karlbergsvägen 54, Stockholm.
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Introduction
With the title on his solo exhibition, Back on Track, James Cane alludes to his return to painting as well as his return to an abstract painting style. Some motives are composed of well-defined shapes; some are fluid colour fields vibrating with emotions. When James Cane combines these two compositional techniques, the result is disintegrated combinations of shapes. Only occasionally recognisable objects appear in his paintings, exhibited at Gallery Artlab, Stockholm.

Compositions of well-defined shapes
One category of paintings in Back on Track is constructed of well-defined geometrical shapes. The shapes lie close together, creating a pressure, which gives a compact expression. Separate parts play with and against each other, resulting in intrinsic motion. It is never strong enough to threaten the order and stability of the objects, though. If some part is removed or changed, only emptiness or a sense of something gone missing, will follow. James Cane avoids the risk of conformist stiffness by not letting the line obey the tyranny of straightness. The hints of depth infuse dynamic tension. With his compositions of well-defined shapes, he turns back time, working in a style stretching back to the cubism of the 1920s.

One example of this style is Growing Up. Here, James Cane takes advantage of the ambivalence between a two- and three-dimensional effect. By combining well-defined and separated shapes, he creates an abstract still life where height and picture plane, not depth, is accentuated. The two-dimensional effect is not completely unambiguous, though. The abstract figure rising in the picture contains shapes in the same colour (pink and white) placed on each side of a shape in a different colour (green). Do the first two, the pink- and white-coloured shapes, constitute a coherent whole or are...
they two separate pieces? If the first is the case, depth is introduced, since the green shape is to be seen as placed on top of the pink- and white-coloured shape.

Depth is definitely introduced in the motif by the blue ladder, one of the two recognisable objects in Growing Up. It blends in very well with the rest of the motive. So does the sailing boat, the second of the recognisable objects, since both of them are constructed of geometrical shapes.

Red Intervention and Fragments, on the other hand, lack recognisable objects. In these two paintings, James Cane uses irregular shapes to create the motives, which resemble abstract landscapes. Rectangular shapes in light blue and white lie piled up in the upper left and the lower right corner respectively in Red Intervention. Between these two vertical piles, irregular shapes produce a flow of diagonals. The combination of shapes, pulling in different directions, gives a sense of depth and of motion.

In Fragments of Summer, shapes lie densely packed. The order, hard as granite, is only put under pressure by the dark blue ribbon, dashing off down to the right side of the canvas. The ribbon’s vertical journey is, temporarily, putting the two-dimensional order aside.

The main subjects in Sin City, the skyscrapers, are constructed of rectangular shapes, emphasizing the verticality of the motif. The buildings are kept apart with the help of protruded borderlines. The city becomes a game board, ordered in zones. There, the keynote is isolation. This is emphasized by the zones painted in cold, darker colours, as well as by the lack of humans or human artefacts. At the same time, the zones dominated by warmer colours reduce this frosty, hostile isolation. In these last zones, hot jazzy rhythms can be sensed.

The play between colours is only one example of how James Cane creates variation and dynamics in Sin City. The shifts between rough and rugged surfaces, on the one hand, and smooth surfaces, on the other hand, is another example. A third one is the way James Cane applies colour. Thick layers of painting end in areas where colours are so sparsely used that the canvas shines through.

A horizontal line divides the skyscrapers. The colours over and below the horizontal line mirror each other. The zones below the line are painted in a more blurred way, compared to the painting style in
the zones above. What emerges is a city carried by and reflected in water, a big city pulsating with passionate sin during the neon lit hours. Deep inside this rhythm, the sense of isolation is echoed and resounded.

Vegas and Sharp are the only two paintings in Back on Track, containing human figures. The female body in Vegas could probably be found in a pleasure district like Sin City. With the help of pointed, sharp shapes, resembling knife blades or splinter, James Cane creates a mood of danger in Sharp. These barely slanting shapes, run vertically in front of a masked face. The threatening mood is felt even stronger since only a part of the head is visible. Not even the light colours could reduce the fearful atmosphere.

Disintegrating shapes
In Temple Dance and Portal, James Cane works with geometrical, disintegrated shapes. They are shown against and nestled in a fond of colours. The motives bear resemblance to each other through the dark palette where blue is the dominant mood.

The circle is the prominent shape in both paintings. In Temple Dance it appears as a shattered sphere, out of which everything around it seems to have emerged. In Portal, it appears more like an abstract arrangement, only hinted at. The circular shape even appears twice in Portal.

The two circular shapes hinted at in Portal can be seen in the middle of the canvas. One consists of a rounded arch in blue, white and orange. The other is balancing on the first. Horizontally to the left, seen from the two circles, are a number of cone or funnel shaped structures. They partly carry on and continue the curve of the rounded arch in blue, white and orange. In combination with their ascending direction, a rotating motion results. Their hovering over the background emphasizes the dynamics of the subject even more.

Between the rounded arch and the lowest situated cone or funnel shaped structure, springs a red and blue line forth. This deviating line is like an escape route, towards the brownish area in the lower right corner. On this area stands a green
utställningar på Galleri Artlab

**Några tankar om...**

Björn G Lindahl

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**Historiens vingslag, 61 x 50 cm, acrylic paint**

house firmly anchored. The door opening, with its red and orange mouth, stands out like an invitation to another dimension. This must be the passage alluded to in the title; if it is not the dynamic power created in an abstract way by the rounded arch and the cone or funnel shaped structures.

This mystical turn to another realm, where the possibilities seem unlimited, also appears in A Hard Choice. At the centre of the motif lies a large triangular shape. Around it, more loosely kept shapes in several different colours and nuances appear. Is this the holy mountain to ascend or the portal to dive through to find the secrets not to be seen with earth-bound eyes? It’s a choice to make, hard or not.

Historiens vingslag (The Wingbeats of History) is the only painting in Back on Track with a Swedish title. The motif consists of shapes that can be seen as geometrical shapes or as colour fields. The use of complementary colours makes it easy to enjoy the motif. Red and orange nuances dominate, thereby creating a warm mood, promising a safe asylum in a hostile world. The motif is yet enriched with dynamism through the sharp diagonal, running from the top left corner to the lower right corner of the canvas.

A white triangle accentuates the diagonal run through its green-painted right side. Yet, at the same time, the horizontal base of the triangle turns out to be an obstacle. The gaze must break through it, if it intends to follow the red and orange diagonal to its very end.

More or less visible letters and numbers can be detected in the colour fields. They appear as forgotten truths, only to be deciphered by the few initiated in the mystery.

**Colour field compositions**

In his latest works, James Cane composes with colour fields. The richness of nuances and the subtle changes from one colour to another, creates a dreamlike state of mind. The freer compositions turn the motives wide open and challenge your imagination. The colours enhance the emotional states and allow a much more symbolic approach that promises a world where the contact with the mundane has vanished. When recognisable objects appear, they are integrated with the colour fields in a way that reduce their objecthoodness.
The atmospheric lightness in Orchestration in Red I-III, could not even be harmed by the use of hot, strong red colours. The changes between colour fields are subtle and hardly discernible. The absence of any kind of borders, lets the gaze easily flow with the brush strokes and the directions pointed out by the shapes of the colour fields. The motif turns into well-ordered colour fields, which are generous enough to let the emotions sing loud.

At the bottom of Orchestration in Red II, an egg-shaped object stands out as the anchorage of the subject. At the same time, it infuses a mystical dimension. The top of the egg-shaped object is so thin that it seems as if the colour fields surrounding it, have flowed from it. The egg-shaped object turns into a Pandora’s box, but certainly not with contents as terrible.

While the disintegrated shapes in Temple Dance are broken up, the counterpart in Orchestration in Red II only offers one subtle transition between the object and the surroundings. The impact becomes much more forceful in Temple Dance, much more gentle in Orchestration in Red II. In Temple Dance, James Cane also inserts different shapes within the broken circle. Therefore, he allows space and the possibility of combining different objects. In Orchestration in Red II, there are only traces of colour outside, on the eggshell. The shape is held together and turns into the spring, out of which everything else has flowed.

Orchestration in Red I and III, have a much more concentrated form than Orchestration in Red II. The reason for this is that James Cane directs the colour fields
towards the centre of the canvas. Together they create an underlying structure. In a way, they work just like the compact, geometrical shapes in the paintings like Growing Up or Fragments of Summer. The difference consists in the way the thin colours and the irregular shaped colour fields in Orchestration in Red I and III create a much lighter and more dynamic expression. Another difference is that the colour fields function as backgrounds to black patterns splattered at the centre of these paintings.

Similar black patterns appear in Mosquito Island and Monk in Meditation. In Monk in Meditation, James Cane lets his paintbrush run wild. The black sign swells out to an extent where it looks like a sticky cloud of colour, on its way to swallow the rest of the colours. In Orchestration in Red I and III, as well as in Mosquito Island, the patterns are more delicate, fluent, spontaneous and livelier.

In Mosquito Island the black pattern looks like a calligraphic sign, mainly consisting of diagonals. These two irregular lines create an ascending force. From this profound sign-structure, thin arrow-shaped traces of colour run out. Their soft curves and bends let the sign vibrate more calmly, creating a contrast to the two dominating, dynamic lines. The wild calligraphic sign is enriched with subtle notes, turning it into a well-orchestrated symphony of black. The colours enhance the sounds even further. The sign appears against a fond of sunwarm tones in beige, yellow and a somewhat more burning streak of orange. Thin, blue brushstrokes beside the streak of orange, bring even more harmony into the motif.

James Cane has really thinned out the acrylics when he painted Mosquito Island and Monk in Meditation. The transparency enriches the motives with an airy atmosphere, which sets them apart from the other paintings in Back on Track. The more heavily applied layers of colour in Orchestration in Red I-III, Wonder, Sin City and Temple Dance, on the other hand, give a certain weight to these motives.

Wet Wings, Serenity and Breaking the Rules are painted with a more limited
palette. Blue and white nuances dominate. The blue colour stands out as the possibilities of heaven and liberty. In Wet Wings, the lower left corner consists of an orange colour field. It eats its way up diagonally towards the centre of the painting. It looks like a playful fire flame trying to heat up or destroy the fresh coolness of heaven or liberty. Its irregular shape emphasizes its energy.

The white parts in Wet Wings are thin, abstractly painted birds. The three birds have different functions. The smallest one, located furthest away, contributes with depth through its size. The bird in the middle flies to the left in the painting. With its wings bent upwards, the bird underlines the compositions diagonal direction. At the same time, it lies like a white border between the greyish blue tones, which dominate the upper part of the painting, and the orange colour field in the bottom left corner. The largest bird is situated to the right. The wings make it look as if the body of the bird lies somewhat aslant, though not totally underpinning the background’s diagonal direction. The closer the wing comes to the border of the canvas, the more it is thinned out. It is as if the realm of freedom coincides with the limits of the canvas. The abstract birds also function as concrete objects in dreamy surroundings.

Light blue nuances dominate in Serenity. In front of these loosely held colour fields, James Cane has applied thin layers of red-brownish and pink-yellowish nuances. The milky, foggy and porous structure of these colour fields are strong enough to create a sense of depth and distance. A symbolic meaning also fuels the composition, echoing the theme of Portal and A Hard Choice. The irregularly shaped colour fields lie as a passage, through which you have to move, if you wish to embark on a flight into another realm. The subtle colour tones in the painting promise a journey, tranquil and full of hope.

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