

DEVIN POWERS

12 January 2015

Devin Powers : *Through the Valley: New Paintings*

Lesley Heller Workspace

14 December 2014 — 01 February 2015

by Jeannine Bardo

Through the Valley Devin Powers' solo show at Lesley Heller workspace is a treat for the eye as well as a rigorous mind journey, a pleasing game that plays with perception in which vision and reason are in constant dialogue.

The title of the show is explained on the Lesley Heller website as coming from a poem by Jean Valentine, in which a wandering hunter or shaman, saddled with a heavy deer carcass, is turned away from the doors of her fellow humans and asks: "door in the mountain / let me in."

Like Jean Valentine's poems that breathtakingly weave the reader in and out of consciousness, time and lives lived, Powers' paintings take the viewer on a similar odyssey, a wandering. There are many places in each of his paintings in which to travel and rest, wonder and move on and if you return to the same place you are never bored for you find yourself seeing something new with each meander. Shapes viewed on your first lap of the image that recede are now resting and looming over another shape or instead of folding in they burst forth.

The designs are reminiscent of beautiful doodles made when the mind is floating and they read as something that simply flows from the mind through the artist's skilled hand but the process being both carved and painted, take on two minds in the making. One is not convinced that what you are seeing is not a fluid process because visually you are persuaded otherwise. The simple act of carving and chiseling is a wrestling between the body and the material. It is not fluid, your hand does not glide over the surface, it digs in. Powers' use of paint is also not fluid it is added and taken away, pasted on and rubbed off, scratched at and layered in some sort of beautiful balance that doesn't make sense to anything but the eye. The eye and brain are justifying everything for you when you view his paintings just as our own everyday illusions justify our existence.

In *Through the Valley*, Powers' title piece, your eyes initially focus on a colorful starburst that seems to emanate from a chiseled, triangular opening that dangles from the starburst's center, but when your gaze ventures over the painting you find yourself gently taken through the image with the help of a thick white line that acts as a guide to ease your way into Powers' visual journey leading back to the beginning, back to the portal, the concave pyramid that ushers you through. *Door in the mountain/let me in.*



Through The Valley, 2014, oil on carved wood, 48 x 36in.

Timepiece brings you into a kaleidoscope with a series of portals surrounded by fractals of color colliding towards other dimensions. All of these portals chiseled to the point of breaking through the wooden canvas, physically lead you out of the painting except for the largest and most alluring one that beckons your eye and brings you in until you find it to be a ruse, an enticing illusion that takes you away from escape.



Timepiece, 2014, oil on carved wood, 48 x 24in.

When color is exempt or barely there Powers' work takes on a more decorative form of geometry, something that is a balance of line and shape. *Night Wind* and *Data Dervish*, his monochromatic works are reminiscent of Indian block plates used for printing complicated patterns



Data Dervish, 2014, oil on carved wood

Cathedral's rectangular shape and concentrated geometric shapes in the top half of the image take on the form of a stained glass window, but it reveals as a paradox of that form. Whereas an image made of glass relies on light to reveal itself Powers' image reckons on the shadows cast within the sweet pastel palette to draw you in. By both carving a relief that creates its own shadows and painting enhanced subtle faux shadows in some places, Powers draws you into the shadows of the image and leaves you confused by their reality. Everything we see is an illusion and our mind justifies it for us, but Powers takes that justification away. We have to question what is real before us. Like a magician he makes things visible and invisible all at once.

Dark Study, Powers' painting that hangs directly across from *Cathedral* in what may be a quiet conversation, seems to possess its own contradictions. It is painted the colors of light's absence, the deep grays, blacks and blues of shadows, the confusing void you "see" when light is non-existent. Yet, these colors of the night also possess their own shadows in Powers' use of relief to create a collapsing or emerging cluster of stars, images that represent light's source in a birth or a death.



Dark Study, 2014, oil on carved wood, 16 x 15in.

Seeing Powers' drawing *Passage* at the end of the show's front room was a surprise because it carries from his paintings physical form, materials and use of color, but it makes perfect sense in the context of both Powers' oeuvre and his newer work. *Passage*, with its beautiful, skillfully rendered lines that create geometric forms and space in a play with the grid, takes us in, out and through space on a completely flat surface, a blueprint for a voyage to new dimensions.



Passage, 2014, pigment & binder on parchment, 7 x 5in.

In a May, 2009 interview with Brent Hallard Powers states, *For a while, I told people I wanted to obliterate the difference between order and chaos in an image. I think this is still true. I do not think it has happened yet, but it is one of those things that keep me moving forward.*

In *Through the Valley* Powers seems to be spinning and tilting directly over the horizon's edge in his quest to obliterate the difference between order and chaos in an image, but his complicated craft and the infinite imagery that he pulls from and investigates will no doubt gift us with more beauty and continue to move him forward at warp speed.