

Ave atque Vale (for now)
Wilma Tabacco



Wilma Tabacco uses the stripe as the means by which she creates space, applies colour and structures her canvases. The work is meticulously painted the old fashioned way – each layer of oil paint carefully applied by hand and taking many months to complete. The works are not planned or plotted by computer. There is no automated process and no bleeding colour or fuzzy edges, just immaculate surfaces.

The works are as perfectly executed as the artist is perfectly dressed. It is, I think, interesting to note that Tabacco chooses to dress one week in co-ordinating clothes, the following week with clashing contrast. Her paintings exhibit similar qualities of discord and harmony. It would seem that Wilma Tabacco mixes equal parts of science and magic to create her art. Tabacco's in depth knowledge of colour theory has enabled her to truly master the challenges of spatial ambiguity. The science of combining colour to solve or even create problems of space is matched by the magic of her ability to create almost unbelievable visual effects using carefully chosen colours from specific spectrums. In some instances the eye creates a third colour where only two exist on the canvas; straight lines twist. Once our optic nerves have stopped twitching, we can wonder at the inexplicable consequences of the manipulation of colour and space. It is inevitable that parallels (pardon the pun) will be drawn between Tabacco's work and that of other artists who use the stripe for optic effect, Brigit Riley being most often cited as an influence. Tabacco's journey with the stripe is radically different to that of Riley and other modern hard-edge painters of her generation. Ironically it was these comparisons that led Tabacco to years of intensive research on the stripe in art as a way of defining how and why her work does not reference the hard-edge geometrists.

The title of her 2006 exhibition at Niagara Galleries, Ave atque Vale (for now), loosely translates as Hello and Goodbye (for now). It is actually to the various forms of the stripe that the artist bids us say "hail" and "farewell". We welcome a new, disconcertingly warped structural space as seen in Fortress 2005-2006, and say goodbye to the complex, intricate moiré effects of Hellzapoppin 2004. But only for now. Art is, after all, a fickle business.

Gina Lee
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