## Some Thoughts on My Recent Work David Brody

For close to three decades I made figurative oil paintings. The narrative content spanned sex, violence, and death, and, at times, the work was tinged with humor. My current work is digital and depends on several media and procedures. Individual elements may be drawn or painted using traditional methods and then scanned. Other elements are derived from my photographs. Others yet are drawn or painted using a digital tablet and pen. Other manipulations occur solely in the digital realm. The new work depends on a synthesis of several different methods and technologies.



Fig. 1a Fig. 1b Fig. 1c

It was in 2006 that my content, procedures and materials began to change significantly. I had just finished a painting of a nude, standing on the floor in front of a wall in an interior (fig. 1a). For some time I had been using digital tools as an aid in planning and for envisioning alternate visual possibilities in a given work. As I began to play out variations on this and similar works I found myself increasingly interested in versions where the ground became the subject (fig. 1b) or where the *figure* became a restatement of the ground itself (fig. 1c). It became apparent that I no longer needed naturalistic description to investigate the visual relationships which had become of interest. It was at this time that I also began the shift from paint to digital tools.

I began to work with grids, which, like walls and floors, can be constructed with horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines. Interestingly, a linear grid itself can be read as *figure* (the lines) against a *ground* (the otherwise blank page). This investigation resulted in works like these (figs. 2a-b):



A grid can also behave as a ground to another grid acting as figure. In fig. 2a the overlap and the placement on the page of the grid elements suggest the illusion of space. The overlaps also create

zones of greater value contrast. This, in turn, intensifies the illusion of space and creates a visual hierarchy. In fig. 2b the spatial illusion is compounded by the use of color. The top rectangle boasts the highest internal contrast of both value and saturation. This, a use of atmospheric perspective, combined with the stacking overlap, pulls it forward in space. In fig. 2c small deformations of the grid units' shapes result in the sensation of creasing or folding in a very shallow space where object and ground are one.

I began doing schematic drawings to explore the interplay among outlines making shapes, lines contained within shapes (i.e. cross-contours), grids and the illusion of three-dimensional volume. In fig. 3a the same shape (i.e. outline) is repeated 16 times with changes only to the internal lines, the cross-contours. In each case the shape is the same though the three-dimensional meaning changes due to the internal lines.



In fig. 3b, reading left to right and top to bottom, we first see the shape, or outline. Next, we see its volume and interior, and then the folding screen form of the block's interior. The bottom three iterations bring out an ambiguity in the central shape of the folding screen (top, right). The same shape can be construed as the top-to-bottom slope of a Monopoly-like house's roof (bottom, left), or as the front-to-back oblique plane in a slice of pie (bottom, right). The middle bottom figure combines both of these views in an object whose spatial meaning flips back and forth between the two. In fig. 3c all the lines constructing the cubes (the *figures*) are identical to lines already found in the grid itself, the flat *ground*. The downward facing plane of the cube on the left is identical to the shape of the upward facing plane of the cube on the right. These visual ideas are expanded upon in works like the two below (figs. 4a-b).



Fig. 4a

Fig. 4b

In fig. 4a the planar figures are reiterations of lines found in the grid itself. In fig. 4b a grid constructed of blue scribbles is placed on a diagonal so that, while ostensibly flat, it also appears to pivot back into space. The block forms are constructed using lines native to the grid. In addition they contain a spatial oddity like that in fig. 3c, the top of the green block is identical in shape to the bottom of the red block and we are seeing both top and bottom at the same height, an impossibility.



Fig. 5a



In fig. 5a a linear element disrupts the otherwise unified and flat surface of the grid's elements. As in a gridded piece of paper, the lines of a piece of notebook paper can be read as *figure* against a white *ground*. But the lines can be manipulated to make the white ground bulge out in front of the lines themselves as in fig. 5b. Perhaps some of the sense of humor in my earlier figurative work survives here in this kind of spatial play.

As much as I have been interested in the relationships among line, constructed solids and rigid grounds, I have also been interested in how solids sculpt atmospheric space—hence images like figs. 6a and 6b below. And, perhaps I haven't fully abandoned overt content either. The image of the cloud being captured, contained or imprisoned, has clear metaphoric associations, as does a crowd of blocks surrounding the once free, now imprisoned, cloud.



Fig. 6a

Fig. 6b

I began looking at line as we see it around us everyday. A tablecloth's stripes are lines (fig. 7a). The lane markings on our highways are lines as well, constituting the world's largest painting extending across continents and around the globe. Using photography I began abstracting the

painted lines and pavement, and created grids and solids—macho weaving. These forms now percolate through my work (figs 7b and 8).



Fig. 7a



In many works a number of these visual ideas combine in greater complexity.



Figure 8

There are many antecedents to my visual preoccupations and trajectory. Mondrian looked out into the landscape to find situations which conformed to a horizontal and vertical grid-like structure as in fig. 9a and later jettisoned the descriptive elements, the landscape, while cultivating the formal focus as in fig. 9b.



Fig. 9a



Both Matisse and Picasso moved from more content laden works to more formal, geometric ones. And, of course, Diebenkorn echoed Mondrian in his movement from description to abstraction (figs.10a-b) while pursuing the same formal concerns.



Fig. 10a

Fig. 10b

Philip Guston is never far from my mind. He started with strong political and narrative content (fig. 11a), then gravitated toward abstraction (fig. 11b), and finally, late in life, created a profound and compellingly original body of work which wed the two (fig. 11c).



Fig. 11a

Fig. 11b

Fig. 11c

This gives me at least the hope that the future may yet have some intriguing surprises in store.