

Tom Bronk: Recent Work

July 7 – August 12, 2022

Andrew Edlin Gallery is pleased to present its second solo exhibition for Tom Bronk, featuring works created since the onset of the pandemic.

Visual sophistication abounds in the paintings of Tom Bronk (b.1944). They are pictorially smart and sharp, commanding the eye with a deft choreography of line and geometry, fearless in their intense color combinations. Dazzling and disorienting, his creations carve deep space out of an emphatic flatness. Works in which disjunction and resolution verge and careen around an ever-shifting center are rigorously measured and metered with almost pathological precision. It seems a brilliant sort of miracle when the variable sum of it all is nothing short of playful.

Much about Tom Bronk's life suggests that he is an outsider artist. He is self-taught, and his broad knowledge and methods of employing his ideas in his art are fully autodidactic. He has also lived and worked in lower Manhattan for the past half century, socially isolated by nature and increasingly in ill health, but otherwise exposed to the creative currents of the art scene by his proximity to galleries and his friendships with many important artists around him. Elements of his work that seem contiguous with the more radical and adventurous aspects of contemporary art also convey themselves with a directness that is a bit too raw and even naïve to easily fit into the academy of styles. While much about him—his great shyness, an underprivileged childhood that estranged him from much of youth culture, the years he has suffered from the debilitating effects of Parkinson's disease—situates him at a remove from both mainstream and underground, his continuous exposure to the world around him—from his time in San Francisco during the Summer of Love to painting the walls at the legendary Leo Castelli Gallery in New York City puts him in the room where history was made. This combination of a certain kind of knowing and an isolation that has set him very much on his own path results in a manner of painting that can best be described as uncanny.

Process for Bronk, a set of limitations he adopts and then mines for discrete variables and their limitless possibility, is unrelentingly consistent. All painted with acrylic on 2' x 4' masonite panels, his compositions are created by first taping out areas to delineate lines and shapes, both as a matter of exactitude and to allow his trembling hand to make straight lines. Though there is no residual trace of the tape, there is a tension to this masking and unmasking of space, a bump and grind between what is bound and unbound.

Bronk may come from rural Midwestern American roots (he grew up in Stevens Point, Wisconsin), but after all his time on the Lower East Side this is surely urban work fitted with all the perspectival angularity and juxtapositions of the city.

- Carlo McCormick