

VISUAL ART

Wanda Koop

by Christina Catherine Martinez

... what is called abstract so often seems to me the figurative of a more delicate and difficult reality, less visible to the naked eye.

—Clarice Lispector

I'm getting a feel for the city. It changes, depending on the day, or the hour. Shit-coloured slivers of sky rain down like knives between buildings. Morning slogs follow Dioxazine nights. The pellucid blue of a lunch break. Shapes emerge. Routines, rhythms and patterns of being that carve out some experience of home—or at least place—amid all that indifferent skyline. I'm getting a feel for the city. It could be any one of them.

Wanda Koop's enigmatic "In Absentia" series marked the prolific Winnipeg-based painter's American solo show debut at Night Gallery in October 2017. Los Angeles is notoriously snobby about sunsets—we claim both Finish Fetish and the Light and Space movement—but Koop's impressions of the New York skyline, painted from sketches and memories, don't look like New York, or Los Angeles, or any city. Many of us could not, at first view, discern that the stark compositions were sly landscapes. If missing the skyline for the sky is a wry urban twist on missing the forest for the trees, it is also a legend for the idiosyncratic mode of vision manifested here.

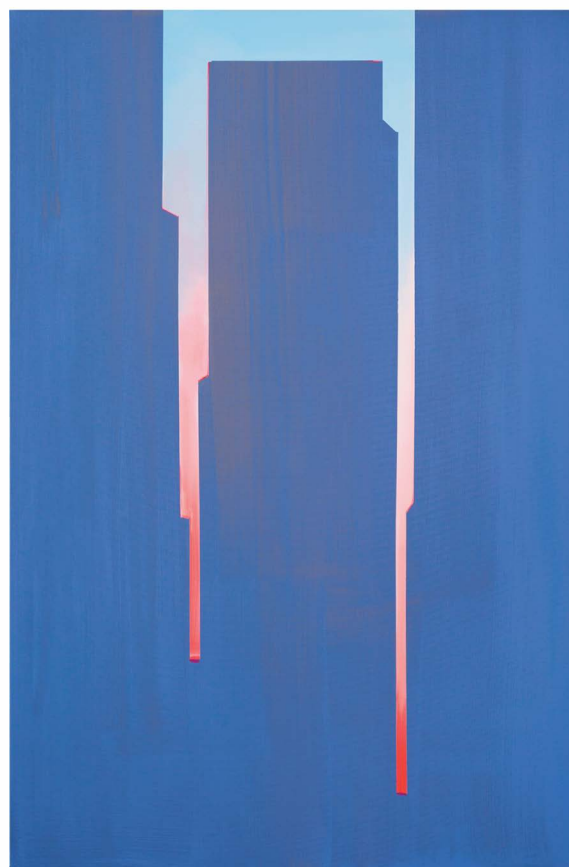
In *Absentia* (Luminous Orange Yellow-Blue Grey), 2016, is the most effective in its sunrise- or sunset-ness. The luminous orange (Koop's oranges are unparalleled: radioactive clementines forged in the fires of Krakatoa, they look absolutely hot to the touch) burns through from behind all that patient grey. Scaled like a not wholly ungenerous loft window and placed smack dab to greet you first thing as you step

through the gallery's giant metal doors, it is a not wholly ungenerous lead-in to the show, where colour and scale break rank and permutate—perhaps too much?—out from these geometries across the 30 or so canvases throughout. In *Absentia* (Soft Pink-Glowing Yellow), 2016, is at the opposite polarity, seemingly abandoning any pretense of landscape in favour of a proper abstract standoff between two blue bands and a glowing yellow shape against streaks of pinks whispering at the edge of existence. In *Absentia* (Luminous Yellow-White-Lilac), 2016, flips the previously established building/sky dynamic; a creamy stick of lilac slaps down on the yellow-white gradient.

The grand faux pas of looking is treating abstraction as an open green screen for the viewer's wild and helpless associations. Wittgenstein said that what we cannot talk about must be passed over in silence. Wayne Koestenbaum said that art is always emotional. I agree with both. Art can be a palliative for the insufficiency of both language and silence; but colour is not a pack mule for emotion. And hasn't New York—as an image—suffered enough under the weight of our wild and helpless associations?

And yet—

Conditions haunt. Koop created these paintings while her mother died. As it happens, this review is late because of the unexpected death of my grandmother. That abstraction resists narrative, or image is less an inherent quality than academic imperative. Although, the two qualities I've come to associate with this series—expansiveness and a kind of public privacy—never quite settle into a sensation that I could describe as "emotional." They pulse at the fuzzy nexus of word and hue and memory, themselves rhyming



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with the totally varied and complex rhythms of urban life: the public privacy closest to loneliness.

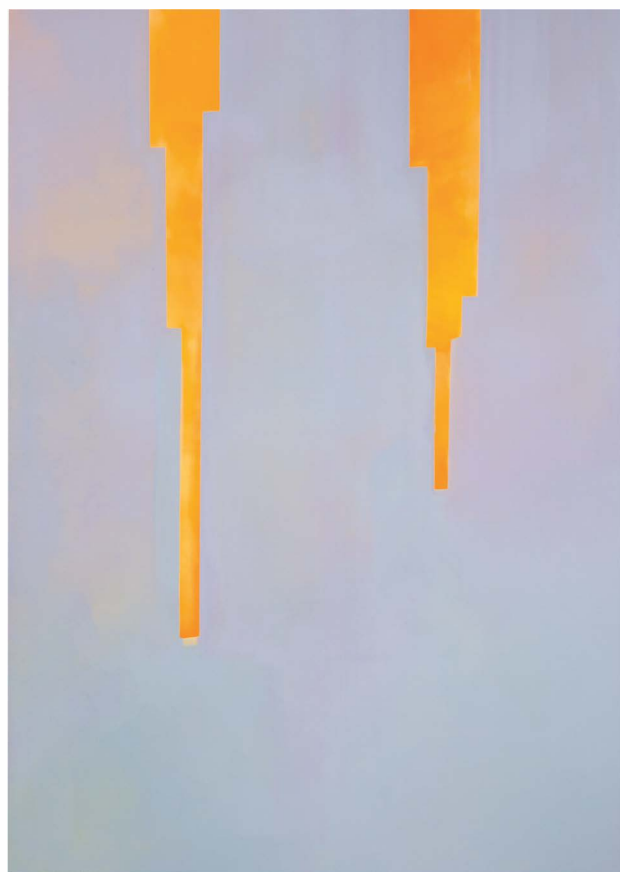
Grief is ineffable. And so In *Absentia* (Small Blue-Violet-Luminous Red-Sky), 2017—the largest of all the paintings and closest to the scale of cities themselves—does not deign to express. It bounces the eye around in its internal logic, its pockets of depth rising and falling like mist, its flirty imagism. The gaze passes over in silence. But every game on the canvas wrings something from the eye that begs some question of the thing steering the eye—for some of us, it's a frame of mind; others, a frame of heart; some, our gear-head knowledge of colour theory and constructions of space; still others, the deafening roar of life itself, aka anxiety, aka life. I like slop and I like canvases whipped thick as cake, but Koop's layering upon

1. Wanda Koop, *In Absentia* (Small Blue-Violet-Luminous Red-Sky), 2017, acrylic on canvas, 108 x 168 inches. Images courtesy the artist and Night Gallery, Los Angeles.
2. *In Absentia* (Luminous Orange Yellow-Blue Grey), 2016, acrylic on canvas, 110.25 x 78 inches.

VISUAL ART

Jon Sasaki

by Dan Adler



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layering upon layering doesn't yield its materiality so easily. Thus, edges become unexpected sites of phenomenological inquiry, tiny arenas for the tussle of foreground and background. The longer you look, the more time is looped into the fray. I think of Mary Heilmann's 1979 masterpiece *Save the Last Dance for Me* or Patrick Caulfield's *Curtains drawn back from balconies of shores*, 1973, paintings whose inner torque undermines their flatness, adding a voluptuousness that keeps them slightly askance of mere postmodern lineage.

That Koop bends colour to the will of syntax—or is it the other way around?—testifies to the prowess of her alchemy. Titles read like textual reflections of each canvas's effects. The hyphen is her mixing stick. You might infer the difference of *Pink-Glowing* versus *Pink-Fluorescent* from

the words on the page, but terms like *Green-Grey* versus *Grey-Cream* beg the paint itself for referendum. And so materiality yields itself after all, in a most unlikely place: the gossamer thread between a word and its purported referent. ■

"In Absentia" was exhibited at Night Gallery, Los Angeles, from October 14 to November 18, 2017.

Christina Catherine Martinez is an LA-based art writer and comedian.

Committed to the conceptualist cause, Jon Sasaki makes art is, in part, about the process of making itself—and questioning what constitutes a creative or critical gesture. What is insightful, important or insubordinate, in art and in life? While his work suggests social situations, he refuses to offer up detailed, prescribed identities with which viewers may identify. And yet, there is an earnestness to the work, the result of a sustained devotion to causes that may seem stupid in their blankness, but still manage to deeply impress.

Sasaki's titles often sum up the task at hand, as in the ongoing series "An Obsolete Calendar Towel Embroidered with an Identical, Future Calendar Year" (begun in 2012). Hanging on hooks and arranged as a loose grid on a single wall, these textiles feature quaint and kitschy imagery: a country clock, prizewinning vegetables, a covered bridge and phrases like "Happiness is ...". As these artifacts have been converted from dish-drying devices to kitschy collection, the years to which they were once dedicated have long passed. But the embroidered gestures give them a new life, provoking subjective speculation about history repeating itself or ecologically conscious recycling. The work recalls early actions by Lawrence Weiner in which the purely textual version of the artwork—describing an action, such as *Two minutes of spray paint directly upon the floor from a standard aerosol spray can*, 1968—is considered just as important as the material execution. Unlike Weiner, Sasaki prioritizes the tactile presence of the skilfully stitched numbers, rendered in fluorescent colours such as green and gold.

Throughout the show, Sasaki performs modest and manual