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WORLD SCULPTURE NEWS

JOHN F. SIMON JR. AT SANDRA GERING GALLERY

I have been observing the development of John F. Simon, Jr.'s work for about 15 years, maybe more. I have always seen it within the context of Sandra Gering's galleries, whether in SoHo on Broome Street, on Fifth Avenue in midtown, and most recently north of West Chelsea in a delightful neighborhood where the gallery appears paradoxically intimate and open. In each of these venues, Simon's works have continued to evolve and resonate in full swing and with full flavor. I use the metaphor "flavor" because there is an element of Pop art in his work, oddly reminiscent of Wayne Thiebaud, mixed with a conceptual determinant. The latter element has been present in Simon's work since his tightly constructed works from the late 1990s. The artist Sol LeWitt clearly had an exemplary influence, which I regard as positive. To some extent, these artists were of like minds. Even so, Simon quickly moved his work beyond anything that could be called "purely conceptual" into

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a hybrid style where the layers of confluence, both in art and science, were so densely concealed and so delightfully articulated in terms of a mental craft that one could not help but sense the artist's rarified encyclopedic brilliance.

I am entranced by the thinking process that stands behind Simon's work and am further struck by the depth of thought that goes hand-in-hand with his process of working. Simply stated, the work included in Simon's recent exhibition, *Moment of Escape*, at Sandra Gering earlier this year goes leagues beyond any ordinary "process art" into a much deeper, more vibrant strata of visual articulation. Simon is authentic, meaning that he reaches beyond the superficial artifice of much of the work presented nowadays in West Chelsea. His art is given not to quirky formulas but to articulations that move between hardware and software. In doing so, his art enters into the future where invisible energies replace obtuse speculations, where the employment of material and pigment, often associated with painting, begin to include video as an



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abstract component.

Here, I recall the recent work *Every Moment is an Opportunity to Return to the Center* (2013). The materials include synthetic HDU, Trupan, and acrylic paint, in addition to an LCD screen that includes custom software and electrical hardware. The most startling fact about this wall work, based on traditional painting, is its deceptive aesthetic presence. This suggests that Simon's *Every Moment* has found a way to combine traditional abstract painting in relation to new technologies. The biomorphic forms literally exude from a frame on the left, bulging into space, but as discretely flat forms, including an interior oval-shaped form where the surface is cut so thin that one views the video loop within it. In each of these flat forms the computer program has been designed by the artist to cut each planar form to its relative thickness prior to being assembled on the surface. The thought, labor, and time involved in producing this work is astonishing.

Much of what I have just described in *Every Moment* is true of several other works included in the exhibition, including the title piece, *Moment of Escape*, in which the bulging



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flat forms are painted in different values of yellow, thus suggesting the artist's knowledge of color theory in addition to the technics used in producing these extraordinary works.

The fact that the word "moment" appears in several of the titles, including another called *Moment of Emergence*, further suggests the artist's intense interest in time and temporality as essential components within the spatial confinement that is perennially in the process of breaking out of the frame into the space of the wall, perhaps, optically creating a sensation of flotation within the space of the room—in this case, the gallery—itsself.

The trajectory of John F. Simon's work is a brilliant apotheosis of how Modernist tradition can be elevated to another level, perhaps, a level that is initially blithely hidden or concealed from view, before it finally becomes apparent in the act of seeing. Such aesthetic maneuvers would seem to be what Modernism at its best tried to achieve. Here Simon offers a way to fulfill Modernism's earlier expectations and thus bring it into the future of advanced art.



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