

# RURI YI

JANUARY 14 – FEBRUARY 25, 2023

INTERVIEWED ON THE OCCASION OF THE ARTIST'S SOLO EXHIBITION



HEMPHILL Artworks: Before we chat about your work, tell us about Mono Practice.

Ruri Yi: Mono Practice is a project space I started in 2018. As an artist, I always exercised the idea of having a space where artists could communicate, discuss the art, share ideas, freely collaborate, and show their works. Then, a few years ago, I found a fixer-upper building while looking for a space for my new studio. It was more than enough for what I needed, and I thought it would be the perfect opportunity to implement the idea of Mono Practice. So that's how it began. There were many great artists in the Baltimore area but limited spaces to show their work, and I am happy Mono Practice adds to the art community. Since opening, Mono Practice has hosted twelve shows featuring over fifty artists.

HA: How has Mono Practice influenced your work?

RY: Mono Practice has been a worthwhile experience not only for myself but also for my work. I met various artists, shared thoughts, exchanged honest critiques . . . We then planned an exhibition together. So, every project was an opportunity for me to learn something new. This experience and the people I met have motivated me to keep questioning myself and trying new ideas.

HA: Does your painting speak of your personal life and feelings?

RY: My painting doesn't portray my personal life, and I want to keep it that way, at least for the time being. Though, it reflects my momentary emotions at the time of creation. In abstract paintings, where representational forms are removed, the expression of emotion can be self-serving to the artist, which means I don't necessarily expect the audience to sympathize or feel the same way. It seems more natural that the work reflects the viewer's personal feelings.

HA: Would it be correct to say the painting is a starting point for the viewer?

RY: Isn't it true that any painting is a starting point for the viewer? It is fair to say if an artwork relies on the viewer's perspective.

HA: Are your paintings without reference to anything outside of the painting itself?

RY: My paintings are without reference to any particular subjects. Colors usually inspire me, but I often take ideas and inspiration from unexpected sources, from urban and natural landscapes to ordinary things in everyday life.

HA: Can you describe an example of a source of inspiration?

RY: Specifically, I am attracted to an object with a unique proportion, something within the boundary of my daily life. It could be just simple lines, the corner of a building, in-between spaces, or unique curves scattered in natural landscapes. These elements become the basis of my imagination.

HA: There is a long modernist and postmodern history of artists emphasizing the flatness of the canvas. How do you fit into or add to that history?

RY: That's an interesting question because I have never thought of my paintings in relation to any style. If my recent paintings must be categorized, you could introduce the concept of "flatness" in terms of how I use colors and arrange them on canvas. But it's more than that. For me, "flatness" expresses ideas. It is not a guide or a style where I should belong. If we look at the flow of art from Manet to Mondrian, the "flatness" seems to have evolved towards abolishing illusionistic depth. I am trying to create emotional layers of dimension without giving a physical illusion of space.

HA: Color plays an important role.

RY: Yes, because color completes my compositions.

HA: Is there such a thing as pure color?

RY: Pure color exists only in theory. Because the moment you try to recognize it, it gets influenced by surrounding colors and absorption and reflections of lights and hence cannot be perceived as pure. Sometimes I wonder if such a thing as pure color even exists. My own colors I perceive in the moment, and they are created to suit the specific situation and purpose.

HA: Do you have a color strategy or color theory that guides your selection of colors?

RY: I do not follow a strategy or theory when creating colors. However, my experiences and the color samples I have made are sometimes helpful in my work. Even so, I am fascinated by different colors and react intuitively to find new colors. A strategy, if there is one, is to achieve the balance of colors in relation to their arrangement. But, of course, it is completely a balance of my own perception and can be different from the viewer's perception.

HA: You seem to be activating moments of spatial illusion and confusion as a function of color.

RY: Color and its arrangement are essential elements of my painting. These colors are not flat; seemingly monochromatic colors are subtly different depending on light and space, and arrangements of these colors hint at an illusion of depth. It's illusory and yet carefully intended. As a result, another space may be seen on the surface depending on the viewer's emotions.

HA: Why are there no traces of your hand, no brushstrokes, no texture to speak of?

RY: When elements like brushstrokes are eliminated, the color becomes bolder and even more faithful to a given surface. I am attracted to and believe in the power of such boldness. To make the color as dense as I intend, brushstrokes and traces must go. They interfere with the composition. The essence of color and its faithfulness to composition is vital to the painting. The texture of the canvas is more than enough to express ideas and satisfy the completeness of the painting. Paradoxically enough, I put layers and layers of brushstrokes, making the final texture free of any trace of brushstrokes.

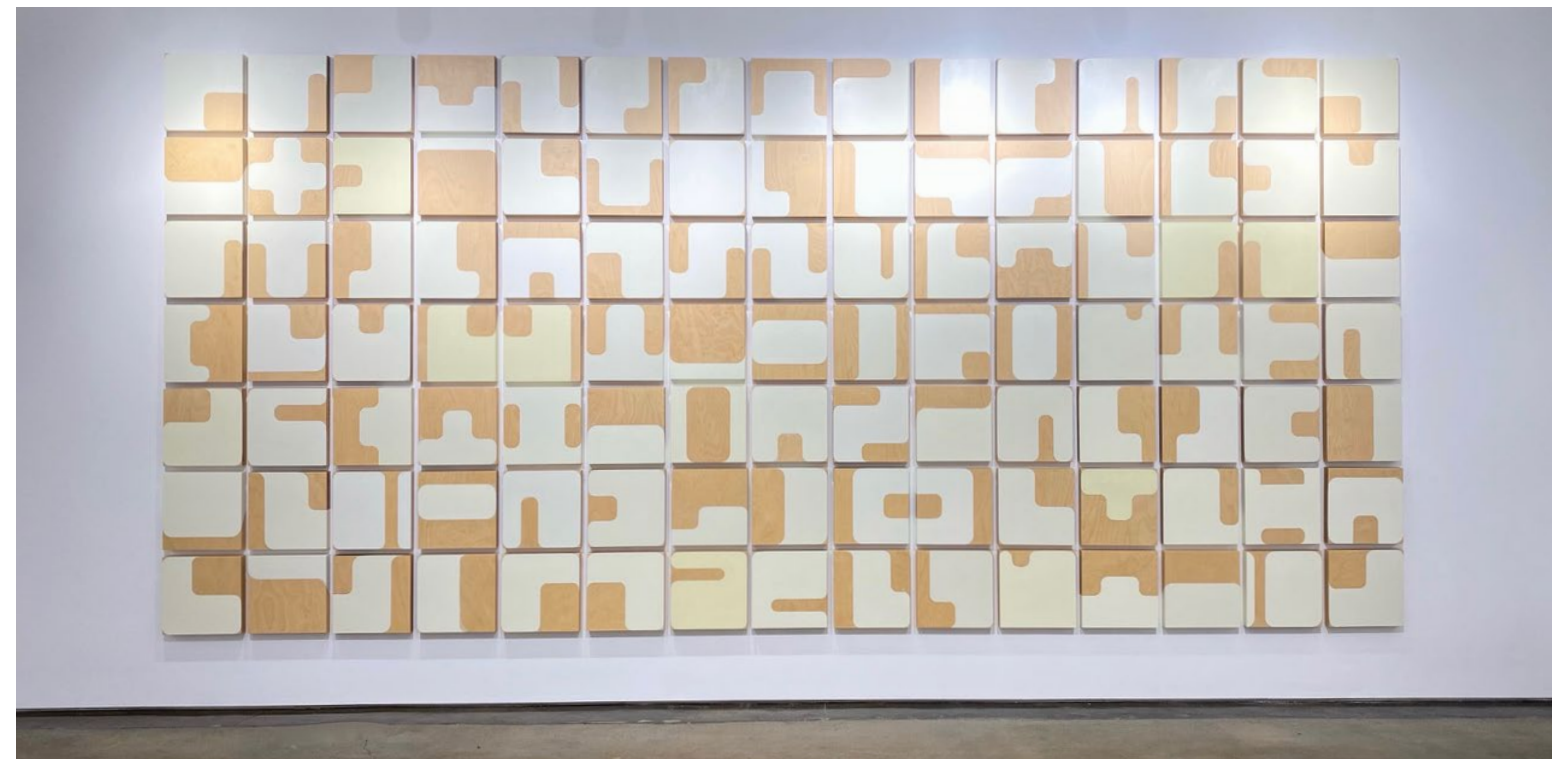
HA: Is the experience of your work intended to be purely retinal?

RY: Yes and no. The viewer's first impression can be a purely aesthetic response. But, in my work, if you look at length, you can also find many elements that feel strong in the use of bold colors and compositions, which naturally lead you to various imaginations. I like such feelings, pursue them, and try to embody them in my work.

HA: In the most recent paintings, you deploy an oval-like shape. Tell me about the use of this shape.

RY: When I started the *Equilibrium* series, I searched for a shape comprising straight lines and curves. After trial and error, I came up with the shape that people often call a "capsule" shape. This form is a shape that feels the most sturdy and stable. If you stare at it for a while, you can feel the dynamic sense of speed and modernity. We can relate if we think of the racetrack in a stadium. Also, this was the most appropriate form to use and express my ideas in a composition with repeated patterns. I sometimes want to inspire the viewer's imagination by giving a slight tilt to a form.

The symmetry and regularity of shapes in the paintings give the



feeling of being suspended, floating in an ideal space. The symmetry and regularity of shapes play an essential role, and color and its careful arrangement complete my composition. This purposeful composition gives an idea of floating space. I am interested in how composition and color induce movements of space that people perceive emotionally, and I find myself involved, more than ever, in exploring all other unexpected outcomes that can be derived from it and challenge my expressive abilities.

HA: You describe a "faithfulness to composition." Please tell us more.

RY: The composition in my paintings is usually finalized during the sketch process, so all other subsequent elements do not interfere with the composition; thus, the finished paintings are faithful to the composition.

HA: You mentioned "challenging your expressive abilities."

RY: I always crave new materials and methods. I experiment with them until I achieve the desired results. I believe there is no limit to our expressive abilities.

HA: Should we resist attempts to interpret the paintings?

RY: My paintings do not carry any particular messages. Still, I want to encourage viewers to be stimulated by my work, have fun imagining, and come up with their own interpretations. I enjoy listening to different viewers' angles and perspectives on the work.

HA: Is there a meditative or spiritual element to your work? For you? For the viewer?

RY: The paintings certainly have meditative elements, whether intentional or unexpected, and I hope viewers feel them one way or another. I want to bring out and talk about one of my past works, *Language of Nature*, 2015, as an example. This work comprises 105 panels, each with a unique composition. I feel it has meditative value. The composition of each panel is made to resemble a state of mind and a state of nature. Depending on the viewer, the entire piece or a just section can reflect viewers' emotions, sometimes as a specific language. The current *Eq.* series is a continuation of this practice. The work in the present show seeks to find a balance, giv-

ing the viewer a moment of reflection, mindfulness, and a respite from life's chaos.

HA: What is next?

RY: I will continue to work on the *Eq.* series. Some concepts have not yet been translated onto surfaces. So "the next" is a continuation of exploring the possibilities within the scope of the *Eq.* series.

Artwork installation:

*Language of Nature*

2015

acrylic on wood panels

93" x 201"

composition with 105 panels, 12" x 12" each