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Helen Miranda Wilson

Wilson calls her recent series of small oil-on-panel paintings, none larger than 20 by 16 inches, simply "Stripes"; but she does not embrace the minimalistic attitude this generic title implies. We learn from Hayden Herrera's catalogue essay—and can observe for ourselves—that Wilson makes her paintings, mixing or choosing each stripe's color, one at a time, without repeating or repainting. She proceeds from top to bottom, so that the resulting gestalt is to some extent aleatory. The stripes are varied and one-of-a-kind with respect to hue, intensity, tonal value and thickness. So also is the quality of edges where they meet: one color may drift slightly into its neighbor's space or show a delicate feathering or a relatively soft or hard edge. The stripes either traverse their panels side to side, or are arranged in paired blocks of from three to as many as seven stripes that shift left and right, or they are arranged in three shifting columns.

These small works invite intimate viewing, so that one can more closely compare their various elements, optically scrolling up and down or finding unexpected correspondences of noncontiguous colors. They are eye-dazzling without the insistent, sometimes overbearing, optical control that characterizes Op art and its descendents. A certain amplitude of playful delight, well beyond what the paintings' seeming matter-of-factness ought to allow, ensues. This effect results particularly from the viewer's noticing the succession of Wilson's choices, especially in the application of paint—that is, the artist leaves visible her own engagement during the time of their making. The unflagging attentiveness and care with which these works are painted make each an accretion of many moments, both for the artist and the sympathetic viewer. We go from seeing the overall effect of a given work to the sequence of experiences by which it was created, and as a result the work brims with quiet intensity.

Apart from their repeated horizontal units and various structural formats, the paintings are unsystematic. Certain titles—*He and I*, *Me and Him*, *T. and H.*—pay homage to Wilson's long companionship with artist Timothy Woodman, while others—such as *Equator*, *Italian* and *Russian*—evoke her own associations but without exclusive claims to significance. *He and I* might grant "him," ("he" presumably on the left, "I" on the right) bolder contrasts and more saturated colors than "I," just as *T. and H.* does for "T," but psychologizing is not generally accorded much importance throughout the exhibition. If you are reminded of traditional quilts, or fabrics, or other paintings, or even, for that matter, of the military "salad" adorning the uniforms of generals, such associations are incidental. Wilson's "stripes" are decidedly not showcases for the ready-made, pre-mixed colors that are concerned with optical discernment only incidentally, and in this they stand firmly apart from, for example, the commercial paint-store paintings of Richter and others seen in MOMA's recent exhibition "Color Chart." Those who know Wilson's earlier representational paintings—about the same size as these and with equally luminous, untroubled surfaces—will discern in these newer works the same poised sensibility, as it gives startling access to a realm of contemplative wonder.