

perception without preconception

Ashley Crawford

Situated within the context of the histories of Minimalism, Concrete Art and Analytical Art, Spremberg's works refuse to carry any inherent meaning. In fact, for all their distinctive beauty and elegance, the creator of these paintings is also aware of, and highly critical of, the fact that the human mind seems to be enslaved by an unconscious function of giving meaning to any and all objects. As a survival mechanism, that inherent tendency 'is useful when crossing the street', Spremberg suggests, 'but not necessarily so when looking at art.'

Alex Spremberg is aiming to achieve an element of emptiness in his work, a void that invites viewers' interpretations but simultaneously makes them aware that that is precisely what they are engaged in. Painting, for Spremberg, is a means to communicate – specifically to communicate the possibility of pure seeing – perception without preconception. In this almost quasi-scientific bid, the artist's aim is to experientially direct attention to our inevitable visual conditioning, to reveal how assumptions and projections interfere with our ability to perceive.

This is where the shift from the representational into the purely abstract can be so unnerving... It is clear that for Spremberg process and the resulting object are of core importance. In an artist's statement, Spremberg has declared that 'for me paintings are three dimensional objects that are effective through their presence...' – obviously a proclamation of a clearly concrete object. 'I investigate the means and methods of painting in that I look at its parts and functions closely by altering their relationship. I distinguish them and subvert their traditional functions.'

But this decidedly analytical approach to the canvas undertaken within the private confines of the studio has a secondary life when transported into the unforgiving lights of the gallery. Here the artist becomes a secondary player. Having acted as what Spremberg has described as a 'mid-wife', the paintings must now contend with their audience. And in this, they no longer act as solo items of 'concrete' interest; they become as many paintings as viewers, given the inevitability of each viewer to 'see' something in the work. In these black and white paintings, a scientist or biologist may inevitably see a spore, a doctor may see a virus, a science fiction fan will see alien-seed pods.

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