

at variance

adjective

Not in accord.

The title for this show came out of the thesaurus, and the fact that it sounds that way seems to make it more suitable. “At variance” is not part of my normal vocabulary, so it sounds more considered, but I also like how a dictionary definition has a voice that speaks to things beyond your immediate query. I’ve noticed for years that while starting a drawing on a blank sheet of paper, I can feel opposing forces wanting to influence what happens, whether it’s abstraction vs. figuration or geometric vs. organic forms, or dynamic vs. static etc. This tension feels electric, and I’ve been thinking that this subtle energy, rather than hindering, may actually be helping drive the drawing. Hues that sit on opposite sides of our color wheel, such as blue and orange, are referred to as “complimentary”, implying that they make each other stronger. Technically, when they are both present in a painting, the palette of the entire work is made more complete, spectrum-wise. Discussing this topic within the history of art would be boundless, but even within the microenvironment of my studio, it’s actually hard to imagine art and artmaking without these polarities in effect.

Outside the studio there is a world of opposites... up-down, hot-cold, south-north, left-right, and the virtual universe which, so I’ve heard, is built upon 1’s and 0’s. It’s a short step from blue-orange to blue-red, and that opens up the association to our team sports political landscape. Though I embrace and even rely on the impulses that are “at variance” in the studio, nothing in my experience working with them has prepared me to understand or better appreciate the current national temper. As an individual I am biased, that I know. I am the blue, the left, the dynamic and abstract element. The fact that that red is just as legitimate a color on the spectrum doesn’t help me understand the mindset of a person dead set against what I believe. Or does it?

Though it’s a huge part of my life, I’ve never been one to look to art for answers. I also steer clear of statements about what art is or should be. This is out of respect. As with my relationship with Nature, I feel personally that there is more reverence in questions as to how than those of why, and there is more to be gained by participating in a mystery than by doubting it. What started out as a series of blue and red drawings led to the large painting of the white house; I went from working with a theme to being subsumed by it.

I think it’s amusing that I feel compelled to conclude a statement on “At Variance” with ideas of how to make things outside the studio less so. But if art and society both fall under the broad umbrella of Nature, there may be some clues. Thinking about the structure of the color wheel could be a start. And there is something else. When I’m assembling a collage, I’ll often assume that a particular final piece will fit into a certain place, and make it complete. Then I find out it doesn’t work, that placing it where I expected to makes it weaker. So I turn the piece upside down or put it somewhere else or both, and it happens, it’s done. This happens very frequently.

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