

Line Circle Square

Tom Dowling introduced me to the contemporary art world thirty years ago. The conversation I continue to have with Tom and associate with his work is filled with literature, theory, and form. Form being the key, because he was trained by a generation of artists like Tony DeLap, John Paul Jones, and Craig Kaufman, who believed in the sanctity and power of the abstract and found great meaning in simple geometry. Dowling follows suit and his conversation is the line on a page, canvas or panel while the battle to dominate the surface is between the circle and the square.

This collection of reductive formalist paintings, constructions, and zips contain a lifetime of exploring the geometry of creativity and culture. Each constructed painting is a world unto itself and feels more like a Bauhaus stage set anticipating its actors' arrival than a static object hanging on the wall. These are seemingly maquettes for grand gestures and the giant zips have allowed Tom to take the work outside to play with architecture. The buildings become his ground and the zip is the solid line where the dialogue begins between the two forms he is calling forth.

As Tom places the zips around an edifice, it reveals the complexity of surface, texture, and patterns within the existing structure. He is appropriating the very canvas he is augmenting and having a visual tête-à-tête with the architect. As Tom has eloquently said of his work (and I would say his life), "My process is a dialogue. I have 'conversations' with art and artists, places, monuments, and literature. These discussions connect me to the ideas and issues of the past, and to cultures other than my own."

Meg Linton

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