

RON COOPER

FRANKLIN PARRASCH GALLERY
53 EAST 64TH STREET, NEW YORK CITY

LOCAL LEGEND RON COOPER IS BEST KNOWN FOR HIS DEL MAGUEY

Single Village Mezcal, which he discovered on a trip to Oaxaca in 1990, looking to create and fill fifty blue bottles with the roasted agave liquor to bring home to friends. His artisanal booze has just recently gained widespread notoriety. He may be better known as the best mezcal importer in the world than as an artist, but Cooper's work is in some pretty prestigious museums, including LACMA and the Guggenheim in New York City. His most recent show at Franklin Parrasch Gallery, on New York's Upper East Side, remains faithful to his previous work, which emerged from 1960s California minimalism.

The Light and Space movement reflected the emerging architecture, Western light, and beach culture of Southern California. Flattening the picture plane seems downright provincial compared to the emphasis on perception and phenomenological experience inherent in the works of Cooper's contemporaries Robert Irwin, James Turrell, and Doug Wheeler. This kind of art does not provoke conceptual foreplay or garner its value from subjective, abstract expression. Often it is barely saleable. The Light and Space movement is exactly that: art made with light and space. Most often it combines existing or site-specific architecture with industrial or ambient light. Thus its difficulty is in giving the work proper space.

Franklin Parrasch Gallery felt breezy and bare. Cooper's nine vertical Plexiglas bars were so unobtrusive that they were almost nonexistent. It's the kind of very livable work that demands nothing more than a beautifully vacant area to let it breathe. Each bar has four sides and is at least seven feet tall and three and a half inches wide. Each hovers off the floor just above the molding. Despite the three dimensions, their aerial lightness defies the gravity of sculpture and places them in between a Donald Judd and a beam of light, escaping even the weight of Barnett Newman's painted zips. However, like the zips, the scale invites human interaction and each is a deliciously tall, skinny, shiny reflection of your own body, but one that has nothing to do with you.

The most enigmatic pieces are the ones with the least amount of color. There are a few that appear almost clear and frustratingly similar in hindsight, with titles that dimly reflect the acrylic lacquer with which they were painted. *Blue with Chinese Red - Beige Transmission* is nearly invisible except for its perfectly straight greyish shadow on the wall, yet one would expect a visible shift from blue to Mao red. Cooper's pearlescent paints are inspired by the 1960s California car culture that engendered Finish Fetish art. The paints are very topical and sit on the surface with iridescent sparkles that look a bit sexy and very fetishized. *Blue with Chinese Red - Beige Transmission* does not do this. Its

white lacquer creates a wall appendage that's barely visible, and it's this quiet monochrome that finds success in its passivity.

By these terms, *Pink Out of Control - Red Transmission*, is quite the opposite. None of Cooper's pieces are loud, but this one does have a room of its own for a reason. Lately, pink is popping up as the quirky, unexpected color flirting its way through the art world. It is arguably the most fetishized color, found in nature in flowers, sunsets, and flesh. Its obvious girlish implications are reflected in innumerable manufactured items, but pink is gaining an exciting, new, arty life that's refreshing. Cooper's pink beam brightens up its small dim alcove, and the light coming through the window creates a golden sunset sheen. Unlike the clarity of *Blue with Chinese Red - Beige Transmission*, *Pink Out of Control - Red Transmission* depends upon this desirable, chatoyant surface.

Cooper's new work is almost—but not quite—perfect. There are a few superficial scratch marks and bubble wrap imprints that distract from the illusory experience of light, space, and fetishized finishes. Despite these minor imperfections, Cooper's West Coast attitude and execution still feel cool and perspicuous—especially in cold, wintery New York. Stigibeau!

—HANNAH HOEL

Ron Cooper, *Pink Out of Control - Red Transmission*, acrylic lacquer on Plexiglas, 84" x 3/8" x 3 5/8", 2014

