

Notes on Malevich: The Black Square, Black Holes, and the Mind's Eye

Has painting died a hundred deaths since Malevich painted 'Black Square', or is it rather the originator of as many births? As I see it, painting is a regenerating activity, brought forward from the Suprematist master's zero of form in 1915, grounding his square in both an ever-present past and future. 'Black Square' is the fundamental mooring between earth and the universe that contains it. Malevich sought a mystical transcendence in painting, and as such 'Black Square' held pride of place when he installed it in the corner at the 0.10 Petrograd exhibition, referencing the place in the home for displaying a traditional icon. For Malevich, the painting was a spiritual object meant to transport us to the great unknown.

Here on the other side of the millenium, over a century later, scientists have developed telescopes that see the past, millions of light years away to the earliest days of the universe. Are we in the past and the future at the same time? Malevich believed in a multi-dimensional universe —he had an obsession with space, and would have indeed been fascinated by this discovery, as well as the discovery of black holes. In his paintings, the white ground is meant to be read as infinite space, which he called the void, and the shapes upon it, such as the black square, are feeling, as he describes in 'The Non-Objective World'. The forms in his paintings overlap and pull, they are never static, and appear to float in the space of the white ground. 'Black Square' has a singular quality, unique in his body of work, and sits like a void contained by space.

My work on paper 'Black Hole 2', part of my 'Folds in Time' series, reads like a sky-blue iris, the mind's eye, a glimpse through a pupil to the other side, but only imagined in its infinite blackness, where light cannot escape. The white ground of the paper also implies space, much like Malevich's white grounds, which he saw as an allusion to the fourth dimension. In my work the piece of paper, the support, might be read as a plane in between infinite lightness and infinite darkness. The central aperture, the black hole, is the void between two worlds. A black hole in space is at the center of each galaxy; my black hole pivots on the edge of such an imagined space.

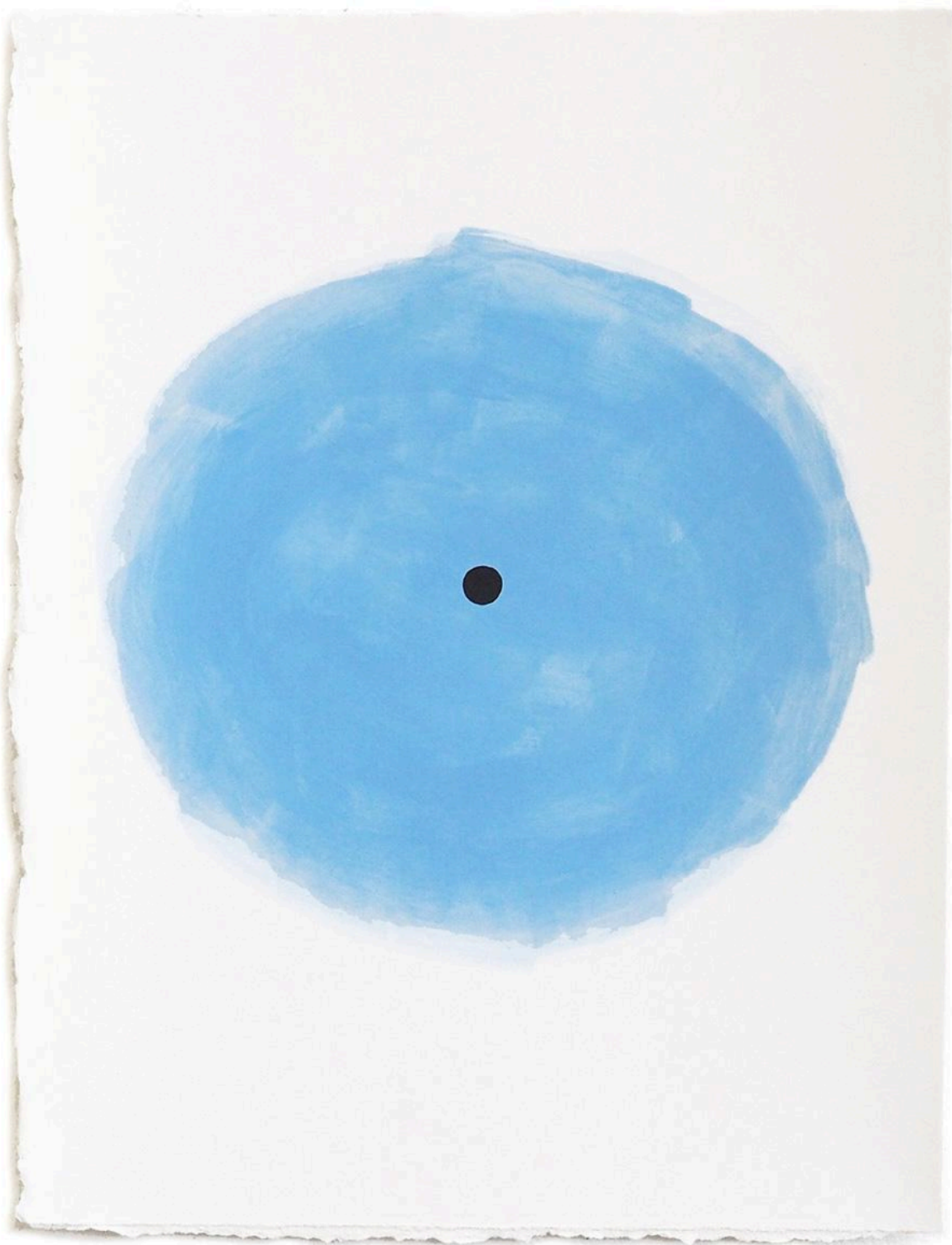
In painting, the question for me is can it be renewed and made afresh even while sticking to traditional means; ie, painting with brushes on canvas. Is it possible to create something new without pushing past traditional parameters into the extended field? Painting today often brings in photographic, sculptural, and digital means, and all of these methodologies continue to hold potential for revitalizing painting. But can traditional painting in and of itself be revitalized without creating a hybrid form? It is this challenge that inspires my practice, which I carry forward in the 'Black Hole' works.

Jessica Snow
San Francisco
2018

Jessica Snow is an artist, educator, and curator based in San Francisco. Her painting is characterized by bright, playful geometrics, and her inspiration is fed by research into mid-century architecture, landscape design, 20th c. art history and Asian art history. Two recent research trips to Suzhou to study Classical Chinese gardens, calligraphy and ink-wash painting is informing her new body of work.

Currently Jessica is preparing for her third solo show at Galleri Urbane in Dallas. In addition to the Dallas shows, she's had several solo shows in the Bay Area, New York, and Southern California, including the Riverside Art Museum. She's been in group shows at the Indianapolis Museum of Contemporary Art, Crocker Art Museum, Monterey Art Museum and the Sonoma Valley Museum of Art. Internationally Jessica has participated in many group shows in the Netherlands, Germany, France, Thailand, Australia, Uruguay and Argentina. ICONS : W13 is her first show in Ukraine.

Jessica earned a BA from UC Davis and a MFA from Mills College, and also attended the Sorbonne and Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. She is adjunct professor in the Studio Art and Art History departments at University of San Francisco, and she's the recipient of the Cadogan Fellowship Award, the Artadia Award in the Visual Arts Grant, and the US State Department's American Artists Abroad Program. She is represented by Galleri Urbane and IdeelArt in London.



Jessica Snow, "Black Hole 2"
Acrylic on paper, 14"h x 11.3"w
2018