



John McCracken, *Blue Block*, 1969, polyester resin, fiberglass, and plywood, 7 x 7 1/2 x 6".



Franz Ackermann, *Untitled (evasion I)*, 1996, oil on canvas, 110 1/2 x 114 1/2". From "Remote Viewing: Invented Worlds in Recent Painting and Drawing."

absorptive and reflective. Thick and sponge-like at close range, from across the room they developed intense energetic fields, the former emptying out at its center and the latter becoming denser. Perhaps there's no such thing as "pure" LeWitt, but in achieving an effective balance between the conceptual and the retinal, these came as close as one could ask.

—Suzanne Hudson

## JOHN MCCRACKEN ZWIRNER & WIRTH

It's a truism that the simplest problems are the toughest to crack, and a question posed some forty years ago by the artist John McCracken is no exception: "If a piece is blue, what color is the space around it?" Scrawled into the pages of a notebook, the riddle has a slightly Wittgensteinian flavor. (It was the author of *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* [1921] who wrote, "This space I can imagine as empty, but I cannot imagine the thing without the space.") Yet McCracken has spent decades pondering relationships between *things* and the spaces they inhabit, less as a purely cerebral exercise and more as a materially intuitive one. After asking what color the space around a blue piece might be, he proceeds by way of building that object and then putting it somewhere to see what happens.

What happens is, of course, both as simple and as complex as the question itself. McCracken produces objects (he has called them "single-things") that can most generally be described in terms of their geometrical orientations and monochromatic coloring: cubes, squares, and long rectan-

gles (he calls these "planks") in luscious, hypershiny shades of blue, pink, green, red, lavender, yellow, black, and white. Given the simplicity and repetition of his forms, one can see why the artist has long been deemed a card-carrying Minimalist. Yet, considering the vicissitudes of that particular designation, it seems less interesting today to contemplate McCracken's aesthetic relationship to, say, Donald Judd than to examine his works on their own—as the "single-things" he insists they are.

Ostensibly historical but altogether more lively than that designation might imply, the exhibition included works spanning the years 1964 to 1974 and included several of McCracken's signature planks as well as a number of smaller blocks on pedestals, one enormous black cube, a single wall-mounted panel, and a number of pages culled from his notebooks. Every sculpture offered a microdialogue with the world—at once surging out to meet and simultaneously sucking in everything around it. The logically constructed ninety-degree contours of, for example, *Lavender Block*, 1969, appear to bend and swoon—its lipid surfaces at the mercy of every passing flicker of light—almost hyperbolically exerting the *presence* that Michael Fried derided in the majority of Minimalist art. Like covertly animated beings, McCracken's basic forms exert, if not aura, a kind of force field: as though each cube and every plank were the embodiment of a mute—though responsive—alien being.

Indeed, McCracken's work is engaged more in dialogues with ancient totemic sculpture and contemporary UFO sightings than with anything made by Carl Andre or Robert Morris. The artist has, for most of

his career, pondered the possibility that his planks—while certainly a kind of modernist hybrid of painting and sculpture—offer access to another kind of transitional state. "Interesting idea," he ruminates on a 1965 notebook page, "these are beings of another world transmitting themselves here through me. Don't ask me why they're here." Hardly the standard Minimalist creed, McCracken's comment suggests an eccentric, if utterly compelling, wager: Take the most basic forms and use them to think through the least answerable questions. If, as the artist has it, his sculptures refer only to themselves but relate to absolutely everything, then perhaps we simply need to resign ourselves to the fact that we'll never know just what color the space around a blue cube is, but there's no reason to quit asking. Indeed, I'm guessing that McCracken wouldn't even take the blue cube for granted. As Wittgenstein put it, "In a manner of speaking, objects are colorless."

—Johanna Burton

## "REMOTE VIEWING: INVENTED WORLDS IN RECENT PAINTING AND DRAWING"

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF  
AMERICAN ART

Artists are an opinionated bunch, so one often wonders what those included in group exhibitions think of the context in which their work has been placed. Sometimes I imagine they feel lucky; on other occasions dismayed. "Remote Viewing" triggered the latter suspicion. For while