

**Scot Heywood**





# Scot Heywood

## A Survey of Large Paintings 2006 – 2013

October 22 – December 7, 2013

Pete & Susan Barrett Art Gallery  
Santa Monica College

organized in cooperation with:

## A Survey of Small Paintings

October 26 – November 30, 2013

Front Cover:

detail of

*Sunyata Red Yellow, Black, 2009*

acrylic on canvas

79 ¾ x 108 ½ inches



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## To Arrive at Balance and Luminosity

Behind the freshness and spark of novelty in the current shows of Scot Heywood's paintings lies a lengthy but remarkably measured and steadfast development as an artist. As his work began to take shape in the late 1970s, interactions with other artists led to crucial orientations, away from the gestural painting he was currently practicing and toward a black-and-white palette implemented with geometric finesse, an approach ultimately inherited from Piet Mondrian. Unlike Mondrian and other early abstract painters, Heywood never progressed anxiously through an intricate figurative stage before arriving at a firm commitment to abstraction. His paintings of the 1980s are simultaneously pared down and complex. By continually refining both aspects, he has today produced a body of work characterized by austerity and exultant pleasure at once. Perhaps only in abstraction can such a dichotomy be realized.

Heywood has a longstanding commitment to the multipanel format, making paintings from two, three, and four separate canvases. In the 1980s and 90s, the square or rectangular canvases were typically turned to forty-five degrees and hung flat against the wall. A notched diamond shape resulted from slipping the panels up or down away from one another, and bolting them together on the back. Each panel is a single color: white, black, or other neutral color, including the beige hue of raw canvas sealed with colorless matte medium. The individual panels are never divided into more than one color area, assuring the cohesion of the overall painting. Instead, the lines and color divisions formed by the abutted edges of the canvases create the only formal articulation inside the work. The divisions function as a kind of real drawing; as Greenberg remarked in 1961, "The first mark on a canvas destroys its literal and utter flatness, and the result of the marks made on it by an artist like Mondrian is still a kind of illusion that suggests a kind of third dimension."<sup>1</sup> The lines between the panels signal the flatness and materiality of the canvas support by eliminating the potential for illusion behind the picture plane. In addition to reinforcing the flatness of the plane, Heywood's divisions impart a sense of precision and exacting clarity to the shapes formed by the individual canvases. Their rectangularity serves as a foil to the diagonal orientation of the

paintings and brings the oppositions of forty-five and ninety-degree angles into equilibrium. Resonant with a lively push-pull and dynamic tension, Heywood's work is, in fact, replete with active binary oppositions.

In 2000, Heywood returned his multipanel paintings to a ninety-degree orientation, righting the rectangle but continuing to slip selected panels downward. The *Piano* paintings consist of four equally sized rectangular canvases, abutted horizontally. The first and third panels are positioned at the same height on the wall, the second and fourth canvases about an inch lower. (The up-down-up-down arrangement recalls the location of a piano's black and white keys, thus the series title.) Each painting includes two colors—raw canvas and a muted primary color or black—with one reserved for the elevated third panel. An especially subtle and complex play of illumination results from the contrast of the unpainted canvas's muffled luminosity and the darker, light-absorbent hues. The colors and placement are adapted to the viewer's natural tendency to "read" paintings from left to right, a predisposition described by perceptual psychologist Rudolf Arnheim as a "lateral bias" with a "directional vector." The force exerted on rightward perception by the lateral bias gives more weight to the right side of a painting, which in turn directs the vector of a visual scan downward.<sup>2</sup> In the *Piano* series, the distinctive color and elevated position of the third canvas counteract the perceptual weight and visual descent on the right to obtain a balanced composition.

As the decade of the 2000s progressed, Heywood developed radically asymmetrical, yet perfectly balanced, three-panel compositions for the *Double Edge* series. The format consists of a large vertical rectangle, or less often a square, on the left with two very narrow panels attached to its right edge. The innermost narrow panel is nudged downward, projecting a few inches from the lower edges of the left and right panels. All three are painted with carefully adjusted hues and, although they differ in color, width, or hanging height, the continuity of the plane is maintained across the three panels. Despite asymmetry, the placement and color of the two bars alleviate the perceptual weight attributed to the right side.

The sensitivity to perceptual dynamics exhibited in the *Double Edge* paintings recalls John McLaughlin's distinctive manner of composing, unmatched by any East Coast artist. An early influence on Heywood, McLaughlin experimented with asymmetrical and symmetrical structures, converting symmetry to asymmetry, and vice versa, through variations of color and proportion. In his hard-edged paintings from the late 1950s and 60s, McLaughlin often established a central vertical axis flanked by adjacent bands. The oppositional forces created by the axis, bands, and framing edge shuttle perception "left to right and back again, seeking a point of resolution, hoping to pull the composition together. No such point of resolution is offered," Susan Larsen observed.<sup>3</sup> While most modern painting "is centrally scanned and apprehended holistically in exactly the same way as a Renaissance painting," wrote John Coplans, McLaughlin "introduced simple forms around a vertical axis that changed position on left to right reading. . . . McLaughlin was probably the first painter to use methods of left to right scanning as used in reading combined with traditional easel painting scanning."<sup>4</sup>

The paintings in Heywood's two series, *Un Deux Trois* and *Sunyata*, are also organized around a centralized vertical axis, reminiscent of the bars on the periphery of the *Double Edge* works. Each painting includes two rectangular canvases of the same size on the left and right. In the symmetrical, three-panel *Un Deux Trois* (one two three) paintings, a single slender rectangle is located in between two squares and placed slightly lower on the wall, so the central bar extends just below the bottom edge of the squares. In the *Sunyata* series, the rectangles flank two narrow bars, the left one of which is slipped down. The structure is a variation on the *Double Edges*, as if a duplicate of the large left panel were attached to the right side of a *Double Edge* painting. The series employs a more complex form of symmetry but once the complexities are unpacked, the structural equilibrium seems obvious. The title *Sunyata* is a Sanskrit word, usually translated as "emptiness," the void or no-thing-ness central to all Buddhist doctrines; Heywood equates it to "no thought," a principle of Tibetan Buddhism. The word's implications here are multiple,

ranging from the purity and “emptiness” of abstraction to the selflessness and lack of ego in anonymous, anti-expressive facture.

Both series involve a wide range of colors of varying complexity, carefully adjusted to the shapes, sizes, and scale of the panels and their surrounds. While holding to his stricture of one color to one panel, Heywood shares with Mondrian the sense of color as the irreducible unit on which painting depends. At its most basic, color is light-reflective. By conceiving of color as light, Heywood’s objective is to “illuminate the plane” with a triad of colors that, together, creates an even, balanced light. In each painting, he explained, “I hope to get to a singular light.”<sup>5</sup> As the basis of all color, the primaries can be used to mix any secondary, tertiary, or quaternary color. Together the primary colors represent the entire spectrum, pure white light. The simpler form of the *Un Deux Trois* paintings called for uncomplicated color, limited to variations on the three primaries (red, yellow, and blue) and black, white, and gray (effectively decreasing or increasing the reflection of light). While *Un Deux Trois Yellow, Red, Blue* (2006-13) is easily decoded, the triad in *Sunyata Sienna, Yellow, Black* (2009) with its rusty red, yellow, and bluish black, is more elusive. Each color mixture is like the multiple notes of a musical chord, chiming with the triad in radiant harmony.<sup>6</sup>

An evenly calibrated illumination emanates even more palpably from the recent *Poles* series. In the several red, yellow, and blue paintings, the bold coloration is matched by the broad, assertive scale. Where the side panels of *Sunyata* seem to unfold from a stepped central spine into a horizontal sweep, the vertically oriented *Poles* are stably anchored by two evenly stacked large rectangles. The asymmetrical note sounds on the periphery: two narrow “arms,” shorter than the central stack, are slipped up on the left and down on the right. Their vertical thrusts counteract perception’s downward diagonal slide from left to right. Together, the proportions and placement of the panels arrive at a perfectly harmonious balance.

The application of paint and evidence of brush or roller in Heywood’s paintings have varied over



the years. Of late, diagonal brushstrokes enliven the surface by activating the play of light across the painting's plane. The reappearance of the diagonal in the surface texture of the recent works is more subtle than in the alignment of panels in the early paintings but it just as markedly contributes to a lively sense of movement. Conversely, the surfaces of those earlier paintings are without apparent brushstrokes, smooth and subdued to the point of anonymity. An increase in the paint's thickness and visible brushwork relieves color of some of its contribution to visual weight. In the *Piano* series and related paintings with raw canvases, the softly colored, veil-like surface of each panel is built up from numerous layers of paint or clear medium rolled horizontally and vertically. From there he returned to dense layers of paint, which include subtle adjustments of color. In the course of developing a fairly diverse and highly accomplished body of work, Heywood has refused to sacrifice his acute attention to texture in favor of the more conspicuous quality of structure.

Heywood's paintings are characterized by a distinctly physical presence that engages the viewer's body and elicits a kinesthetic response. The bodily effect of presence derives in part from the use of scale. Maintaining a consistent internal scale by adjusting the size of each panel, Heywood generally constructs examples of each series in small, midsize, and large formats. As a result, external scale is determined by the relationship between the viewer's sense of his own size and the portable, easel-size, or architecturally scaled painting. Presence, William Rubin once wrote, is "the ability of a configuration to command its own space."<sup>7</sup> The spatial presence of Heywood's paintings is enhanced by their flatness and frontality but the expanse, saturation, and intensity of color and lack of fussy painterly nuance give his paintings their authoritative hold on the wall.

Although his paintings are often described as "minimalist," Heywood's refusal of minimal art's internal blankness and anticompositional approach is figured in his use of color and shape to *compose*. For modernists, with whom he is actually more closely allied, composition provided abstraction with

a subject to replace representation. To remain actively engaged with painting, the abstract artist held tight to composition, which Mondrian's plotting of pictorial elements came to exemplify.<sup>8</sup> For Mondrian, composition was a matter of "*opposition* through color and line, and this opposition expresses plastic *relationship*. *Relationship* is what I have always sought, and that is what all painting seeks to express."<sup>9</sup> As a result of bringing oppositions into balance, but without neutralizing or cancelling them out, Mondrian achieved what he called "dynamic equilibrium." In Mondrian's art, theorist Fredric Jameson writes, "the process of abstraction has gone far enough to reveal dialectical oppositions at work, and at work in a dynamic rather than a static fashion."<sup>10</sup> Reducible to the elementary form of the binary opposition, the dialectical process—roughly, Hegel's thesis/antithesis opposition—reemerges in structuralism, which treats a work of art as a structure rather than a representation of the artist's talent, intention, or biography. As such, Mondrian's "fundamental doctrine—'all relationship is governed by one prime relationship: that of extreme opposites'—is both profoundly Hegelian and structuralist *avant la lettre*."<sup>11</sup>

By extension, Heywood's abstract paintings are functionally structuralist, a method with which he identifies.<sup>12</sup> Oppositions of up and down in the alignment of panels on the wall and left and right, countered by directional vision's attribution of unequal weight, are held in check. The strength of color and the subtlety of light result from a spectral balance of all colors, encompassing raw and painted canvas and bracketed by black and white. "The balanced relation is the purest representation of universality," wrote Mondrian, "of the harmony and unity which are inherent characteristics of the mind."<sup>13</sup> Decanting painting's formal oppositions, Heywood's viewer too is left with the pleasure of contemplative equipoise.

Frances Colpitt

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in *The Collected Essays and Criticism: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, vol. 4, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 90.
- <sup>2</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 14-36. Contrary to popular opinion, the operation of directional force "has little to do with eye movements," according to Arnheim.
- <sup>3</sup> Susan C. Larsen, "John McLaughlin," in *California: 5 Footnotes to Modern Art History*, ed. Stephanie Barron (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1977), 71.
- <sup>4</sup> John Coplans, "John McLaughlin, Hard-Edge, and American Painting," *Artforum* 2 (January 1964): 31.
- <sup>5</sup> Conversation with the author.
- <sup>6</sup> Heywood compared the colors in his paintings ("structures put together to illuminate this plane") to the structure of a musical chord. "Marks and Movement," DVD of panel discussion, Santa Monica City College, 20 November 2011.
- <sup>7</sup> William Rubin, *Frank Stella* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 37.
- <sup>8</sup> Howard Singerman, "Noncompositional Effects, or the Process of Painting in 1970," *Oxford Art Journal* 26 (2003), 129, 134.
- <sup>9</sup> Piet Mondrian, "Dialogue on the New Plastic," in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 285.
- <sup>10</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009), 33.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.
- <sup>12</sup> "I am a 'structurist,'" he asserted in conversation. Also see n. 6 above.
- <sup>13</sup> Piet Mondrian, "Natural Reality and Abstract Reality," in *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, ed. Herschel B. Chipp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 322.



*Piano #1 Canvas and Black, 2001*  
acrylic and matte medium on canvas  
16 x 36 ½ inches



*Piano #2 Canvas and Black*, 2001  
acrylic and matte medium on canvas  
16 x 36 ½ inches



*Piano #3 Canvas and Red*, 2001  
acrylic and matte medium on canvas  
16 x 36 ½ inches



*Piano #5 Canvas and Red, 2001*  
acrylic and matte medium on canvas  
16 x 36 ½ inches



*Piano #4 Canvas and Blue, 2001*  
acrylic and matte medium on canvas  
16 x 36 ½ inches





*Double Edge White, Yellow, Gray, 2008*  
acrylic on canvas and wood  
15  $\frac{3}{8}$  x 16  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches



*Double Edge Black, Red, White, 2008*  
acrylic on canvas and wood  
16 ½ x 15 ¾ inches



*Double Edge Blue, Yellow, Red, 2009*  
acrylic on canvas and wood  
22 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 21 <sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches



*Double Edge Red, Yellow, Blue, 2011*  
acrylic on canvas and wood  
19 ½ x 18 ¾ inches



*Double Edge Gray, Black, Red, 2011*  
acrylic on canvas and wood  
16 ¼ x 15 ¾ inches



*Poles Yellow, Gray, White, 2012*  
acrylic on canvas and wood  
24 ¼ x 24 ¼ inches



*Poles Yellow, White, Black, 2012*  
acrylic on canvas and wood  
24 ¼ x 24 ¼ inches

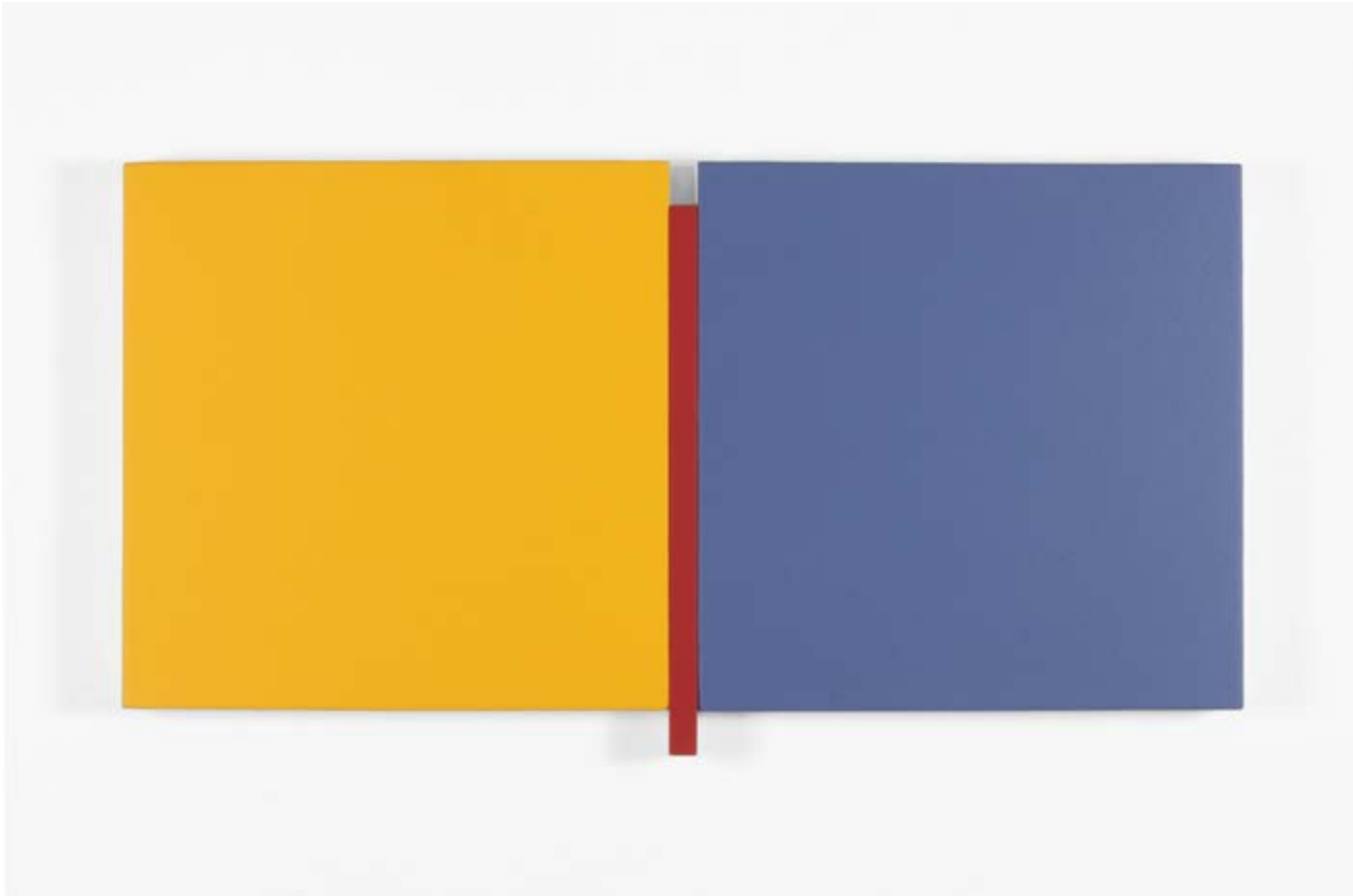


*Poles White, Black, Red, 2012*  
acrylic on canvas  
81 x 49 ¾ inches

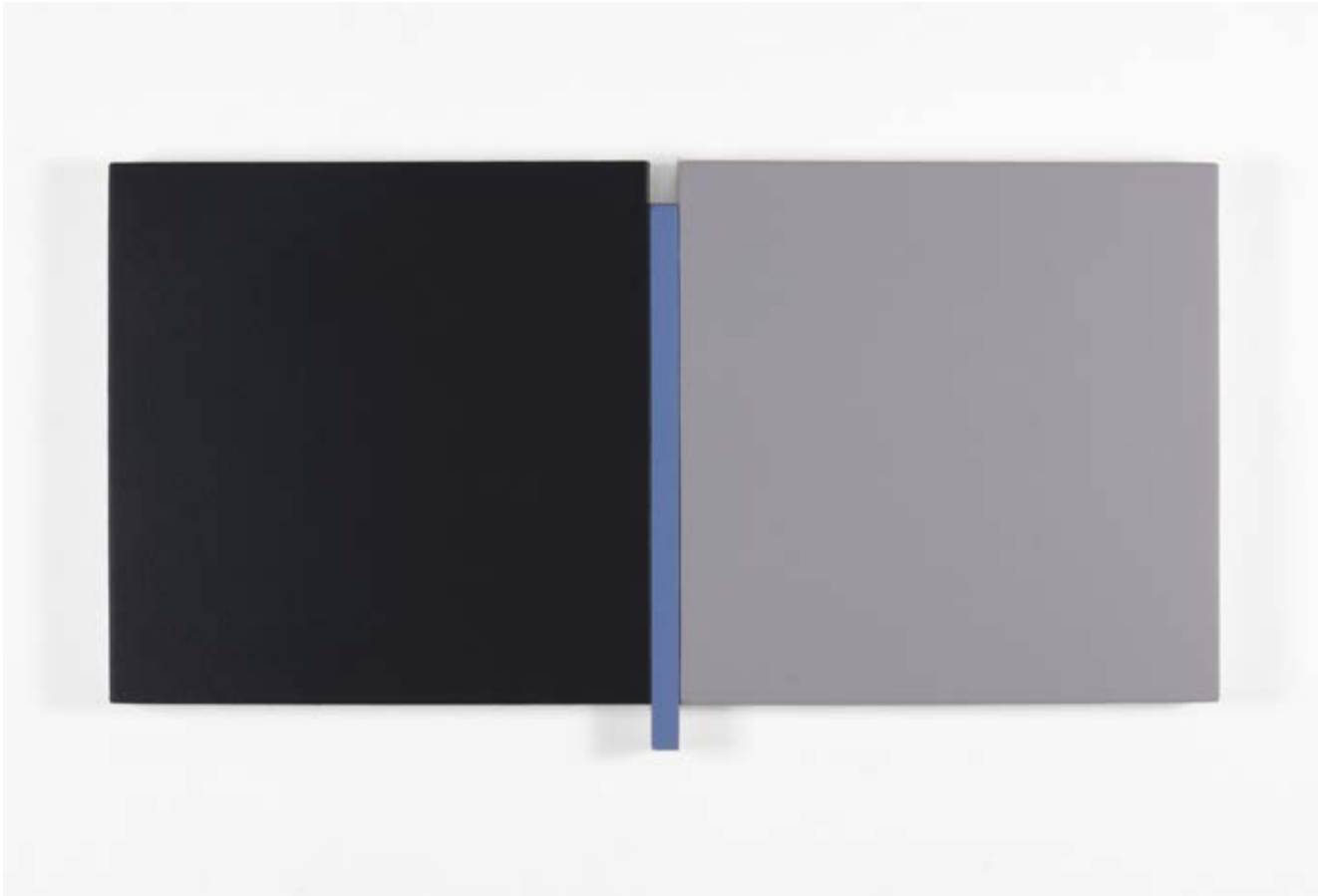




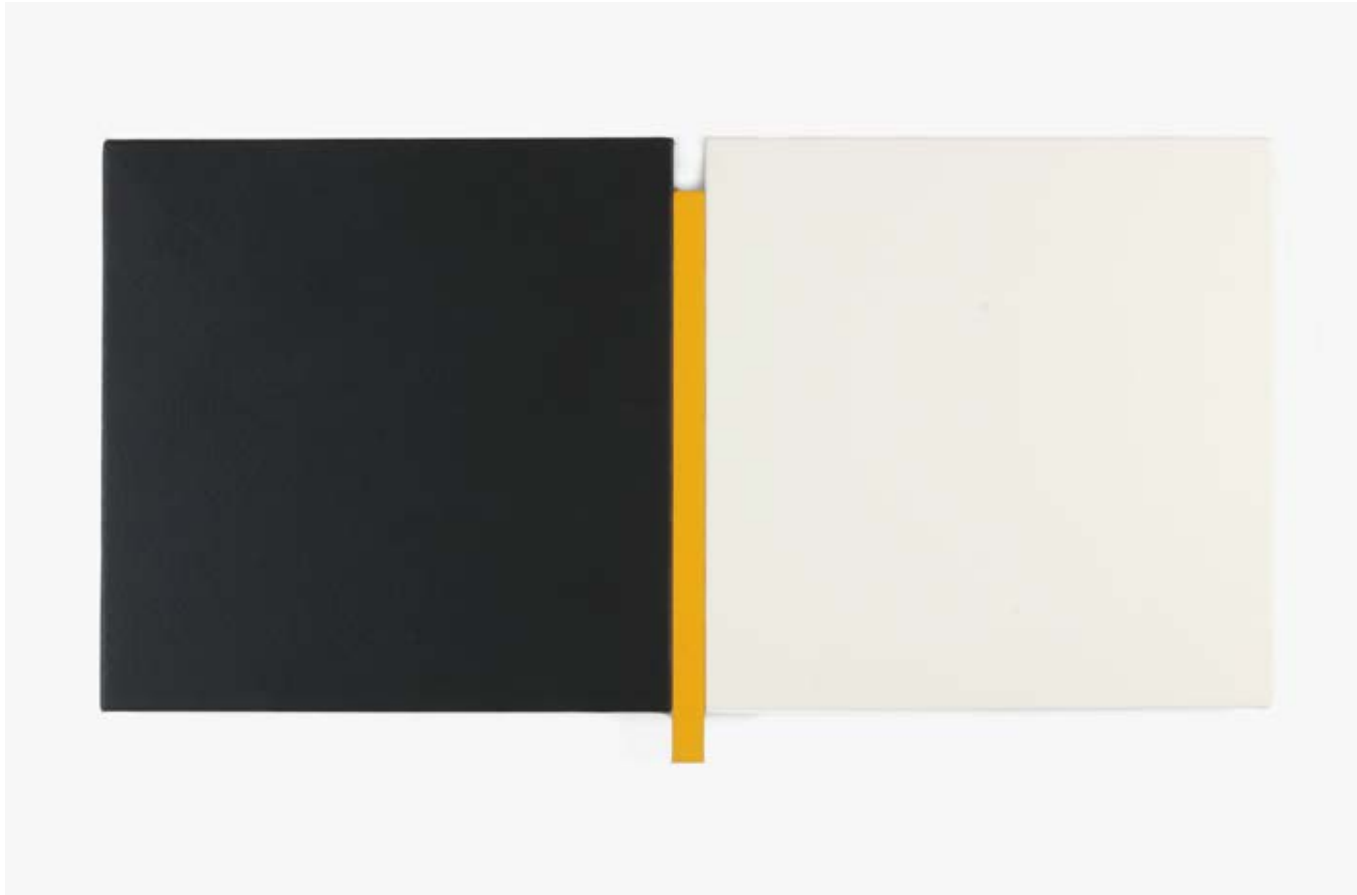
*Poles Blue, White, Black, 2013*  
acrylic on canvas  
81 x 54 inches



*Un Deux Trois Yellow, Red, Blue, 2006*  
acrylic on canvas and wood  
16 ¼ x 31 inches



*Un Deux Trois Black, Blue, Gray*, 2006  
acrylic on canvas and wood  
16 ¼ x 31 inches



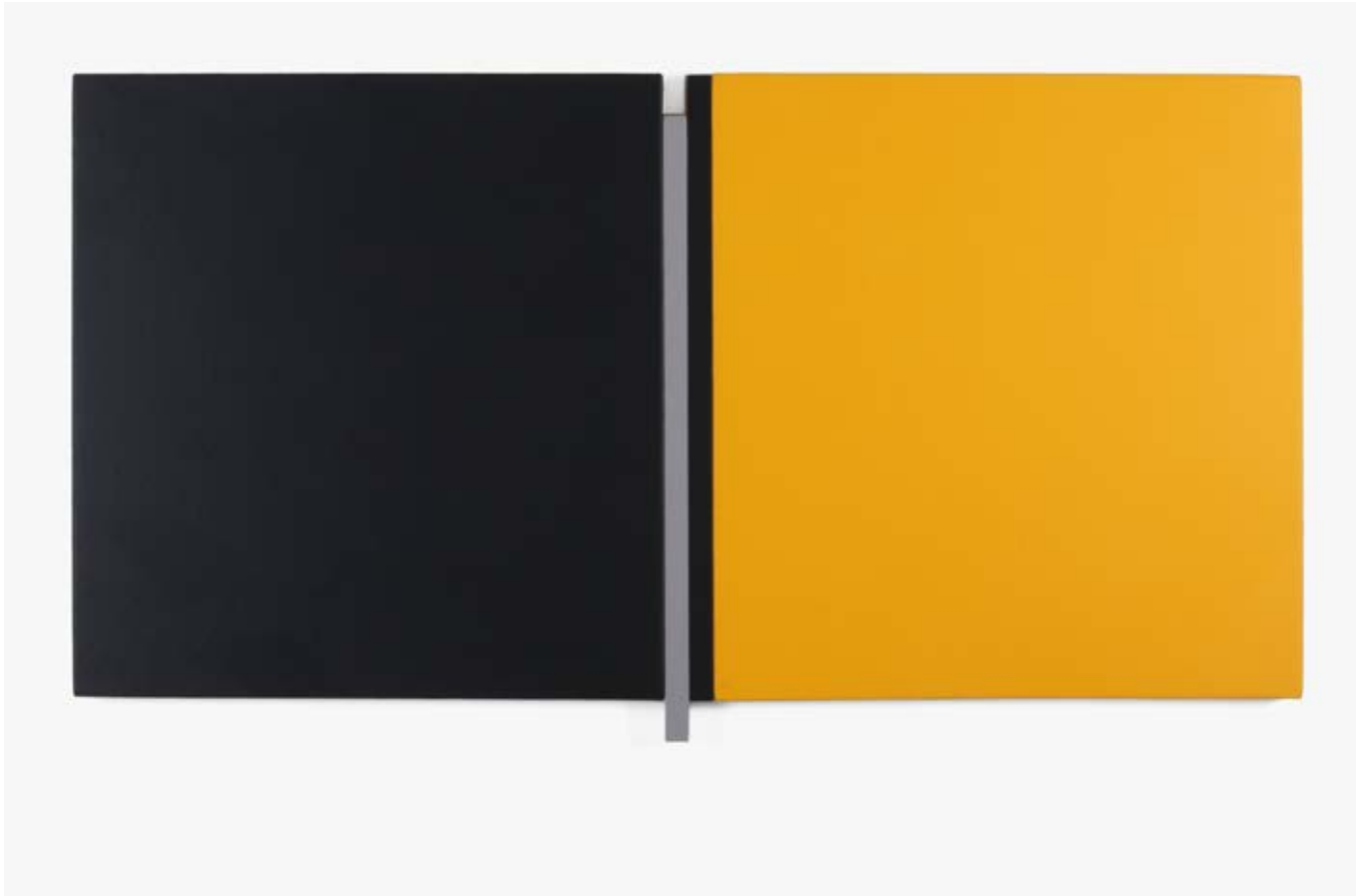
*Un Deux Trois Black, Yellow, White, 2006*  
acrylic on canvas and wood  
16 ¼ x 31 inches



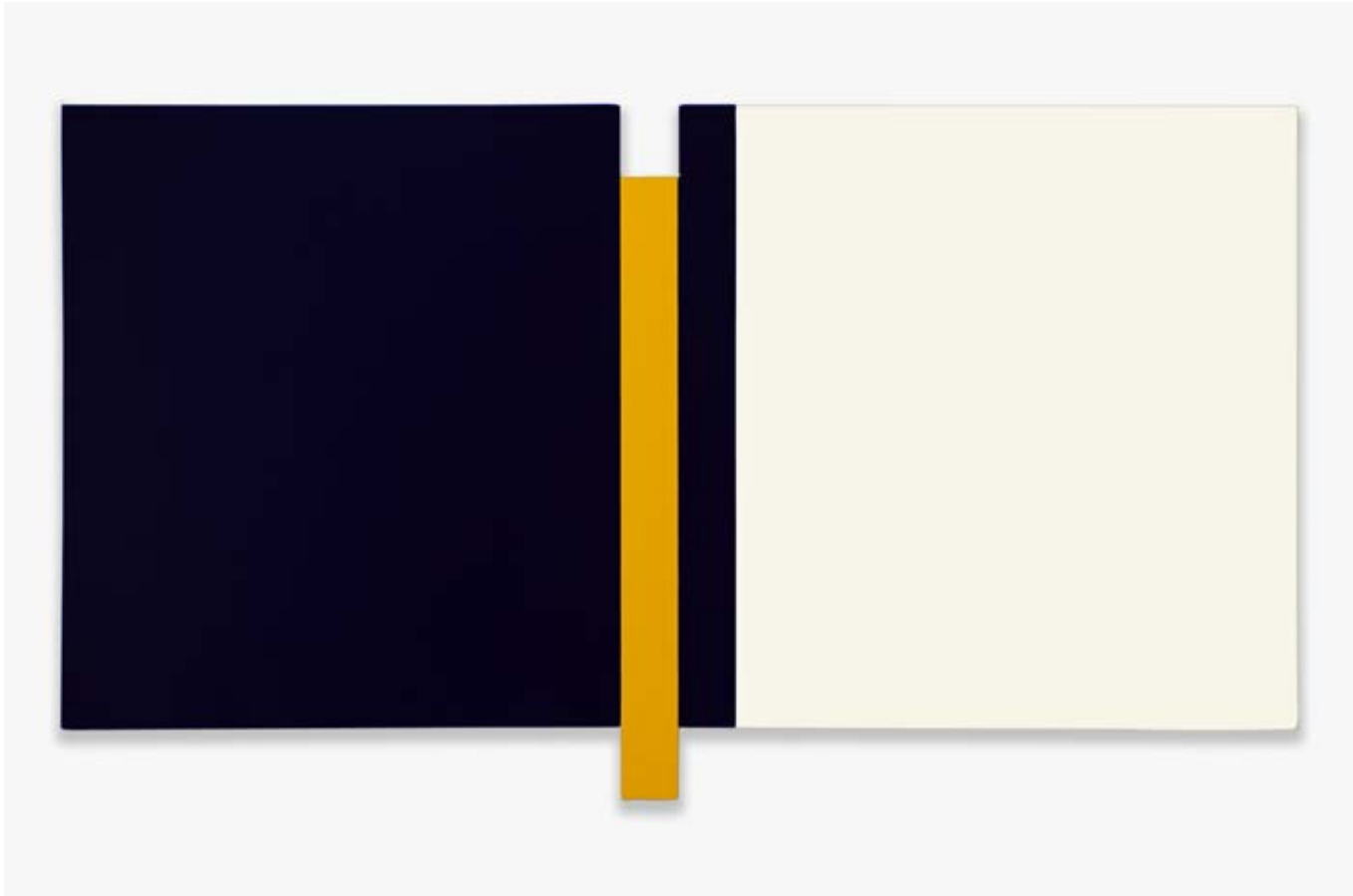
*Un Deux Trois Red, Gray, Black, 2006*  
acrylic on canvas and wood  
16 ¼ x 31 inches



*Un Deux Trois Yellow, Red, Blue, 2009*  
acrylic on canvas  
61 x 85 ½ inches

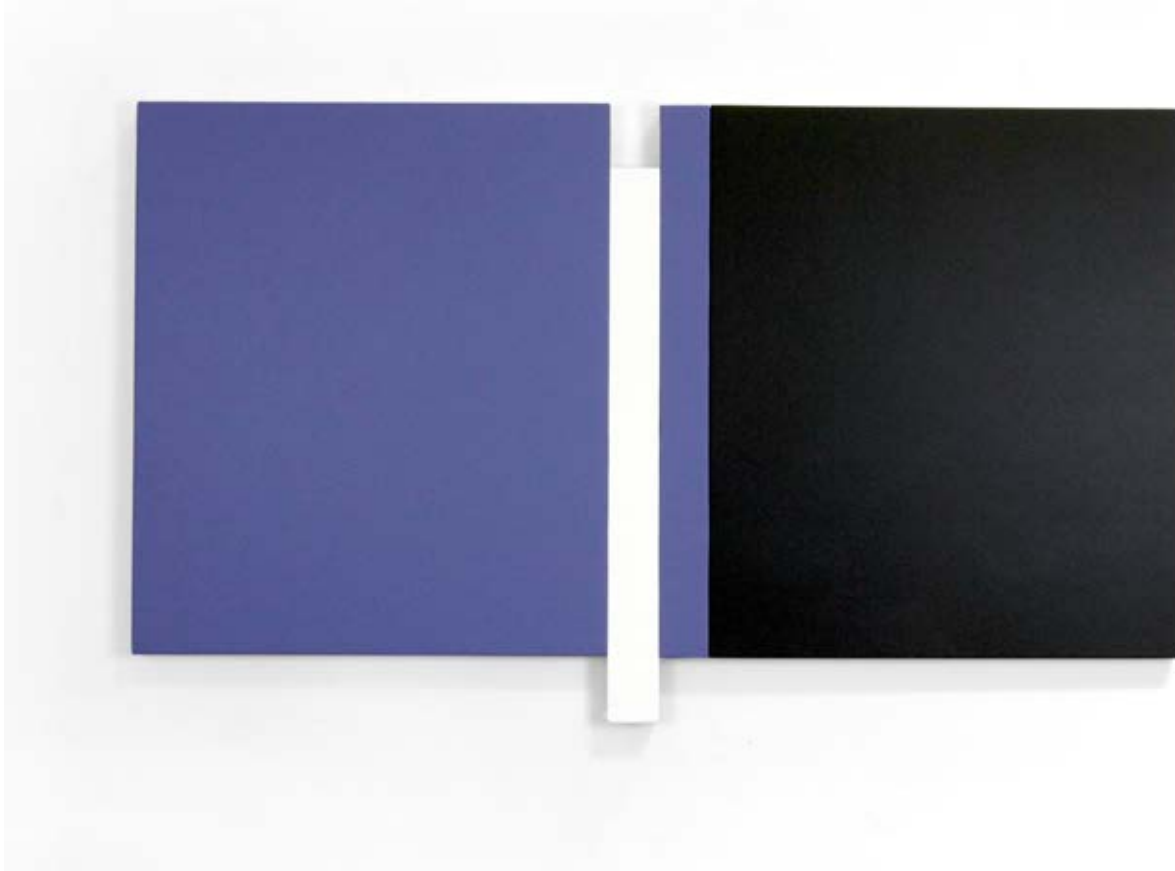


*Sunyata Black, Gray, Yellow, 2008*  
acrylic on canvas and wood  
22 ½ x 41 ¾ inches



*Sunyata Blue, Yellow, White*, 2009  
acrylic on canvas  
67 x 119 ½ inches





*Sunyata Blue, White, Black, 2009*  
acrylic on canvas  
31 ½ x 53 ½ inches



*Sunyata Red, Yellow, Black*, 2009  
acrylic on canvas  
79 ¾ x 108 ½ inches



*Sunyata Red, White, Yellow, 2013*  
acrylic on canvas  
64 x 79 inches



*Sunyata Gray, Black, Yellow and Canvas, 2013*  
acrylic on canvas  
91 ¾ x 108 inches



*Piano II* Gray, Yellow, White, 2013  
acrylic on osb  
17 ¼ x 64 inches



*Piano II Blue, White, Yellow, 2013*  
acrylic on osb  
17 ¼ x 64 inches



*Piano II Black, Red, Gray, 2013*  
acrylic on osb  
17 ¼ x 64 inches



Installation view of Scot Heywood's studio, 2013.



# Scot Heywood

1951 Born in Los Angeles, California

## One Person Exhibitions

- 2013 *A Survey of Large Paintings 2006-2013*, Barrett Art Gallery, Santa Monica, California  
*A Survey of Small Paintings*, Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica, California (catalogue)
- 2012 *Polarities*, Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica, California
- 2010 *Recent Works*, Peter Blake Gallery, Laguna Beach, California
- 2009 *New Paintings*, Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica, California  
 Peter Blake Gallery, Laguna Beach, California
- 2008 Peter Blake Gallery, Laguna Beach, California
- 2005 Hunsaker/Schlesinger Fine Art, Santa Monica, California
- 2003 Chac Mool Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- 2000 Chac Mool Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- 1998 Chac Mool Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- 1995 Ace Contemporary Exhibitions, Los Angeles, California
- 1994 Ace Contemporary Exhibitions, Los Angeles, California
- 1992 Ace Contemporary Exhibitions, Los Angeles, California
- 1990 Kiyohashi Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- 1989 Newspace, Los Angeles, California
- 1987 Newspace, Los Angeles, California

## Selected Group Exhibitions

1986 Newspace, Los Angeles, California

- 2013 *Polyform: Larry Bell, Scot Heywood, Gustavo Pérez, Mark Pharis*, Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica, California
- 2012 *California Abstract Painting 1952-2011* (Curated by James Hayward), Woodbury University Nan Rae Gallery, Burbank, California
- 2011 *Less is More*, Subliminal Projects Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- Marks and Movement: Five Painters, Edith Baumann, James Hayward, Scot Heywood, John M. Miller & Ed Moses*, Santa Monica College Pete and Susan Barrett Art Gallery, Santa Monica, California, (catalogue)
- Three Abstract Painters: John McLaughlin, James Hayward, Scot Heywood*, Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica, California
- 2009 *Lita Albuquerque, Scot Heywood and Andy Moses*, Peter Blake Gallery, Laguna Beach, California
- 2008 *Planes and Surfaces: James Hayward, Larry Bell, Scot Heywood, Wouter Dam*, Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica, California  
*Fifteen Years/ Fifteen Artists*, Peter Blake Gallery, Laguna Beach, California  
*Color Blind: Black, White and Grey in Contemporary Art*, Cardwell Jimmerson

- Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California  
*Tony DeLap and Scot Heywood*, Peter Blake Gallery, Laguna Beach, California
- 2007 *Black and White*, Frank Lloyd Gallery, Santa Monica, California  
*Monochrome Painting: Some Versions from Ad Reinhardt to Present*, Cardwell Jimmerson Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California  
*West Coast Abstraction*, Peter Blake Gallery, Laguna Beach, California
- 2006 *A Little So Cal Abstraction*, Mandarin Gallery, Los Angeles, California (catalogue)  
*That's Hot*, Charlotte Jackson Fine Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico
- 2000 *Spring Fever*, Charlotte Jackson Fine Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico  
*Luminous*, Ikon, Ltd./Kay Richards Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California  
*Simply Complex: Monochromatic Paintings from L.A.* (Curated by Reuben M. Baron and Joan Boykoff Baron), Dorsky Gallery, New York
- 1999 *Under 500/Intimate Abstract Painting*, Black Dragon Society, Los Angeles, California
- 1998 *Starting with McLaughlin*, Patricia Faure Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- 1997 *Abstraction in Los Angeles*, New Image Art, Los Angeles, California
- 1996 *Red Painting*, Newspace, Los Angeles, California
- 1994 *Plane/Structures* (Curated by David Pagel), Otis Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, California  
*In Plane Sight: Abstract Painting in Los Angeles* (Curated by Frances Colpitt), Blue Star Art Space, San Antonio, Texas
- 1992 *New L.A. Abstraction*, Art Gallery, College of the Mainlands, Texas City, Texas  
*Group Show*, Burnett Miller Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- 1991 *Group Show*, Kiyo Higashi Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- 1989 *Art and Soul*, Pence Gallery, Los Angeles, California  
*Los Angeles Current Abstract Painting*, Marc Richards Gallery, Los Angeles, California
- 1988 *Primary Abstraction: Los Angeles*, Modernism Gallery, San Francisco, California
- 1985 *Tenth Anniversary Exhibition*, Newspace, Los Angeles, California  
*Divisions: Seven Los Angeles Painters*, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California
- 1984 *New Clear Painting*, Newspace, Los Angeles, California

- 1983 *New Abstract Painters from Los Angeles*, San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, California
- 1982 *In the Tradition*, Group Studio Show, Los Angeles, California
- 1980 *Abstract Painting*, Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, California
- 1979 *Group Exhibition*, Vanguard Gallery, Los Angeles, California
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