

## Lawrence Fodor / *Holding Light*

*In nature, light creates the color. In the picture, color creates the light.*  
- Hans Hofmann

Lawrence Fodor is best known for his opulent and densely layered paintings representing the sublime force of earth and sea - the heft, splendor, and profusion of existence. They are commanding, expressive, and vigorous. Regardless of scale they have a substantial presence, deeply grounded in the colors and textures of the natural world. In the words of art critic Sarah King for *Art in America* "these compositions often suggest lush vegetation, desert, sky or water perceived from close angles." The sculptural tiers of rich paint, wax, and alkyd evoke a visceral desire to breathe in the scent of resonant oil and run my fingertips over their lavishly textured surfaces.

Fodor's new body of watercolor on paper is a stunning departure. It is a shift in scale, medium, process, and impact. Delicate strands of monochrome paint loop and interlace atop small squares of archival paper mounted upon a block of apple plywood. At each intersecting line of color a tiny form emerges - a glimmering point of light beneath a complex web. Dapples of negative space flicker and undulate beneath tangles of watery paint.

These paintings are disconcerting in scale – at just 7 by 7 inches they belie their size and feel vast and limitless. Their impact lies in the incalculable space between mark and omission, presence and absence, pigment and void. They are spider webs, honeycombs, oceans, galaxies. As Fodor describes, "The small paintings begin as a microcosm or a meditation on the finite in order to access the infinite or the external. I have always thought that the only way to access the infinite, the universal, or the collective unconscious was to go deep within the personal." Or in the words of author Henry Miller, "the moment one gives close attention to any thing, even a blade of grass it becomes a mysterious, awesome, indescribably magnificent world in itself."

Each carefully placed line of watercolor circumscribes a space of untouched paper - a spontaneous flash of light and beauty. Fodor counts each point as it is created. He makes a line on the page for every 100 points of light that appears, then makes a notation of the numeric on the reverse of each block of plywood - the total number ranging in the works from 1,600 to 2,600. Each small painting is then added to a larger grid, creating a matrix of hundreds of thousands of small points of shimmering light. There is a tension in each piece between the meticulous rigor of process and installation and the twinkling chaos that explodes from each small painting.

The precise detail of the work brings to mind Vija Celmins' delicate graphite drawings of night skies, spider webs, and oceans. As described by curator Poul Erik Tøjner, her "gaze from the small sheet of paper out into the starry oceans of the universe expresses what the intimate format can contain: everything from the smallest to the greatest." The organic and infinite undulations of Fodor's paintings have a clear visual connection to Yayoi Kusama's infinity nets, described by the artist as "without beginning, end, or center. The entire canvas would be occupied by [a] monochromatic net. This endless repetition caused a kind of dizzy, empty, hypnotic feeling."

The simplicity of abstraction and pursuit of beauty bears a close relationship to Agnes Martin. Deeply guided by Eastern philosophy, Martin explored in her paintings the abundance, mystery, and beauty of existence with painstaking simplicity. In her words, "Beauty and happiness and life are all the same and they are pervasive, unattached and abstract and they are our only concern. They are immeasurable, completely lacking in substance. They are perfect and sublime. This is the subject matter of art."

Beyond all art historical reference, however, these watercolors trace the trajectory and continuum of Fodor's own artistic process. Light radiates from the rich oil paintings as a result of the viscosity of the medium, its impasto-like texture, months of adding layer upon layer of paint. The small watercolors shimmer with spare simplicity, the beauty and mystery of the spaces left untouched. Points of light shimmer through each delicately painted line, radiance emerging through intentional omission.

I see this exhibition in three parts – individual 7-by-7-inch squares, the 81-piece grid installation, and the large oil paintings. Threaded throughout the whole are shimmering points of light, the beauty of creation, an attempt to touch the indefinable vastness of the human experience. As Fodor describes: "There is a paradox within this all. While I am attempting to give 'definition' it is ultimately impossible. Never the less I am compelled to try – to define – to count (like all humans struggle to give definition to their lives) and in doing so I am ultimately 'pointing out' the indefinable nature of it all."

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