Nail polish drawings

In 1950 Ellsworth Kelly made a unique drawing by dripping green ink onto a vertical sheet of paper, creating what he called an “automatic drawing”. In May of 1999 I worked with Mr. Kelly to hang that drawing at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta.

My work takes a heavy focus on line. The Kelly exhibition challenged me in a way that I have never been challenged before. Many of his drawings looked exactly like my current body of work with juxtaposed panels in a variety of colors. It confirmed my ideas in art while also confusing me. The visual language was very similar, but the content was completely different. It brought me to the conclusion that I needed to try to understand why and how Kelly was making his work. So I set out on a search for understanding, I ended with approximately 80 pieces of art that I call the Kelly Re-drawings. The project literally consisted of tearing my favor pieces in the exhibition out of the catalog, and re-drawing directly over the printed works on the catalog pages.

In the process, I did two versions of the 1950 automatic drawing, but I re-drew the lines in nail polish. I had been using nail polish in my former color studies for larger works. The polish became a cost effective serogate material to automotive enamels. I also loved the role of sexual reversal that happened by switching the materials. I had thought about using model car enamels, but the nail polish became not just a feminine material, but sexually charged at the same time, in the complete opposite way as hot rod and sports car enamels. I felt the drawings were moving into a direction that directly reflected the cocaine culture of the art, fashion and celebrity world with the stiletto thin lines.

That was 12 years ago. The drawings seem just as timelessly fresh and the stilettos are taller. I attribute this to the fact that the works are based in modernism. In addition to Kelly I was really looking at people like Helen Frankenthaler, Friedel Dzubas, and Gene Davis. It wasn’t until later that I really saw the relationship to Morris Louis and other stain painters.

For me the paintings are really based in line and drawing, keeping in the true spirit of Kelly’s automatic drawing. The lines that make up the pieces reflect ideas of human life for me. The all start the same and end the same, but it the path that each line takes creates the composition. The paintings are rather liberating to make, I select the size, colors and arrangement. The lines activate the pure white space leaving a document on the action as an artifact.

The colors for me start to talk about personal interests for not just me but the viewer. So many times I hear men say, I had a car that color, or women attempting to match the color they are wearing. I often wonder who wears many of the colors.