



CAROL REED: *paper arches*

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Carol Reed is a painter of abstractions, continuing a tradition that was born in the feverish years of artistic experimentation before the First World War. The push toward abstract art was “explained” by Kandinsky in his seminal statement of 1911, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. When he wrote the celebrated phrase, “Form is the outward expression of [. . .] inner meaning,” Kandinsky painted with little regard to objective reality, freely filling his canvases or sheets of paper with organic forms and vibrant colors in a spontaneous expressionistic manner. His approach was, as the Germans would say, *malerisch*. A few years later, exposed to the constructivist avant-garde of Russia during WWI, he developed a more rational type of abstraction, dominated by geometric compositions and a controlled use of color, a style that he then refined and perfected in his eleven years at the Bauhaus.

In what she calls her “search for logic,” Carol Reed draws on both these traditions of abstract art, the organic and geometric. Drawing straight lines, polygons, curved lines, circles or parts of circles, manipulating so as to “correcting” and re-stating them, Reed explores their formal and expressive possibilities. Working for many years in black and white and the many shades in between, she has recently begun to introduce color to her abstract compositions, adding thus layers of emotional content to her original motifs. Color appears like a subjective commentary on the objective geometry of line and shape. Freed from its earlier descriptive function, it creates a visceral resonance of which Delacroix was perhaps the first great master, inspiring later romantics, symbolists, and expressionists to further develop and refine its magic qualities. Among Reed’s more recent experimentation with color and abstraction, *Tattoo House* (2016) is exemplary. We notice an armature of polygons, shapes that have been tentatively sketched at the edges of a large sheet but are worked on more intensively as the artist moves to the center. They are cut into or opened up, filled with patterns like chevrons, herring bones, scales, checkerboard and dots; they are worked with paint by staining, smudging, and spattering surfaces, resulting in fuzzy edges and defaced contours. This sophisticated handling of polygons is just one aspect of Reed’s art. Adding color is another. It opens a new dimension, enriching her “search for logic,” while presenting fresh challenges. Breaking free from her previous self-imposed “exile” in black-and-white territory, Reed seizes the inherent possibilities of color; but with its myriad associations, it may also seduce and mislead the artist or viewer whose goal is harmony and balance or, say, a truce between expressionism and constructivism. The achievement of *Tattoo House* and other recent work, all mixed media on paper, is Reed’s subtle integration of color in her persistent investigation of the formal nature of line and shape. Her tone is deliberately restrained. Cool blues rein in warm browns, razor sharp lines confer clarity on spontaneous drips and daubs. With her abstractions, Reed is bringing a serious, measured voice to today’s art conversation, perfectly in tune with the general rejection of grand gestures and romantic views of art and society.

Erich Keel served as Head of Education for the Kreeger Museum until his retirement in 2013. Currently, he lectures on twentieth-century German art, leads art-themed study tours to Europe, and serves as a volunteer curator for the Arts Club of Washington exhibition program. Keel earned a Ph.D. in Critical Theory from Emory University.