

Art Reviews

A Transgenerational and Intercultural Look at Abstract Painting

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by Alexandra M. Thomas
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Installation view of *Color/Code* at Morgan Presents gallery (all photos by the author)

A world steeped in abundant color and enticing designs, [Color/Code](#) at [Morgan Presents](#) embraces the mystery and expressive possibility of abstraction. Staging a visual dialogue between two artists of different generations — [Sam Jablon](#) and [Odili Donald Odita](#) — the exhibition is an invitation to ponder the chemistry

between varied approaches to abstract painting. Large-scale works are dispersed evenly throughout the white cube gallery with two on each side wall and one on a floating wall furthest from the entrance. From across the gallery, the painting facing the entrance is legible: “BAD BAD BAD” in yellow paint against a cloudy, midnight-blue-hued background. Evocation of such pessimism — BAD BAD BAD — is at first discombobulating in an exhibition replete with bold, happy colors. When exploring the other paintings, *Color/Code* becomes a riddle: There are no wall texts, but the QR-code-enabled press release includes a checklist. Deducing the artist of each painting is possible through recognizing each artist’s style or following the checklist like a scavenger hunt: the “BAD” textual paintings are by Jablon and the rainbow geometric designs are by Oditá.

What, then, are we to make of the meaning, various colors, and visual impact of each artist’s style? Both paintings by Oditá are of angular lines jutting across the canvas to form pointed, neat geometric shapes rendered in deep, earthy shades of brown, blue, and red. One Jablon painting has a cotton-candy-hued background with orange letters: “NO BAD DAYS.” The harshness of the word “bad” is softened by the blurry letters and swirled backgrounds, while the sharp angularity of Oditá’s paintings lend the energetic, colorful works a distinct edginess. Both artists are harnessing the power of abstraction as opacity: The so-called “meaning” of each painting is seemingly impenetrable. Is Jablon attempting to manifest a world without badness? Or are these days and nights so endlessly rife with bad that this insistence is playful, even laughable? Likewise, the playful energy of Oditá’s contrasting warm and cool colors invites further exploration until we are gently stymied by the impassable, criss-crossing pointed lines. At the root of these works is the issue of poetics — painterly and textual for Jablon, dynamic, multicolor geometry for Oditá. Displayed alongside each other, the paintings spark questions about the limits and possibilities of abstraction to communicate feelings or ideas through text, color, and form.



Installation view of *Color/Code* at Morgan Presents, at left, Sam Jablon, "NO BAD DAYS," (2021) oil on canvas, 90 x 80 inches; and at right, Odili Donald Odita "Power Line" (2003) acrylic on canvas, 84 x 109 inches

As the inaugural exhibition for Morgan Presents, *Color/Code* sets the tone for exhibitions that promote deeper looking and experimental dialogue, instead of merely communicating a linear art historical narrative or a neatly packaged curatorial philosophy for commercial purposes. Eschewing didactics such as wall texts and longer form exhibition essays, visitors are left to their own devices. Such a bold curatorial decision, especially for a brand new gallery, sincerely emphasizes the importance of transgenerational and intercultural exhibitions where the viewer must make meaning for themselves.

Color/Code: Sam Jablon & Odili Donald Odita continues at **Morgan Presents** (155 Suffolk Street, Lower East Side, Manhattan) through November 2.

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