

*FREQUENCIES: BLUR & FOCUS*

by Lauren Buscemi

Stanley Casselman renders mesmerizing paintings that transport and transfix through bold drips, washes of color, line, and vast receding forms. *Frequencies: Blur & Focus* at Scott White Contemporary Art highlights Casselman's experimental process maximizing the innovative potential of polyester screen. Over the past thirty years, between L.A. and N.Y., Casselman has prolifically created pulsating absorbing works. Today, he maintains a studio at Mana Fine Arts, Jersey City where his work caught the attention of Scott White. Inclined toward abstract expressionism and color field, Casselman cites Pollock and Rothko as influences. Yet, Casselman's work is distinctly contemporary through an unconventional and unrelenting approach to painting.

*Frequencies* skirts the line between spontaneity and control. Random occurrence is embraced, but Casselman shapes his paintings through a labor intensive process. Working entirely from the back of the screen, Casselman executes controlled lines using tape contrasted with loose fading sweeps of color made by pouring concentrated areas of pigment along the top edge of a painting and squeegeeing the mass across the surface. Working from the back Casselman notes, "It allows precision and perfection, wild things can occur adjacent to each other but they are kept separate and pure due to having been screened from the back. It's analogous to painting on glass; however, instead of being flat, my paintings have a dynamic and varied surface."

Prior to *Frequencies*, Casselman painted on canvas for his *Inhaling Richter* series, a body of work resulting from a well-documented response to a proposition presented by New York Magazine art critic Jerry Saltz, "to fake a Richter." Casselman, quite conflicted about the idea of trying to copy Gerhard Richter but well versed in the use of a squeegee, eventually took on the challenge and prevailed. Embracing Richter's painting process enabled Casselman to expand his repertoire. He states, "moving enormous volumes of pigment around and with a squeegee up to ten feet in width gave me a vast and immersive education in color. Inherent in that practice is to be on the precipice of in and out of control and thus it led to things I couldn't have possibly preconceived or produced in any other fashion." At the beginning of 2016 Casselman felt compelled to move forward and embarked on *Frequencies*.

With *Frequencies* he returned to his roots using polyester screen, an open or porous fabric meant to have liquid pass through it. Casselman noticed early on in his practice that if one doubles or layers the screen a moiré pattern is created. Many of the Frequency paintings incorporate moiré patterns providing a sense of energy as one's eyes travel across the surface or as one physically engages with the work. This effect is pronounced in *Frequency-F7IV-V* where Casselman exhibits the work in an aluminum box-beam frame, an industrial device to stretch screen. The frame appeals to Casselman due to its untreated nature of exposed flaws and welds. Cantilevered out from the wall, the frame provides a sculptural platform allowing the image and its surrounding moiré to float and breathe in space.

The individual titles of the Frequency paintings, such as *Frequency-F7IV-V*, derive from Casselman's fascination with astronomy. The numbers and letters represent stellar classifications of stars in the Ursa Major constellation. Casselman chose Ursa Major due to its close proximity to the Hubble telescope's deep field image. When discussing the deep field image Casselman speaks passionately, stating, "In 1995 Hubble was pointed at a tiny patch of sky. The size of a dime held seventy-five feet away from one's eye to be specific. This little area was thought to be empty, devoid of stars or the like. Hubble was trained on it for ten days and to the amazement of the astronomical world it revealed several thousand galaxies. A galaxy, by the way typically contains around 100 billion stars. So the take away for me is not the magnitude of the discovery, but the idea that the truth to the universe, our truth, is fluid and constantly expanding."

The linear bands in the Frequency paintings loosely relate to the idea of what's contained in the light that makes up a star or its stellar classification. Casselman explains, "Starlight seen through a prism splits into a rainbow that is interspersed with bands or absorption lines. Each line indicates a certain ion of a chemical element. Beyond all of the specifics and the physics, what's interesting to me is that what we see or the chemical make up of nearly any star is all of the same stuff that not only surrounds our lives here on earth, but much of what you and I are made up of as well."

In terms of the notion, "Blur and Focus", it is the balance between blur and focus Casselman seeks in *Frequencies*. This is reflected in *Frequencies-1-4*, where expansive blurred fades composed of lavender, purple, white, and black provide a vortex-like contrast with focused drips and bands of sharp color – bright yellow verticals, and a single vivid line of fuchsia. *Blur and Focus* also plays with the way we visually experience our surroundings, Casselman states, "The way we see the world - what we are looking at is in focus and what's closer or far away is not. Our eyes instantly refocus as we change our gaze so conceptually we think that everything in our surrounding is always in focus, but in the physics and reality of seeing, it's not." Casselman wrestles with his effusive appetite for color, and an appreciation for the restraint of minimalism. He states, "It's a constant struggle in my practice wanting to make the brightest, loudest, most 'fuck you' paintings, contrasted by things you are going to be seduced by and meditate with."

Casselmann concluded *Frequencies* with *Frequency-G8IV*, a black and white painting with intense drips of yellow. Vertical motion of rich varying texture in the background contrasts with elegant drips of yellow in the foreground. Casselman notes the work felt like a natural conclusion to *Frequencies*. He states, "It's almost like I could never go there again. I don't know what happened in that moment, but the series felt complete. It was nice to end on such a strong note."

Pushing boundaries, exploring the possibilities of painting and challenging himself are key to Casselman's practice. He turns out an inexhaustible number of paintings, but not even half meet his standard, whereas those fallen by the wayside evolve his process. Creating captivating work, Casselman raises the bar for contemporary painting.