

Tuesday, March 3rd, 2020



Tsibi Geva: Structure and Entropy

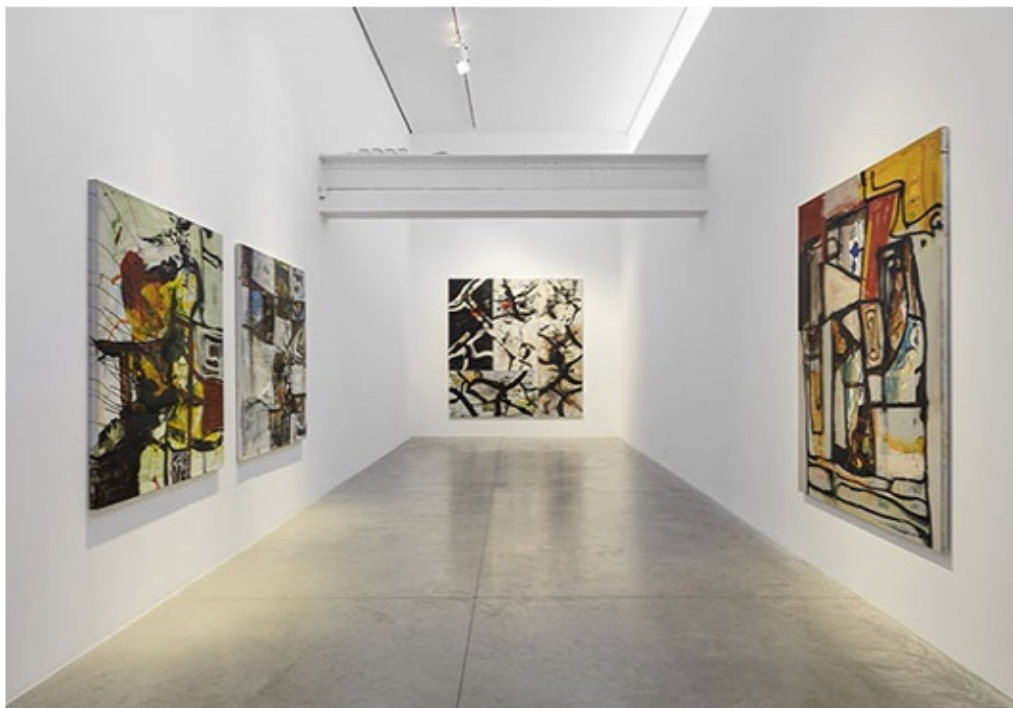
by Robert C. Morgan

Tsibi Geva: Substrata at Albertz Benda Gallery

January 9 – February 15, 2020

515 W 26th Street, between 10th and 11th avenues

New York City, albertzbenda.com



Installation shot of the exhibition under review, Tsibi Geva at Albertz Benda, 2020

“Tsibi Geva: Structure and Entropy.” *Artercritical*, 4 Mar. 2020, artcritical.com/2020/03/03/robert-c-morgan-on-tsibi-geva/.

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In contrast to the figure based abstract paintings shown at Tsibi Geva's first exhibition at Albertz Benda Gallery in late 2017, the current show presents an ensemble of pattern-based gestural abstractions. Titled *Substrata*, the recent work focuses entirely on what Geva believes is the ground structure of painting, the very foundation of what he sees while walking around that inspires him to paint, anything from the terrazzo tiles under his feet to the mesmeric glimpses of urban Mediterranean patterns on the buildings around him. There is little concern for going outside the parameters of materiality or concretizing the narrative scope of what surrounds him. Over the years, Tsibi Geva's paintings have persistently taken their own course. There is nothing explicitly formal about his surfaces. Nor do his paintings attempt to follow the direction of a style of pictorial nominalism. The artist prefers to remain conscious within the act of painting rather than insisting that the unconscious is the derivation of his aesthetic. Despite Geva's fierce attention to the gesture, it is not possible to place him in the context of "action painting." This is not the origin of what Geva is about. He is a thinking painter, not a romantic.

Born and raised on Kibbutz Ein Shemer close to sixty-nine years ago, Geva is a painter with a significant history, which needs to be taken into account. In the process of growing up with an architect father, the concern for seeing and understanding structure was a preeminent aspect of his education. Eventually, the artist's acute awareness of structure discovered a counterpart that leaned inadvertently in the direction of decoration whereby the grid – influenced by the presence of Bauhaus buildings in Israel – would eventually give way to what Geva called "entropy." He would soon designate "irregular patterns" that included ornamentation as having expressive content as a complement to formal structure.

While growing up in relative proximity to a Palestinian village, Geva had indirect, though distant access to experiencing the vernacular architecture around him. This included various collaged improvisations he witnessed in Bedouin homes built on the high desert region near the border (that eventually changed after 1967). Even so, these innately organic structures offered the young artist an alternative way of perceiving form – in essence a type of form without form. This complementary relationship began to merge into his work as a painter. This became particularly evident in a series of paintings based on *Keffiyeh* scarf patterns, worn by Arab men, which appeared to some viewers of Geva's paintings during the 1980s and 90s as a semi-radical motif.

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Tsibi Geva, Untitled, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and Albertz Benda Gallery

The paintings currently on view at Albertz Benda open another door for Geva. It is a somewhat ironic door in that it returns to the notion that the concept of structure – whatever that might be – is no longer within the realm of isolation. Given that all the paintings in the show are untitled, and painted in acrylic on canvas (with one painted in acrylic and oil), and all executed in 2019, (except one from 2018), I will proceed according to measurement and description. The painting I wish to address is constructed with six panels of which three are rectangular and three are square. Together the six panels constitute a single large square painting on the rear wall of the back gallery.

The focus on structure, of course, has not gone away even as the gestural force of the painting lends its overwhelming presence. Emphasis is given to the quadrilateral shape, the scale, the relative isolation of each gesture, and to the color

black. The painted backgrounds of the various canvases reveal light earth colors with sparingly applied touches of the three primaries, which are scarcely noticeable. Of the various works chosen for display in *Substrata*, this painting carries the most significant magnitude. The balance between the entropic gestural forms and the unique architectonic construction of the painting's support appears to have found a profound match. Nothing is left hovering.

The paintings on view in *Substrata* are indeed “entropic gestural forms.” But they also have a structure buried within them, a sense of geometry given over to floating particles in space, reminiscent of the torn paper works of Hans Arp or intensely applied gestural fields where the paint ruptures our ability to find a discreet form.

There is a distance between language and entropy in terms of how form is identified. But for Geva, the form becomes less important than the repetition.

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There is no real narrative in these paintings, no exact timeline. There is another vertical rectangular painting where the hardedge sectioning has been obliterated and replaced by square black nets in with two nondescript banners in red and blue monitoring one another near the top. It is doubtful to suggest that the particulars have meaning in such paintings. Therefore, we turn to the allover process – to the unclear borders, the borders Geva knows so well – not only in the academic or political sense, but in the painting sense. Here we may grasp the sense of a painting, where in Geva's case, everything is let loose, where the turbulence becomes amenable and striated, deceased and overturned, one layer upon another. The process assumes to be endless. However, once the structure is intact, and once we discover how and where it exists, the painting comes alive on its own terms. We have no further to go other than to acknowledge where we have been. Finally, we are able to open the door to the present.



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