



CREATING THE NEW CENTURY

Contemporary Art from the Dicke Collection

For the last decade my paintings have been made as acrylic paint bodies that are displayed folded or rolled over rods or attached directly to the wall in a way that allows for their reattachment to different architectural environments. At a material level, the work has a deliberately ambiguous relationship to some of the ideologically constructed certainties of abstraction. Most obviously, they become paintings and sculpture simultaneously—embodying two- and three-dimensional elements. They also complicate the inherent visual and historical vocabularies of painting by blurring the fundamental formal and perceptual binary structures of painting: surface-ground; flat-spatial; front-back, etc.

Fold #71 is a 6-x-6 ft. painting and, like all my folds, is based on the “golden rectangle.” The Golden Rectangle refers to a geometric rectangle ratio for classical ideal form in a painting. Each fold is made from a sheet of paint that is essentially a folded golden rectangle. In other words, **Fold #71** hangs at 6 x 6 ft. but is actually a 6-x-9-ft. sheet of paint folded at the “top” third. My interest was to find a way to make a painting that both reflected the history of ideal forms and undermined that history. The “image” of **Fold #71** consists of a grid made—not from hard edges—but rather of a series of vertical and horizontal gestures.

Subverting the traditional understanding of the medium of painting, Linda Besemer creates objects that defy classification. Made entirely of acrylic paint, they are built up layer by layer so thickly that the paint acts as its own support, eliminating the need for a canvas. Besemer reinvents paint as both a form and a medium. Her work can be interpreted as a feminist response to the way artists apply paint—an act of “masculine” domination over the passive, receiving, “feminine” canvas. Another aspect of the work that reinforces a feminist reading is the presentation of the “painting” draped over what could be a towel or curtain rod, referencing domestic environments, conventionally women’s territory.¹

Compared with the seeming insouciance of the finished work, Besemer’s art-making process is laborious and complex. The *Fold* series is especially difficult to execute, as the works are double-sided. She first applies paint to a sheet of glass to form the top layer. Next she fills in the background with lines and grids, and bulks up the core with layers of white acrylic. She then works her way to the opposite surface, filling in the background and ending with a second foreground. When the paint dries, she peels the rubbery acrylic sheet off the glass

and hangs it over a wall-mounted aluminum pole so that both sides are displayed.

In the *Fold* series, the folded grid of horizontal and vertical stripes appears from afar to form a single plane. In *Fold #71* Besemer has simultaneously channeled and inverted Op Art, a style in which the optical illusion of swelling or bending is generated in a flat work. Besemer’s glossy reflective surface, with its intersections of brightly painted stripes, compounds our optical disorientation. Our first clue that the surface is actually two is the misalignment of the grids. Once we perceive the work’s three-dimensionality, we can begin to appreciate the many elements that Besemer deftly brings together: painting and sculpture, front and back, surface and substance, form and content. In freeing painting from canvas, she opens up a world of possibilities.

¹ Alice Thorson, “Shifting Colors: ‘ColorLove’ presents a gallery of ideas in abstraction,” *Kansas City Star*, September 29, 2002.

LINDA BESEMER

(b. 1957, South Bend, Indiana)

Fold #71, 2002

Acrylic, aluminum rod

72 x 72 x 2 3/4 in

