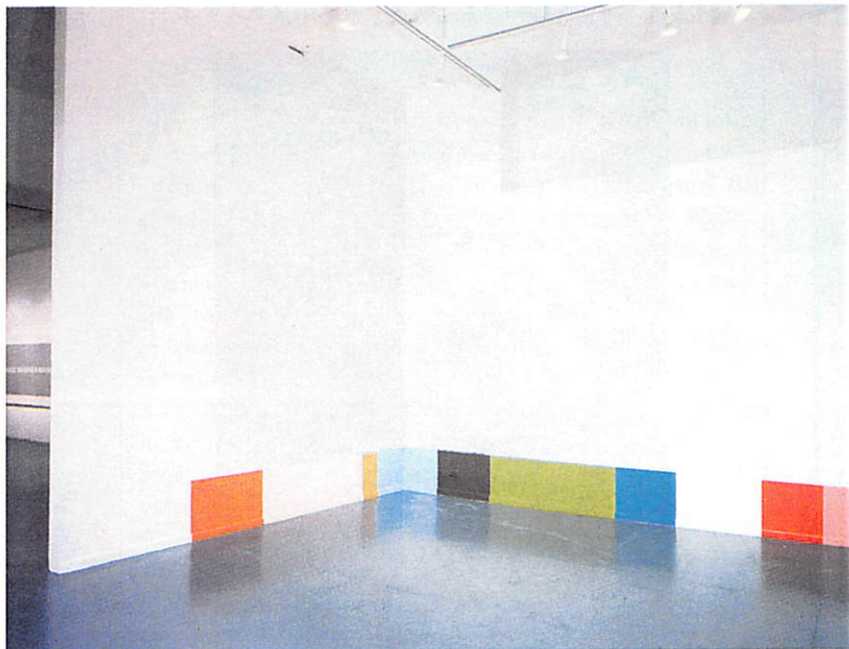




Vertical Economy



Yunhee Min *One Foot in Front of the Other* 1997 House paint on windows, doors and walls Photo: Karin Geiger Courtesy: Or Gallery

Yunhee Min *One Foot in Front of the Other* (installation view) 1997 House paint on windows, doors and walls Photo: Karin Geiger Courtesy: Or Gallery

Located in the heart of Vancouver's east side, the Or Gallery is in one of the most abject districts in Canada. On a usual day, the disenfranchised—junkies, dealers and prostitutes among them—hang out in front. The area was once the bustling and prosperous centre of Vancouver, back when the the Or space was known as the Black & White Hat Store. Capital has since moved on, but is on the verge of return.

Made specifically for the Or, Yunhee Min's painting installation *One foot in front of the other* (1997) rejects conventional canvas supports in favour of gallery walls and street-front display windows. Min seizes these spaces with a variety of hard-edge colour combinations. She uses house paint made primarily for domestic interiors, deriving her palate from a catalogue of discarded mistints, the nameless custom-mixed colours that have been abandoned at the hardware store.

Seven long vertical bands of colour—rusty orange, salmon, brown, baby blue, pink, grey and pale green—fill the Or's two large storefront windows. Framed by the turn-of-the-century building with its dark green street-level façade, as well as the buildings on either side, the now closed Golden Crown Wonton House and a pawn shop, the intervention looks completely out of place. Painted on the inside but viewed only from the outside, the windows resemble an ultra-high-gloss abstract diptych of a distinctly modernist type. Folding inward, the colours multiply, twenty-three in all, defining a narrow passageway leading to the gallery's set-back doors. Like the street front, this odd, small space is transformed into a spectacle: the hues envelop passers-by like Surround Sound, recalling all manner of spaces and reflecting the activity of the busy strip against a backdrop of the now defunct Woodward's Department Store directly opposite.

In the Or's back gallery, the installation continues with a ribbon of colours, matching those out front, that rise a foot high off the floor and wrap around the gallery's walls. Blank or "gallery-white" spaces signal interior features, such as the Or entrance and other openings. Delineating the negative space carved out by the display windows, this short field of lowly placed colour compensates for, and brings into consciousness, the non-space between the sidewalk and window panes framing the installation.

In the act of painting with rejected colors, Min re-dignifies them. She allows them to re-enter the decor economy—tints like these might enhance the luxury condos soon to emerge out of Woodward's. Min also inverts the most common engagement with painting, challenging the frontality of most painted pictures. From the outside, spectators look through the brilliance of the mediating glass to see the *back* of her painting. Inside, spectators look at the *front* of the cleanly painted flat and expressionless surface.

The installation appeals to eyes and intellect in equal measure; its simplicity and beauty binds the discourse of painting to architecture and to the urban condition. ■

by KITTY SCOTT

