

JOEL SHAPIRO: GOUACHES AND RELIEFS 1978-83
TO BE EXHIBITED AT CRAIG STARR GALLERY APR 11 – JUN 29, 2024



Joel Shapiro (b. 1941)
untitled, 1979
Wood and casein, 7 1/8 x 6 1/8 x 2 3/8 inches

NEW YORK – Craig Starr Gallery is pleased to announce *Joel Shapiro: Gouaches and Reliefs 1978-83*, on view from April 11 through June 29, 2024. Organized in collaboration with the artist and his studio, the exhibition highlights Shapiro's interest in the play between color and structure, abstraction and illusion, across media.

From 1978 to 1980, Shapiro made numerous small reliefs in wood, none larger than a foot in height or width. The reliefs in the show are painted uniformly, using one color and type of paint, such as oil, casein, or gouache. Exploring the effect of color on form, Shapiro brings into these sculptures the optical sensibilities of an experienced painter. He prefers colors that have a strong graphic identity: primaries (red, blue) and their close relatives (red-orange, orange, blue-green), as well as other instantly recognizable hues (brown). His choices transform color into a structural component that unifies and flattens the discrete pieces of wood into an abstract shape. The thin application of paint alters the quality of the wood grain, making the texture visually part of the field of color. "Paint makes [sculptures] more abstract and removes the material... from its source," said Shapiro in a 1995 interview, "We know it is painted wood, or it's painted bronze, or it's painted canvas. But the fact is, it denies its materiality. It might make it [the form] a more real idea, a more realized idea."

During the same years, Shapiro produced a related series of gouaches on paper made of closed shapes of color and graphite. In these gouaches, Shapiro employs techniques similar to those he used on his reliefs – simple, graphic colors transforming the texture of the paper – to explore feelings of mass, density, and weight typical of his sculptures. The colors layer over the surface rather than blending or transitioning. Just like in the reliefs, color in these gouaches appears to unite distinct shapes, intimated by the charcoal lines. The uneven application of paint suggests the sensation of gravity and movement, the balance between falling and rising elements on an undescribed ground. The handling also insinuates the process of the artist at work. "We might say," as Richard Schiff has stated, "that Shapiro's paintings reveal a sculptor's commitment to multiple dimensions, angles and turns of volumetric space, while his sculpture exhibits a painter's sensibility to the way that color causes a material form to advance or recede. In the play between material volume and surface color, neither stabilizes."

About Craig Starr Gallery

Craig Starr Gallery is located at 5 East 73rd Street between Fifth and Madison Avenues. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 11am-5:30pm, and by appointment. For general information, please visit the gallery's website at www.craigstarr.com.