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**Kendall Shaw**

Kendall Shaw’s abstract painting *Bethune* (1978) clearly reveals to us the formal roots of the Pattern and Decoration movement: the frequently grid-like visual frame serves as a kind of substructure while repetition is used to attain an overall planar composition reminiscent of a woven tapestry. These two visual strategies also informed the work of minimalist painters, who relied mostly on geometric elements to structure an image. Shaw and other artists of the Pattern and Decoration movement tended rather to draw on everyday instances of abstraction in which formal repetition unfolds an emotional impact and colorfulness holds immediate appeal for the senses, and hence is physically engaging.

Energy, sensuality, and musical elements are the core preoccupation and message of the paintings of Shaw, who graduated in chemistry before studying art with Mark Rothko, among other mentors. In *Bethune* he combines countless small squares and diagonal lines to create a rhythmic grid. Modulating this basic form and highlighting the striking contrasts in a spectrum of warm, earthy tones makes the canvas appear to vibrate or even hum, conjuring a pattern of sound subject to ever novel variations: single parts recur yet always in modified form. In places, one can see the coarse, unprimed canvas support between the squares as well as faint traces on it of the grid sketched out in pencil. The artist plays and experiments in multifarious ways with the material properties of the paint. While applied on the margins as a glaze and bound matt with the canvas, on the squares in the foreground its effect is of impasto with an especially glossy sheen, which heightens the dynamism of this intensely haptic work.

Mosaics or traditional handwoven textiles evidently inspired the composition. Kendall Shaw was fascinated by the play of individual elements assembled into larger units and then as such, repeated in subtle variations. If on the one hand the mosaic elements are formalized by patterning, on the other hand the craft in technical execution lends them an individual character. Besides Shaw’s interest in handicrafts of a wide range of cultures, he has been influenced by the music of his birthplace, New Orleans, specifically jazz. According to Shaw, art is a revelation—for the recipient and the artist alike. “Patterning in painting mirrored my personally scientific perception of universal reality as vibrating energy in space. I attempted to create visual music that celebrated reflected energy of colored light, by painting rhythmically spaced squares of color on canvas.” With their musical, rhythmical compositions in which small, pulsating, vibrating areas of color meet, Kendall Shaw’s works attest to a highly individual modus operandi; at the same time his artistic approach, with its formal image composition, also stands as a prime example of the Pattern and Decoration movement.