

Artist's Notes: "CMY RGB XYZ" Anoka Faruqee at Hosfelt Gallery New York (Feb 22- April 5, 2008)
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1. CMY

Cyan Magenta and Yellow are the three primary colors of pigment. In grade school we learn about red yellow and blue, and that trio certainly inspired Mondrian among others, but technology sharpens our notion of the primary colors. Printing processes, whether analog or digital, photographic or otherwise affirm the dominance of CMY. Chuck Close's brilliant watercolors using the translucent overlay of these colors imitate a photograph's printing process.

Enter [a room](#) of five diptychs. I worked on these paintings intermittently over a period of four years (2004 through 2007). One now sees them all in a single glance. Here, the idea is to "copy" a quickly brushed painting by mapping color and gesture. The smaller panels on the left side of each diptych are the "originals" made quickly with large gesso brushes. For example: "Big Brush Painting (CMY)" has a solid cyan ground, a layer of translucent magenta brushstrokes, and a similar layer of yellow. This overlay of primary colors yields a huge array of intermediary colors, as in Close's watercolors. Each original in each diptych is a different sequence of primary colors: CMY, MYC, YCM, YMC, MCY.

This room reveals not just my artistic process but also my project. Sustained investigation over a period of years of a relatively single-minded idea may seem contrary to our times, but this insistence yields significant revelations. I liken the mapping of these "spontaneous" moments to the process of an engineer analyzing the flow of sediment on the bottom of a river or ocean. The mapping is ultimately subjective. Consider deciding how often and where to take a "color read." The first attempt maps the original's color on only the horizontal axis, while the second includes the vertical axis and the subtle tilt of the original gestures. Furthermore, in each successive diptych, I saw more colors, only because I increased my expectation for seeing. (The first copy has fifteen colors while the last has ninety-three.) The originals, though made quickly appear cleaner and tougher: seamless. The copies, though more laborious and analytic, nakedly reveal the painter's human and flawed gestures. Viewers often mistake the copies for the originals because of this apparent subjectivity. I like the paradox inherent in this confusion.

The last original is only 5.625"x 5.25" and the brush that made it was wider than the painting. The copy is ten times larger, a magnification as much as a mapping. (["Colors Observed and Magnified \(MCY\)"](#)) The discrepancy in size prevents one from seeing the detail in the original and the copy at the same time, a frustration that reveals the absurdity of copying. I stared at that small painting for a few weeks mixing the ninety-three colors I saw. Since no one could ever really compare the two (except perhaps with the aid of photographs), I was more faithful to my futile project of affirming the invisible.

The [recent fade paintings](#) (2007-2008) unify the two halves of the diptychs. Spontaneity is represented in the compositions imitating painterly bleeds. They look like translucent spills of paint, and the light or atmosphere that those moments often refer to. But they are virtual mappings of those occurrences, illusions. Like the earlier copies, they are made one gesture and color at a time; I mix dozens, sometimes hundreds of subtly shifting colors in small jars. (The records of this color mixing process via color charts are available in the [entrance gallery](#).) Earlier diptychs consisted of pixelated copies of poured paintings. And each fade painting could be a magnification of a tiny segment of painterly blur. I used to draw triangular pencil grids on the grounds to lay the gestures into, but now I paint them freehand, creating inadvertent glitches in the "fabric" of the painting. Scaling up the paintings and the gestures makes them quite material and even drippy in places.

My gestures in the shape of six pointed asterisks or three pointed tripods derive from Islamic tile geometry. Many ask about the role of Islamic patterns in my work. True, I am a second generation Bangladeshi-American with an Islamic heritage. I grew up around patterns in the form of embroidery, rugs, and saris. My interest in Persian and Moghul miniatures founded my interest in pattern painting. (Though one could say I came to Islamic miniatures via Matisse.) Some comment that the use of Islamic geometry in my work is almost invisible; why isn't it more obvious or iconic? But Islamic geometry is in itself willfully anti-iconic, whether developed in antithesis to Christian icons, in adherence to the historical ban on images, or as mathematical perfection describing weightless, infinite space. Where else would one turn to for such highly evolved and distilled tessellations? What drew me to these shapes was their ability to yield geometry through painterly and calligraphic mark making. Because someone centuries ago spent a good amount of time playing with a ruler and a compass, I can lift from that tradition a kind of readymade handmade pixel. Those experiments were indeed the mathematical forerunners of current digital technology.

I'm not interested in merely quoting these forms; I use them for what they are and what they can become.

2. RGB

Red Green and Blue are the primary colors of light. They are the components that make up not only the backlit computer or television screen but also our ability to see anything at all. CMY complements RGB. (C opposes R, M opposes G and Y opposes B.) In one painting, a "shadow" gray, or a gray mixed to match a shadow cast by a painting, mutes this primary CMYRGB rainbow. This faded rainbow reminds me of candies I ate as a child; "[Freehand Fade to Gray Ground](#)" could be tornadoes of swirling "Smarties," subtly alluding to a girlhood fantasy. In all the paintings, a notion of CMYRGB as the six primary place holders of color dictate the orders in which colors are organized and applied.

Though some of the colors in the fade paintings were generated through systems of primaries fading to colors of shadow or imagined colors of light, other colors were pulled from the last diptych (MCY). These were colors observed in the tiniest painting in the show. The ground color for one large painting however is based on Gatorade. My assistant was drinking blue Gatorade and she happened to be wearing a bright blue T-shirt of the exact same color and standing in front of the large solid yellow ground of a painting. It was an arresting visual experience, and I asked her to mix a big pail of that color. We eventually moved all the colors in the current painting towards Gatorade Blue, and that moment also became the origin of "[Freehand Fade to Gatorade Blue Ground](#)". Though I didn't set out to comment on processed energy drinks, rupturing the internal systems of color in the studio (as I had done some years ago through observing fruits and flowers) is still productive. The Gatorade painting is my favorite in the show. I've been trying to make a painting like it for years; a painting that appears a continuous monochrome wash of color, a subtle Rothko bleed, but upon closer examination reveals literally a hundred subtly shifting shades. The moments of bright blue ground that peek (and peak) through the shapes are here, as elsewhere, significant in revealing the artifice of the single layer atop a ground of subtly shifting modules.

The color systems in the fade paintings are idiosyncratic and again subjective. In the diptych series, color generates from systems, akin to LeWitt or Cage, even if that system yields a very subjective moment of looking and mapping. Thus the diptychs have a conceptual rigor and legibility that the fade paintings evade, but I like the paintings of the diptychs better than their idea. I hope that the confusion of looking supersedes the neatness (and didacticism) of the idea. The return to the single fade painting, though somehow retrograde, is a painter's affirmation of a material experience unfolding the idea.

In these fade paintings there is the impulse to leave the ground partially exposed. (The mark of my hand usually completely covers the uniform ground.) I've thought of leaving ground exposed for some time, and at least six of the seven fade paintings in the show started with the intention of doing so. Of the three paintings where some ground is left untouched, the most successful is "[Freehand Fade to Exposed Gray Green Ground](#)." This one presents the asterisks in a hovering diamond shape; it doesn't hide the seam between the ground and the gesture. The straight lines of the diamond reiterate the artifice of the works' production. I work across the surface in vertical rows of shapes, fitting each row into the last one and the diamond shape is simply generated by the triangular geometry of the accumulating asterisk shape. (I'd link to an image, but like an Ad Reinhardt black painting, it defies reproduction.)

3. XYZ

X Y and Z are the three axes of the grid and the space it maps: horizontal, vertical and diagonal. The geometry in my paintings relies on this triangulation and its implied space. ("[Freehand Asterisks \(Getting Smaller and Bigger Again\)](#)") reveals more obviously the freehand nature of all the paintings. With only six colors, there is no color fade; rather the size and shape of the modules are shifting. A large distorted bubble results. This painting happened almost accidentally. Because of the large size of the painting, I had to paint it in two halves. In the top half, I made the asterisks compress in size from left to right rather evenly by painting the asterisks on a subtly increasing curve. When I started painting the bottom half of the painting, the shapes did not fit into those of the top half, and the asterisks to my initial chagrin got bigger again. Alas, a Bridget Riley effect, but not mapped mathematically, rather filtered through the scale of the painting in relation to my body and my gesture. This time, I am the river.

Pigment, light, and space, condensed to the codes of old and new technology. But after all, such codes only develop to describe the world's expansive materials and processes.

[Images of the installation](#)