

## Ryan Mrozowski

### ON STELLAR RAYS

Vigilant birds flanked the entrance to Ryan Mrozowski's exhibit, eyeing the ripe goods hanging farther in: canvases covered in citrus-tree flowers, oranges, cherries, and "indeterminate fruit." This compact exhibit—comprising two drawings (the birds, in thick oil-stick profile on paper) and nine paintings, all made this past summer—had an intractable beauty that promised something compelling beyond its polished perfection.

From the contrasting colors of lush green, gray, orange, teal, yellow, and red to the delicate, botanic detailing—not unlike Fra Angelico's background landscapes, in which each blade of grass and petal is so precisely considered as to seem like a carpet or wallpaper print—Mrozowski's paintings are lovely to look at. Alternating rows of six and seven oranges floating in a leafy field in the mural-size *Untitled (Orange)* have a mysterious depth. (I immediately thought of the island foliage in Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, and of the magical jungles of Henri Rousseau's orange groves.) Mrozowski goes back over many of his pristine surfaces with a thin wash; bands of green are just visible running down the backs of some leaves, as if we are seeing the plants through a rain-streaked window.

Mrozowski seems fascinated by the way that patterns invite us into their reverie and then shift in front of our eyes. Take the celestial white dots on a black field of the only non-flora painting on view, *Dot*: He

Ryan Mrozowski,  
*Pair (Indeterminate  
Fruit)*, 2015, two  
parts, acrylic on linen,  
each 23 × 16".



carved out hundreds of thimble holes in plywood, hammered in white plastic inlays typically found on guitar fretboards, and then sanded down and stained the surface. The white circles dance in rows that are just a little wonky. (The top edge gives away its meandering line, and there are several half moons throughout, as if wrapping paper had been cut and then taped together along a not-quite-matched seam.) It's a mischievous minimalism with a hat tip to abstraction's long tango with music.

Such furtive seriality in an all-over field nods to some of modernism's critical strategies of composition, but with a flair for materiality all this young artist's own. Other forms of repetition were present, too—three of the works were pendants, two paintings hanging side by side. (Mrozowski has explored this kind of doubling before, in *Doppelgänger*, 2012, and even his drawings here had a confusing repetition: Were we seeing one bird, duplicated and flipped, or several?) The twinned canvases of *Pair (Yellow Flowers)*, *Pair (Cherries)*, and *Pair (Indeterminate Fruit)* are almost identical, but not at all: In one, a leaf might be its realist green shade, while in the second canvas it is grayed out in thick, opaque paint. You look and look again; a cherry in the left canvas is a teal globe on the right, and vice versa. An abstract diamond wedge is a leaf curling under another in its second iteration.

The masking of certain outlines and shapes suggests the quick work of the silhouetting function in Photoshop; so too, do the repeated motifs that have no horizon, as if an infinite field of copy-and-paste. But the pendants also underscore something about the ways in which we see patterns; about how we intuit a shape to be a leaf because of its color and context, even if, on seeing the shape “deleted,” as it were, from the scene, we are hard-pressed to understand how it stood alone as a representational thing in the first place. And that this exacting oscillation between negative and positive isn't immediately apparent when we observe the pendants also points to our own perceptual Photoshopping: the ways we stitch together voids to form a graphic continuum, and the way that allowing the differences to come forward can be its own reward.

Did those avian sentinels of the exhibit recognize its bounty? Mrozowski's “indeterminate fruit” looks a lot like the medlar, a pome that's picked early and left to overripen for a period of weeks until it is rotten enough to eat, in a process called bletting. The same might be said for Mrozowski's canvases: What at first appear simply as beautiful objects become ever more compelling to savor.

—Prudence Peiffer