

The Pixel As Minimal Art by Tom R. Chambers

I began to look at the pixel within the context of Abstractionism and Minimalism. I used my self-portrait as a testing ground to begin to equate the pixel with the works of nonobjective artists who generated works to establish an abstract visual language of the sublime, pure color, geometric form, deep contemplation and metaphysical pursuit of the truth.

During the latter part of 2000 and as a part of an online residency with Jimmy Sellars.com, I began to look at the pixel within the context of Abstractionism and Minimalism. I used my self-portrait [to the left] as a testing ground to begin to equate the pixel with the works of nonobjective artists like Vasily Kandinsky, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt, Kazimir Malevich, Piet Mondrian and others. They generated works to establish an abstract visual language of the sublime, pure color, geometric form, deep contemplation and metaphysical pursuit of the truth.

If you begin clicking within the outlined boxes on the self-portrait, pixels appear due to magnification of these areas via graphics software [Photoshop]. The pixels or Pixelscapes ... as I call them ... conform with many of these nonobjective artists' works. These Pixelscapes were somewhat of a revelation for me when compared to these nonobjective works generated 40 years before the pixel and 80 years before the Digital Revolution. It seemed that I had managed to do what Kasimir Malevich and other Minimalists had done through the simple process of magnification and isolation of the pixel(s).

Kasimir Malevich, in particular, invented this new, abstract visual language that he called Suprematism ... the name he gave to paintings consisting of one or more colored geometric shapes on a white field. He wrote of visualizing a state of feeling, of creating through abstract painting a sense of bliss and wonder.

Malevich's Black Cross (1915, oil on canvas, 80 x 79.5 cm) and Black Square (c. 1923-1930, oil on plaster, 36.7 x 36.7 x 9.2 cm) are seen to the right. To jump ahead a bit of my evolution with the pixel, my Pixelscapes [Third Generation] seen below are reminiscent of Malevich's works.

The above Pixelscapes are at greater magnification and isolation via filter [halftone] treatment in Photoshop. These actions begin to move the pixel towards similar considerations taken by Malevich and other early Minimalists. They also sought to de-mystify art, to reveal its most fundamental character, its reality, exposing its materials and processes. And they attempted to engage the viewer in an immediate, direct and unmediated experience. There was no attempt to represent an outside reality with viewers responding to only what was in front of them.

Let me backtrack to my humble beginnings with the pixel and take a look at a few first- and second-generation Pixelscapes. These works are a bit tentative in the sense that I had just begun to explore the potential of the pixel as an abstract art form with the notion of their Minimalist genre and relationship to the early Minimalists' and Abstractionists' works. These Pixelscapes [First and Second Generation] comprise more pixels and focus on color fields and juxtapositions [seen below].

For those of you who may wonder how I arrived at these particular pixel combinations [seen above], the process involved exploring various photographs at extreme magnification then isolating [cropping] the color fields and juxtapositions [via Photoshop] to generate the Pixelscapes.

Some of my colleagues say that they are similar to Found Art. I'm okay with this. Found Art is what it is, and my Pixelscapes are what they are ... Minimal Art. Another colleague of mine states: "In terms of Minimalism these works seem almost elaborate, with strong patterns emerging from the basic structure that is the single pixel. Taken to the next extreme would be a sculptural arrangement of individual squares (pixels) of a single color. As if pixels have liberated themselves, through magnification, from any other context and are now present as individual entities in non-virtual space."

So this brings me to my third-generation Pixelscapes once again that are in keeping with Kasimir Malevich's works some 80 to 90 years ago, and they seem to have liberated themselves as Minimal Art in their own right. And sometimes I feel that there's no need to look any further than the pixel because it doesn't pretend to be anything else other than what it is ... truth. This most basic component of any computer graphic, which stands for picture element, corresponds to the smallest thing that can be drawn on a computer screen. It's also mathematical in the sense that it can be represented by 1 bit, a 1 if the pixel is black, or a 0 if the pixel is white. So Malevich, the Russian Suprematist whose work was a precursor to Minimalism, and those Minimalists who followed later would probably have had great appreciation for this basic and mathematical component ... the pixel.

My fourth-generation Pixelscapes are only three in number due to a decrease in available time to pursue the pixel as Minimal Art, and they delve into the realm of the sublime. Again, I arrived at these particular pixel combinations [seen below] by exploring various photographs at extreme magnification then isolating [cropping] the color fields and juxtapositions [via Photoshop] to generate the Pixelscapes.

I'm currently in the midst of my fifth-generation Pixelscapes which are compounded versions of second-generation Pixelscapes through the use of noise and texture filters in Photoshop. This compounded effect or the process of adding pixels on top of pixels ... and at various sizes ... enhances the sublimity, and it also brings in other interpretations or connotations such as plurality, for example the coexistence of several worlds. These Pixelscapes are seen below. Click on them to show larger versions for more detail, then click on the larger versions to show their scan derivatives which I call Pscans. These Pscans use the lens applet to move the Minimal Art towards Kinetic Abstraction. And if you click on the moving lens and move it around manually, you can explore the Pixelscapes in great detail. And as you look through the lens, you're glimpsing a Minimal World ... in the same sense astronomers glimpse through their telescopes to see another Minimal World: the Universe.

On July 14, 2004 in Vienna, Austria, artist, Claude Bossett, unveiled a tribute to the pixel for its 50th Birthday, titled Pixel. The tribute took the form of an acrylic painted 60 cm x 60 cm blue square on a 100 cm x 140 cm canvas. It is a portrait of a magnified pixel. This is mentioned because his process of painting the large blue square on a larger, white canvas to represent a pixel tends to come full-circle with the early Minimalists doing essentially the same before the pixel and the Digital Revolution. I continue on course with my Pixelscapes.

Links:

MY DEAR MALEVICH exhibition by Tom R. Chambers at Art Gallery, Fine Arts Department, Zhaoqing University, Zhaoqing, Guangdong Province, China, April 2-15, 2007

[Pixelscapes: First and Second Generations](#)

[Pixelscapes: Third Generation](#)

[Pixelscapes: Fourth Generation](#)

[Pixelscapes: Fifth Generation](#)

[Pscans](#)

[Ptones](#)

[Chambers' website](#)