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AROUND THE GALLERIES

Monochrome: the color of funny

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Art Critic

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"Witty" is not a word frequently applied to monochrome paintings. Their nearly 100-year legacy in abstract art is more often associated with such sober notions as purity, clarity and spiritual aspiration. Yet it fits to a proverbial T an elaborate and compelling new work by **Morgan Fisher**.

At China Art Objects, "Alien Pendant Pair Paintings" is a group of six single-color canvases, each 4 feet square, installed as one work. Building on organizational systems familiar from Minimal and Conceptual art, Fisher has constructed the installation according to a simple structure derived from the color wheel. Then he's given the wheel a couple of unexpected yet savvy spins.

The flatly covered surface of each painting is red, orange, yellow, green, blue or violet. Rather than pure colors, however, Fisher has used fluorescent paints -- not unlike those employed for very different purposes in the late 1960s and early 1970s by the formalist abstract painter Frank Stella.

These ultraviolet-sensitive pigments seem to give off an inner light -- though the effect is purely scientific rather than that of a metaphysical glow. They are also kind of cheesy, more attuned to associations with

popular and commercial art.

The paintings are paired into standard complementary colors -- yellow and purple, red and green, blue and orange -- but they are not installed side by side. Instead, the pairs are hung back to back, with the wall between the gallery's two rooms dividing them.

That means three paintings are in one room, three in the other. These are pairs that, like bickering couples, cannot occupy the same space, yet they rely on each other for completion. The wall that divides them becomes a critical presence.

This is a deft assimilation of architectural space into the domain of painting. It's impossible to see the entire work at once, so a viewer must instead surrender to its divisions or else choose sides.

Monochrome abstraction isn't supposed to make you laugh, think about interpersonal relationships or feed on actual space. Fisher's does that and more, and the cheerful discombobulation is invigorating.

China Art Objects, 933 Chung King Road, Chinatown, Los Angeles, (213) 613-0384, through Dec. 13. Closed Sundays through Tuesdays. www.chinaartobjects.com

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