

## Digital Field Painting

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In 2002 George Pusenkoff created cycle of large-format paintings was entitled *Digital Field Painting*, a reference to the *Colourfield Painting* movement launched by first-generation American Abstract Expressionists Clyfford Still, Barnett Newman, and Mark Rothko.

It is worth pausing to consider the subject of these works, the “stories” they tell. They are based on scans of the paper found in gridded school notebooks. In the computer, this grid of squares is enlarged and skewed. The lines of the resulting rectangles acquire a near-planar dimension, while the angling helps to bring out the pixilated structure. As image-forming structures, the pixels are arranged vertically and horizontally, and so the lines of the cells turn into discontinuous, serrated bars when greatly enlarged.

Pusenkoff often says that only the scanning process is digital: as soon as he moves from screen to canvas, his work becomes analogical. Pusenkoff’s “computer” paintings are executed using classical painting technique. In his case, this technique involves several layers of paint to which he sometimes adds sand to achieve coloristic nuances or subtle textural variations. Pusenkoff paints the bars black, while he paints the planes in bright local colors, or blue-red, red-green or green-orange duotones. The color fields clash with the quasi-relief effect created by the black pixilated bars. They thus highlight what make these pictures so lively: the primacy of color in them.

One another thematic aspect of these paintings is quite curious. The customary, everyday function of these grids is to assist in the solution of certain normative tasks. The data entered into the squares must be precisely arranged into rows and columns. That is, the gridded raster predetermines a priori the form in which any concrete content will be transmitted.

The pixilated structure is likewise an a priori phenomenon. Digitalizing an image means, first of all, that it is transformed from analog to digital (a series of square points). In Pusenkoff’s work, the grids are slightly angled (and thus the grid ornament is relativized), and this brings the two systems into conflict. The conflict between the vertically oriented pixel squares and the inclined grid is generated, first and foremost, by the pixel. This underscores the absolute nature of its existence in the digitalized picture, an existence that is consciously prior to the emergence of any particular image. In art scholarship, such pre-regulated systems are described as “givens”—that is, they make claims to absolute inevitability and universality. In *Digital Field Painting*, Pusenkoff nicely illustrates how the careful observer sees revealed in pixilated structure’s claims to “givenness” the overall ambitions of the digital world.

Color plays the authentic central role in *Digital Field Painting*. The laws of visual perception advance their own priorities. The serrated boundaries between black and blue, black and red, black and strontium yellow are the first things to attract our attention, and they transfix our gaze for a long while. If the gaze wanders along the boundary of the color field, which is delimited by the serrated black bar, then the colored grids are capable of producing brief explosions. Something similar happens when we fix our gaze on the blue color field: the eye produces an optical copy of the opposite color (i.e., orange), which shifts to red as we move into the neighboring color field. Moreover, the color fields seem to expand and contract in turn. This interaction of colors, their pulsation and movement, is the contrary of the pixilated structure’s givenness. It is spontaneous, unpredictable, and incalculable—that is, analogical. That is why Pusenkoff’s *Digital Field Painting* is an example of “anti-cyclical art,” to borrow the term coined by Jean-Christophe Ammann: “I am in favor of anti-cyclical art. I call anti-cyclical those artists who, while they take into account the properties of mediatized perception, once more

conquer real space by means anthropological and phenomenological. [. . .] Hence our task is to find a way of preventing unlimited mediatization from robbing us of the ability to create our own images.”