

Essay by Peter Halley, in: *Homecoming*, (Exhibition Catalog), JCCC Collection for the Nerman Museum of Art, Overland Park, Kansas

Andrzej Zielinski

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I worked with Andrzej a couple of years ago when he was a graduate student in painting at Yale. When he arrived, he wrote poetry, studied information theory, and made black and white conceptual collage grids constructed from cloth. Over the next two years, I witnessed the transformation of this brainy young kid from Kansas City into a strange and brilliant painter.

When I saw Andrzej's first paintings of laptop computers during a critique at Yale, I literally broke out laughing (somewhat to the artist's embarrassment, I'm afraid). They were hilarious: jokes and puns of every kind abounded, about representation, color, perspective, and paint handling. With very aggressive faux naiveté, absolutely nothing was done right – the straight lines were all crooked, perspective confused perception in every way possible, color ran rampant, transforming the machine's staid grays and blacks into fauvist flower-power.

The absurdist humor was strongest when viewing the paintings all together, a wall of laptops painted in oil, one after the other, all on same-size square canvases. The stratagems of both minimalist seriality and phenomenological repetition were being hung out for laughs.

However, as in the absurdist theatre of Beckett or Ionesco, there seemed to be a lot more at stake in these paintings. Andrzej, the student of information theory, the rationalist, the defender of minimalist rigor, seemed to be saying that he was throwing in the towel, that he had lost faith in the rationality of modernity. He wasn't going to talk about the elegant world of binary logic anymore. Instead, he was obsessing about laptops, thinking of the machines as magic, not reason. The thinking echoed that of Frederick Jameson: in modern technology, function had been clearly expressed and process easily understood (think of the typewriter), while post-modern technology, hiding function behind smoothly sculpted plastic casings, is instead designed to be incomprehensible, to awe and to mystify.

Since then, Andrzej has been living in Europe, working in both Berlin and Rome. He's added ATM machines – totemic oracles spilling out cash on demand -- to his collection of magical devices. In paintings like *Orange ATM*, 2005, the machine is barely recognizable; it dances across the surface like a whirling dervish, the painting is all curvilinear rhythms, part human, part landscape. These days, the paintings don't look so funny anymore. They are very strange.

By Peter Halley