



STEPHANIE WEBER

EMBEDDED

*There, everything is order and beauty  
richness, quiet and pleasure.*

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE, *Invitation to a Voyage*

One of the appeals of Stephanie Weber's current paintings is their encapsulation of tendencies of our historical period. This is what Baudelaire described as the "essential problem" of the painter of "modern life:" "to discover whether we possess a specific beauty, intrinsic to our new emotions." Weber's synthesis of sensual materiality and its structured containment suggests a conception of beauty "of our time." Her art displays an awareness of both historical precedents and contemporary consciousness. It is both distinctive and embedded.

The past is manifest in Weber's imagery in her incorporation of large-scale swathes of the brush, its pigment-laden bristles leaving linear trails or smoothly saturated hues. The tenuous stripes and variegated fields call up the mid-twentieth century Abstract Expressionist method of facture — the so-obvious marks of the hand demonstrating the artist's very physical engagement. At the same time, the increasing use of digitalized image-processing intensifies the increasing scarcity of "hand-made" objects, making the organic irregularity of the human touch in painting newly precious.

Equally prominent in these paintings is the containment of these signs of expressiveness — the textures' delimitation within blocks and bands.

Weber intensifies the presence of structure by painting on sheets of aluminum, their open edges revealing a honeycomb network sandwiched between sheets. This support's metal grid signals industrial fabrication, another contrast to the fluid color, and which heightens the sense of a juxtaposition of a classicizing "yang" and painterly "yin." Her incorporation of such geometries offers a current version of the "order" that Baudelaire linked with "beauty" to produce "richness, quiet and pleasure."

Situating this duality historically reminds one that in periods of social vulnerability — in Antiquity; around the French Revolution; after World War I — artists superimposed balance on the flux of existence by emphasizing idealized and structurally clear forms. Our own brief new millennium has experienced multiple sites of political chaos, and containment of impulses ranging from terrorist violence, to corporate corruption, to personally unhealthy practices in public is newly prominent.

Weber's sensitivity to these factors, manifest in her balance of expressive beauty and emotional containment, could only come from the sieve of experience. Her art displays the benefits of years of discriminating making and looking, of being embedded in both history and contemporary culture, yet maintaining her own engagement with a particularly luscious order of beauty.

Charles Baudelaire's poem is part of his provocative 1857 collection *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Suzaan Boettger is an art critic/historian in New York City and the author of *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties*, University of California Press.