

THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE

ANDREW CHRISTOFIDES' ABSTRACT
PAINTINGS SPEAK THROUGH THEIR SILENCES

*Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, muss man schweigen
(Of that which we cannot speak, we must remain silent)*

— LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

To say that Andrew Christofides' exquisite paintings are meaningless is not being pejorative. In fact, he might conceivably take this as a compliment. Certainly, it is possible to trace some origins to these abstract forms – map grids, the checkerboard-patterned copes (or vestments) worn by Byzantine priests as depicted in the icons, indeed traditional Christian imagery (but also including Islamic calligraphy and decoration) and the decorative embellishments on everyday objects through history – but at best these are simply influences which the viewer may or may not know about.

For example, do we really need to know that Christofides is of Greek-Cypriot descent and that a visit to Cyprus in 1995 re-connected him to his cultural roots and awakened an interest in Greek icons? That is interesting to know, but cannot be relevant to the fact of the painting as we stand before it and respond emotionally, intellectually and aesthetically.

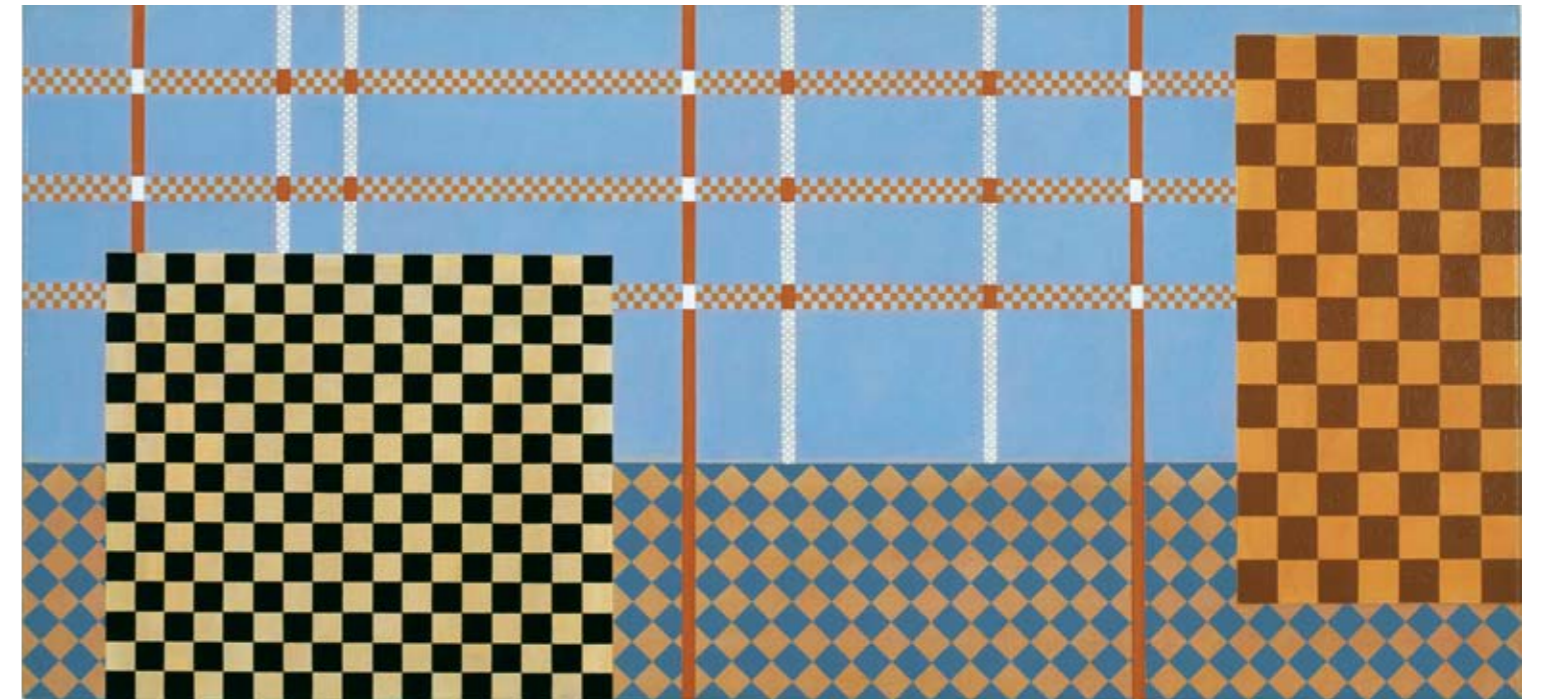
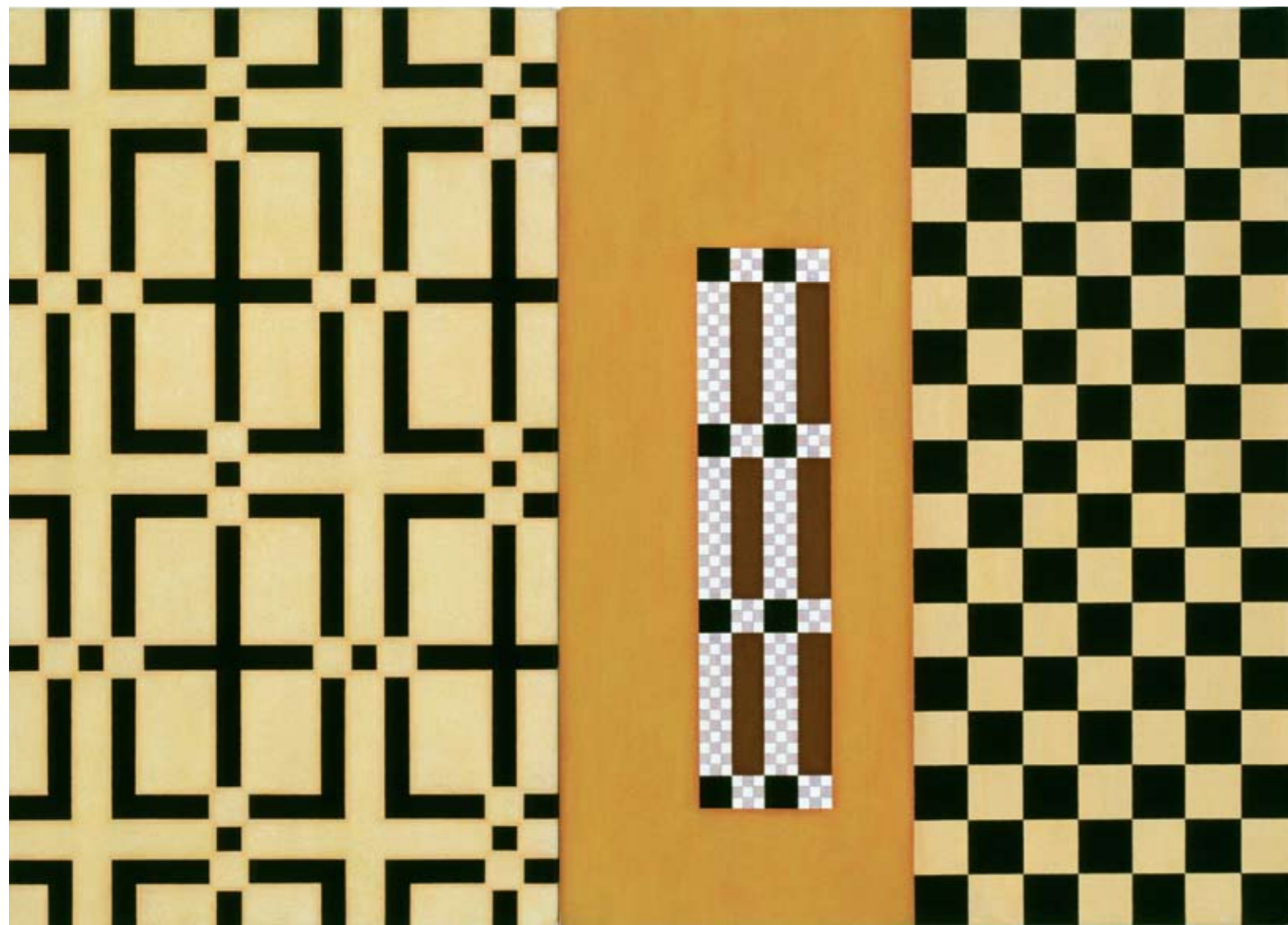
To say that his paintings are meaningless is simply to say that they are meaningless in any referential sense – which is to say they do not refer visually to the appearance of the natural world. And this raises two



ARTIST ANDREW CHRISTOFIDES
WORDS PAUL MCGILICK
PORTRAIT PAUL LOVELACE

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PAUL MCGILLICK



questions: What is the meaning of meaning, and in what sense can a painting, for example, have meaning?

It is possible, of course, for Christofides' visual influences to resonate for us at a subliminal level (because we associate them with our own experiences) and in that way suggest meanings. But as an abstract painter, Christofides chooses to be non-referential – because any images taken from the world of appearances will come laden with pre-existing meaning and Christofides wants his paintings to generate their own meaning in a direct, unmediated way.

At the end of the day, meaning is not a given – say, in the way a dictionary claims to provide the meaning of a word – but is negotiated through relationships, or context in the case of language.

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.” He knew what he was talking about and, for an abstract painter like Andrew Christofides, the same could be said about painted shapes on a paper or canvas surface and the ways in which they are arranged in relation to one another.

Now we are talking about aesthetic meaning – something directly apprehended through forms. It is never pure, of course, because each of us brings our own memories, our own emotional state and our own life experience to art or music. It is simply to say that predominantly, meaning in art is aesthetic, not referential.

Alright, so what do Andrew Christofides' paintings mean to me? Let me mention just two things.

Firstly, they embody the ceaseless struggle between reason and energy, between our idealism and

the reality of our lives. Hence, the precision of these paintings with their grids and mathematical organisation appeals to our ideal of an ordered, rational life. But look again and you will see that these pictures are not inert, but enriched by layers of under-painting, and the edges of the shapes inflected by a subtle aura, projecting emotion, gesture and a sense of the texture of life and all its uncertainties.

Secondly, these sequences of forms have all the rhythm and nuance of music. And if music has any ‘meaning’, it lies in the silences between the notes. It is the most ‘abstract’ (or seemingly non-emotive) music which paradoxically carries the most meaning – for example, the liturgical music of Gesualdo, Schütz, Bach, Vittoria etc. – because it is deeply meditative, taking us into the silence of our spiritual world and away from the ‘noisy’ world of appearances.

The famous comment of Wittgenstein at the beginning of this article asserts that there are things whose meanings lie beyond language. These things can only be understood, felt and appreciated in silence – in the silence between the notes, in the silent spaces of Andrew Christofides' grids.

ANDREW CHRISTOFIDES IS REPRESENTED
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PREVIOUS PAGE Andrew Christofides painting in his Chippendale studio, Sydney

OPPOSITE Andrew Christofides, 'Icon: For Malevich', 2008, acrylic on canvas, 51x71cm

ABOVE Andrew Christofides, 'Escarment', 2007, acrylic on canvas, 35.5x76cm