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The material and conceptual possibilities of the fold permeate Kathryn Stevens' latest series of paintings for *Switch*. These possibilities are examined through composition, colour, line and surface to generate a conversation on the two-dimensional surface that moves back and forth between concept and concrete reality; space and mass; surface and depth; movement and stasis; and questions relating to the finite and infinite.

The concept of the fold is where this conversation begins. A singular gesture, the material fold sets into motion a vast complexity of interplays. In essence, it is an expression of space and possibility. At the same time, the fold is suspended between a tangible material action and the conceptual expression of boundlessness. Stevens' working practice involves a sequential act of folding flat planes of paper in ways that produce a range of intricate, small-scale assemblages, and using these forms to investigate the ambiguities and transitions between planes. Each form is diverse and multifaceted; in its folding or unfolding dimensions, it causes, in Stevens' words, 'a map of possible planes.' The planes and facets of each fold form a spatial dialogue with each other and surrounding space; unified and contracted in one form, yet expanding into new topographies. As a locus of possibility, then, the fold becomes part of an awareness of how we effect and are affected by space, architectural and constructed, subjective and expressive.

The conceptual or concrete fold is an established modality in architectural thought and practice, and to an extent echoes Stevens' interest in how we construct space on flat surfaces. In architectural terms, the fold can simply express a physical division between interiority and exteriority. In its critical capacity however, the fold can be understood as a critique of binary divisions of surface and depth, appearance and essence, the mechanical and the organic. In structural space the fold delivers an intricate complexity based on variation and a fusion of disparate elements – pleats, kinks, creases, facets – to create patterns that traverse the structural form, while not reducible to the whole. Therefore, a complexity of meaning associated with the fold escapes any sense of compositional hierarchy. These oppositions invigorate the conceptual approach to space and structure. Premised on unity of form and lines of escape and flux that work simultaneously through it, the fold determines and materialises possibilities for concrete form.

These concepts manifest as a subtle tension and generative process in the spatial field of each painting. Each of Stevens' compositions captures a fragment of folded space, without revealing the whole; each individual vector creates a unique interplay with the painted surface. Here we are invited to consider an underlying tension between spatial illusion and reality as these interact on a two-dimensional surface, unifying and blurring distinctions while showing us complexities of space, contradiction and possibility. Layers of gesso, acrylic and oil paint generate a material thickness that extends into the space beyond the work's surface. Simultaneously, tonal variations work away from a sense of material depth through a depiction of suspended, illusory space. This switching, alternating, transitioning and changing is part of an ambiguity that occurs at the boundary between the physical space in which we encounter the work, and how we perceive of the qualities of illusory space. In essence, one cannot proceed without the other.

While the tensions at work in Stevens' new collection raise awareness of how we construct space on a flat surface, there are harmonies of colour and line that satisfy a need for balance. A palette of tonal crimson and ruby, violet and azure blues is layered to create spatial recession and to expose the process of illusion through the painted surface. Saturated areas are realised through a process of adding thin layer upon thin layer of oil paint. This layering of colour is accentuated through qualities of light and transparency, articulating further space and depth within each frame. Colour is thus deployed with a specific intent to explore its inherent possibilities for defining space. Certain colours draw us into the illusion, while the impact of tone and saturation also appeal to an emotional response. Meanwhile crisp and blurred lines operate in tandem with colour to create juxtapositions and transitions between surface planes. Shadowy outlines tend to float back into the work; clearer lines draw us back to the surface. An off-centre 'plumb line' bisects each composition, as if anchoring the centrifugal movement of folding and unfolding around a single support. One is tempted to consider whether this illustrates our own restless search for stability in an otherwise undetermined relationship to space that is constantly shifting, switching and unfolding.

Stevens' works leave us to ponder our awareness of the possibilities of space as an idea or physically defined, expanding and contracting, and the concept of folding as a process of becoming. The unfolding topographies of space; the gaps between things; looking through one constructed form to another; and the manoeuvring that takes place at the surface boundary between subjective and concrete space, are all interacting in this series. The fold, around which another space unfolds, becomes the unassuming yet delicate pleat in this dialogue, suggesting to us that the spatial interior is nothing more than a fold of the exterior. Compliant, supple, responsive and fluid, the fold unifies, produces and creates unforeseen interplays and connections. From here we might begin to reassess a range of topologies of different kinds of folds, both concrete and conceptual.

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