



UCR Arts' Culver Center of the Arts, "*Red Carpet C*" is a collaboration between Yunhee Min and Peter Tolkin.

## **Within the Color and Space of *Red Carpet in C***

By Tyler Stallings

*Red Carpet in C* is a collaborative, large-scale installation by painter Yunhee Min and architect Peter Tolkin\* that blurs distinctions between art and architecture. Occupying UCR Arts' Culver Center of the Arts' nearly 2000 square foot, two-story atrium, the work encourages multiple encounters for exploring the relationship between form, gesture, and color.

Min and Tolkin have brought their individual sensibilities to bear on their collaboration in *Red Carpet in C*. They fuse explorations in color and space to create three, 150-foot bands of opulent red cloth, populated with pixel-like, colored cardboard tubes. Altogether, a rhythm of color and space creates a dynamic energy set within the Classical qualities of the symmetrically designed atrium.

Min has explored abstraction with color as her primary language in her studio-based paintings for many years. Reminiscent of Color Field painters like Morris Louis and Helen Frankenthaler, her *Movements* series (2015), depicts flowing swaths of colors that were inspired by both music and the ebbs-and-flows of the natural world, while teasing viewers with the impression of an implied space existing beyond the thin, overlapping veils of paint.

In site-specific installations, she has utilized bold colors and invited a different exploration of perceptual experience. *For Instance* (2008), at the Lindbrook Terrace on the mezzanine level at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, is made from richly colored draped Velour. Min suspended tall panels to create an ever-shifting monumental abstract “painting” that divides the volume of the space into architectural corridors of sumptuous colors. The piece incorporates elements of time, whereby a viewer progresses and interweaves through the spaces of color, rather than just the usual gestalt experience of positioning oneself in front of a painting and viewing it as it hangs static on a wall.

Collaborator Peter Tolkin, principal at TOLO Architecture, has designed commercial, residential, and cultural projects throughout Southern California. He has also created temporary projects and collaborated with conceptual artists whose work operate in the space between art and architecture.

His *Dunnage Ball* (2007-2008), for example, is a 22-foot diameter icosahedron that functions as both nomadic sculpture and soft architecture. It is made of thirty dunnage bags, lit

from within, that can be configured in various ways; and was installed at the Santa Monica pier for the inaugural Glow art festival in 2008. Tolkin/TOLO's collaboration with artist Charles Gaines on a proposed project in St. Louis called *Moving Chains* involves large mooring chains that rotate. They suggest both the moving water of the nearby Mississippi River and also the chains of slavery that are so much part of this country's history.

Min and Tolkin's approach has antecedents, such as the Europeans Blinky Palermo and Daniel Buren, who came to prominence in the 1960s and 70s. They were genre-defying in eschewing definitions of what is painting, what is sculpture, and, finally, what is an experience in space. Their work dissolved a static relationship with art, replacing it with evolving spatial encounters. They often fled traditional white walls, foregrounding the context in which the work was encounter or how it was made, by emphasizing stretcher bars, the gallery itself, or even, in some instances, an entire cityscape.

Palermo and Buren, as in *Red Carpet in C*, used fabric to highlight the entire context of the work. Palermo used readymade fabric that he extended over stretcher bars, suggesting that geometric abstractions can be made from almost any material, not just oil paint on canvas. In the context of his time, his whimsical gestures challenged presumed definitions of high art, while also expanding possibilities for object making. Palermo's pieces also demonstrated the powerful effects of color, even if the fabric was simply store-bought. It was just a matter of one's point of view.

In the late 1960s, Buren arrived at a signature use of regularly spaced stripes on fabric and printed paper. His approach was centered more on institutional critique that examined a viewer's mediated experience with art via museums and galleries, primarily. He deployed his stripes to form a relationship with the architecture of a given location and called the results *in situ* works. When he would wheat-paste a large, paper mural of the stripes to a building, for

example, then the two became inseparable, thus, bringing into the foreground the authoritative context in which the art was exhibited but also making it part of the work too.

Fifty years later, Min and Tolkin continue this dialogue about the power of color and the interaction with the space that contains it or, more generally, the relationship between art and the environment in which it is located, and also between a work's medium and its support. Following on this notion, they combine in their work's title, *Red Carpet in C*, the idea of a fine art, monochromatic painting and the industrial-produced flooring of an architectural space, as being one in the same and, of course, both being red.

They are playful with this conceit. *Red Carpet* suggests there will be an experience of walking on the piece. Indeed, upon entering the lobby, one is confronted by three swaths of red "carpet." But, they proceed to swoop up thirty-five feet past the lobby's lower hanging ceiling into the vast two-story atrium, undulating down the length of its seventy-five feet. What was supposed to be the floor is now a ceiling. Walk to the second-floor mezzanine level of the Culver Center of the Arts' and look down from above, and the ceiling again becomes a floor.

The parabolic arches in the bands are made possible by precision cut, specifically positioned cardboard tubes. When the weight of the fabric falls, the tubes compress into the form of an arch. The clusters of tubes imply a coffered ceiling, resonating with those used since ancient Rome to the Renaissance to midcentury modern homes. Usually, a coffered ceiling connects architectural spans visually, such as domes atop a structure, long hallways, or large rooms. In *Red Carpet in C*, the illusion of the ceiling breaks apart, as the bands slip from referencing functional architecture to an artistic experience with color and space.

The layout of the colored cardboard tubes on the red fabric substrate follows Min and Tolkin's planning with hand colored dots on graph paper. Their initial use of the grid brings to mind the conceptual structures of Minimalist artists such as Sol Lewitt. However, the final

result is a cross between the analytical, geometric abstraction of Ellsworth Kelly and the gestural, intuitive geometries of Mary Heilmann.

This aesthetic, which slips away from the formalism of the grid, occurs as result of Min and Tolkin's process for generating the final composition of the colored cardboard tubes. The hand-colored notations on graph paper were scanned into a computer program, which then further interpreted their design, resulting in an output with different results. In other words, there was a very organic, improvisational process that involved both handmade, analogue processes, and then utilized digital processes to adjust the parameters of the design for the location of the colored tubes. Finally, when the tubes were glued to the red fabric, they did not maintain a strict grid formation. Rather, gravity's pull united them into a new, singular formation and structure.

In this respect, *Red Carpet in C*, brings together tenets of Modernism that espoused the use of industrialized, standardized materials and the inherent aesthetic repetition generated by the use of modular components. Aesthetically, complexity was created through variation with the prefabricated units. Analogously, the *Red Carpet in C* tubes are all the same diameter, but they have been cut at varying heights along with a variegated placement of colors. It is through this repetition and variation of these basic units, or cells, that create the installation's spatial dynamism and rhythm. These qualities are enhanced by subtleties of color shifts. The hollow centers of the tubes sometimes take on a pinkish glow when the red, fabric substrate to which they are attach reflects onto their inner, white walls.

Their hand colored grids are also suggestive of experimental, musical scores, stressed by the "...in C" chord reference in the title. Here, the contemporary, non-linear editing of sound in computer programs, or the non-standard notational systems of avant-garde musicians such as John Cage, come to mind. His intentions, like Min and Tolkin, was to lessen the regulation

of a performance through the written score by permitting indeterminacy and improvisation for the performer.

Interestingly, Min and Tolkin's choice of "C" in their title is also notable, as it is the most basic form of musical notation. In musicology, the C Major is not the root chord or home base for any inherent reason. Rather, it was one of ease for teaching music. Min and Tolkin adopt this notion by coloring the substrate of the bands a solid, bright red, that becomes, in essence, their C note that sustains the variation in the colored tubes.

Their use of "in C" in their title also evokes Terry Riley's 1964 composition, *In C*. Often considered the first masterpiece of minimalist music, the score consists of fifty-three musical modules. Riley allowed a variety of instruments to be used in any given situation, the length of play is adjustable, and complexity is generated through minimal rules. The key comparison is that Min and Tolkin, like Riley, and even Daniel Buren with his consistent use of stripes, employ a simple set of rules of repetition and variation to create complex, new forms that bring to the foreground what had been in the background.

Min and Tolkin, however, are not attempting to visualize music with *Red Carpet in C*. Rather, they allude and draw power from the rhythms of repetition found in both music and architecture. They disrupt the static symmetry of the atrium—a formal rectangle bracketed by equidistant columns—with the asymmetry of the bands. They direct our attention to the status of the exhibition space, usually a mere backdrop to work shown on its walls, by using their large bands of color in the atrium to offset Classically-influenced building style that surrounds them. Overall, Min and Tolkin complicate our assumptions about what it is that we think we are seeing, encountering, and experiencing, whether it be a piece of art or a style of architecture, even if we have seen them before many times.

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*\*While it is Min and Tolkin's vision that is behind Red Carpet in C, the making of it has required a major team effort. This has included TOLO's other principal partner, Sarah Lorenzen, who worked with the fabrication team that included over thirty Cal Poly Pomona Architecture (CPP ARC) students to determine the best way to make the piece, including how to efficiently cut, color, organize, and attach thousands of tubes to the red fabric. Also, from TOLO, Socrates Medina was the project manager overseeing the fabrication of the piece, and Karl Kachele developed the model and script that allowed the overall shape to be determined and the cardboard tubes to be quantified. There are other participants that worked to develop the project early on, particularly Kare Tonapetyan and Parker Ammann. Additionally, Matt Melnik from NOUS Engineering was instrumental in predicting the behavior of the piece and ensuring that the fabric would hold its shape, no simple task given the many unknown parameters of dealing with non-traditional, building materials such as cardboard tubes and fabric. Finally, the implementation of the hanging and on the ground problem solving came into play by the exhibition's co-curator Zaid Yousef, who is also the exhibition designer at UCR Arts, which encompasses the Culver Center of the Arts.*

*TOLO Architecture participants include Peter Tolkin, Sarah Lorenzen, Socrates Medina, Karl Kachele, Kare Tonapetyan, Parker Amman, Jeremy Schacht, Trenman Yau, Chelsea Rector, and Karl Blette. Cal Poly Pomona Architecture (CPP ARC) students included Athenna Ann Lim, Yewon Hong, Romi Anne Grepo, Victor Daniel Macias, Emily To, Cheyenne Capener, Vi Phan, Maria Mercado, Fariba Dorrifar, Matthew Rivera, Ryan Han, Kleon Tran, Tak Kin Szeto, Stephanie Contreras, Stephanie Toro, Chelsea Steiner, Paola Murillo, Karla Vich, Julie Habib, Kenza Abourraja, Karen Venegas, Jose Luis Hernandez, Grace Liu, Rusxanne Londonio, Son Vu, Osvaldo Gutierrez Muñoz, Sam Rubio, Sharifeh Diabdallah, Amaris Vazquez, Joseph Nandino, Emily Bandy, William Tan, Emily Ta, and Karla Camarena. The team from UCR Arts that transported and hung the work included Zaid Yousef, co-curator and exhibition designer, Cody Norris, senior preparator, Tim LeBlanc, assistant preparator, and Grace Saunders, preparator, along with Rene Balingit Jr., Samuel Cantrell, Ivy Son, and Jennifer Rodriguez Trujillo.*

Author

Tyler Stallings is the co-curator of *Red Carpet in C*, along with Zaid Yousef. He was the artistic director at UCR Arts' Culver Center of the Arts from 2007 to 2017. Presently, he is the director of the Frank M. Doyle Arts Pavilion at Orange Coast College.

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