

Marlow Rodale, Easton Irregular, December 2013

Marlow Rodale met me at his Banana Factory studio to discuss new paintings and catch up on recent art projects. He and I both paint conceptual, imaginary spaces, and we appeared together in a show at the Soft Machine Gallery in Allentown in 2012. Rodale's part of the exhibit was titled "Neofuturism," and his current work employs the same elements he used then: transparency, layering, architectural forms and parallel lines laid out like circuit boards. His work is rooted in Cubism and Futurism as well as the Bauhaus or International styles of architecture. The paintings are brightly colored, anxious with activity, and devoid of figures. He situates the viewer in a space that feels empty, yet it's walled in by painterly information, and occasionally studded with 3-D modular forms. As I focus on Rodale's vibrant color, paint drips, scraped areas, graphic details and masses of squares or rectangles, I am compelled to study one unrelated detail after another. So many choices makes me hyperaware of movement and time passing, the work triggers associations with vertigo, speed, travel, technology and restlessness, themes that have been linked with Futurism since the 1930s. Oddly, the compositions spur me to rush ahead and excavate a sketchy future even as my footing in the present is uncertain. The painting affords a broad perspective of opposites: "Stay!" and "Run!" are equal choices, and weighing them side-by-side creates a sense of resolution.

Gates of Ryhleh (2011) reminds me of the *Star Wars* trilogy of the 80s and the then-new thrill of zooming into a cold, alien world rendered so cleanly and simply like interlocking Legos. Rodale divides forms, bevels corners and modulates the color and tone of planes as coolly and systematically as a computer animator. While studying the shift from light to dark on the white L-shaped plane of *Gates of Rhyleh*, I simultaneously register that the entire L form is tilting in space; so, I'm divided: Is light falling on the form? Or is this form physically colored in a graduated way? And since I prefer the older, ham-handed style of computer animation, I admire Rodale's failure to have his planes and forms act in lockstep. In terms of Postmodernism, propagating innate quirks is a current, viable subgenre. Contrasting Rodale's paintings with Al Held's Hard-Edge abstractions qualifies Rodale's disjointed way of relating 2-D and 3-D. Whereas Held insists on consistent rules of perspective, Rodale's unfussy drafting style undermines the Hard-

Edge tradition of clearly relating form to surface and injects fallibility into the arch-perfectionist trade of architectural drafting.

Rodale has exhibited recently in *Eleven* at Our Garage Space Gallery in Easton, and in *Manufactured Consent* at the Fowler Center of Northampton Community College. He was the Featured Artist in March 2013 at The Banana Factory and showed in *Never Accept Art From Strangers* at New Vox Gallery in 2011 in Bethlehem. He had solo exhibitions in 2010 at the Moravian Academy and Loose Threads Boutique, both in Bethlehem. He received his B.F.A. (Painting Concentration) from Kutztown University in 2009.

Leaving Rodale's studio, I pass *Isolationism* (2010) which contrasts bright cadmium oranges and reds against the greyest, most subdued Prussian blue background, and a group of Robert DeLaunay-esque circle paintings framing and masking deep space with many layers of visual interest. I recall how the Bauhaus artists esteemed function as the precursor of beauty and praised the absence of ornamentation, and how Futurism compressed time into an instant. Rodale's work does just the opposite. He makes simple things complicated, thwarts the rules of drawing, and meanders through deep space paving a path of fantastic color. Paradoxically, instead of streamlining design, Rodale empties space by filling it.