



Less Form, More Painting: Ana Cardoso's "Your Payment Verification Code Is 26QNFLU9"

by *Gea Politi*

I had just finishing reading (again, possibly for the third time) John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* when Ana Cardoso asked me to write a critical text for her show at Renata Fabbri, in Milan.

Ana is a dear friend, and I have been an admirer and supporter of her work since the late-2000s. I was beyond excited that she was going to show her latest body of work in my hometown.

Looking at images of the works she was going to present, I immediately thought of a sentence from the book I'd just finished reading:

We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves. Our vision is continually active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are.

This new body of work, at first glance, feels more performative than her earlier modular works, which also had a physical approach, but followed color schemes based more on the installation rather than any discrete painterly gesture.

In her new works, Ana's physicality is more daring. She is not afraid to employ imagery and a more overt storytelling approach. Her work has shifted from a subtle formalism to a more tangible conceptual approach. Less form, more painting.

Ana's work is about unlocking complexity. When she was still spending most of her time in New York, there were times when I would visit her studio more than once within a few days. Each time her work would have developed further toward the "breaking of a code" (one of her earlier works was titled *Code Break*). She always connected the digital and the mathematical to her practice, exposing elaborate patterns throughout her modules. It was as if composition and color could impose their own *necessary condition*, in the same way that necessity and sufficiency are terms used to describe conditional or implicational relationships in logic and mathematics.

Ana's titles have often conjured the intricacies of the digital world. Since the mid-2010s until now, this association has suggested a connection between data compression and the canvas: painting as a form of database storage, the file's contents informed by its title. This relationship is further complicated by the unusual shapes in Cardoso's new body of work. *Form Reform (Atomic Abyss)*, one of the central works of this exhibition, employs a twisted, DNA-like form. The painting is still modular, but the gestural acrylic seems almost migratory, as if coming out of the front of the canvas and continuing on the back.

In *26QNFLU9*, the word "flu" in the title evokes a form of virus (or not), which in turn reflects aspects of the actual painting: turquoise acrylic overlaying graphite, chaotically invading a composition compressed into a triangle-shaped canvas.

Path Finder dares a more pastel palette, and elements are placed as if the shape is turning a page. The work may indeed have to do with finding a path, as the title suggests.

Your Identity History Summary Request includes silhouettes of a pterosaur—the prehistoric winged lizard that Cardoso borrowed from her children's collection. It is a more playful work, both in terms of subject matter and its colorful, stencil-enhanced narrative sequences.

As in Berger's relational way of seeing, each of the paintings in this show changes according to its hanging; there is always another way to present these works, including playing with back and front.

Each of Cardoso's modules easily stands on its own, but connected they reveal the workings of an essential code embedded in painting's three-dimensionality. Each module belongs to a different time—a composition in the making. It is the ultimate performative act in painting.

(Please note that this text was written before seeing the artworks in person, following a phone conversation between Ana Cardoso and the author.)