



Partial view of Jennifer Bartlett's *Recitative*, 2009-10, 372 painted enamel plates, 158 feet long overall; at Pace.



JENNIFER BARTLETT

PACE

Recitative, the title piece of Jennifer Bartlett's recent exhibition at Pace, is a magnum opus, the latest in an ongoing body of work using painted steel plates. When the most celebrated of these, the nearly 153-foot-long *Rhapsody*, was first shown in 1976, it was as though Bartlett had taken Carl Andre's grids of metal squares, hand-painted them and put them up on the wall.

Wrapped around three walls of Pace Gallery's enormous 22nd Street space, the 372 square plates that make up *Recitative* (2009-10) extended a total of 158 feet. Arranged in columns of varying height, the plates (24, 18 or 12 inches square) formed a frieze that rose up to meet the viewer's body. To survey the piece in its entirety required an ambulation similar to walking the perimeter of a cloister.

On a background of baked white enamel gridded in pale silver, the plates of *Recitative* are painted with brightly colored enamel, many in grids of dots that suggest a borrowing of strategies from Minimalist and Post-Minimalist art: impersonality, repetition and rules. Differences in density make the marks worth examining carefully: some dots drip and others refuse to drip. Certain subgroupings of plates paraphrase abstract motifs readily associated with other artists: there are snaking networks of lines that look like Brice Marden's; drizzles and drips that are reminiscent of Pollock's; and a crosshatch pattern that must be Jasper Johns's. Arranged in a rhythmic, linear progression propelled by the varying heights of the plate columns, the sequence seems intended

to be read from left to right around the room. The title *Recitative* (a spoken-singing style often used in opera) suggests, as did that of the earlier *Rhapsody*, that Bartlett sees the overall work as analogous to a piece of music. But the arrangement of plates perhaps too literally resembles a musical score.

With its ostensibly interchangeable parts, *Recitative* provokes a deeper meditation on the digital age than any number of so-called digital artworks. The work originates in discrete parts, from the pixel-like dots to the plates themselves, which, like the tesserae of a mosaic, form an array much larger than its constituent elements. There is a delicious tension between analog and digital, as the manifestly hand-painted marks contrast with the standardized units.

Logistically speaking, a work like this can be created in a very small space, each steel plate being painted separately, in serial fashion. The finished work, in order to be shown, requires a huge space like Pace's. Yet for all its expanse the painting is easily disassembled, transported and reassembled—a desirable quality in a world of traveling exhibitions.

Six smaller multiplate works (most 2010) in the back room made an impact without the need to be as immense as *Recitative*. *Trio* (2008), a fascinating 45-plate work whose dots compose parabolic lines that may have been inspired by a wood-grain pattern, also brought to mind familiar dotted color-blindness tests, thanks to a palette heavy on red/green and blue/yellow pairs.

—Jeff Frederick