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## SERIOUS FUN: NEW MINIMALISM IS CHAMPIONED AT RULE

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[EXCERPT]

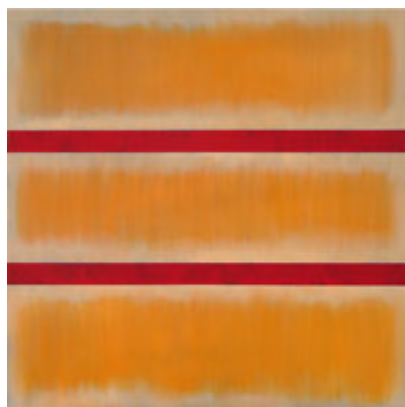
Rule Gallery director Robin Rule has a taste for art with a less-is-more aesthetic, and she has made her place on Broadway Denver's "minimalist central." Over the years, she's showcased first-generation minimalists from New York, including Carl Andre and Mary Obering, as well as local practitioners, notably Clark Richert, the dean of geometric painters in the region. Sometimes though only rarely Rule takes a risk with an emerging local artist who is doing a contemporary take on minimalism. That's exactly what she's doing right now, with the handsome exhibit Pard Morrison: Recent Paintings and Sculptures.

The marvelous Morrison show, installed in the entry and in the main gallery, is filled with stark color-field works that blur the distinction between painting and sculpture. But even though some pieces look like paintings, they are sculptures first and foremost, because they are three-dimensional objects.

Morrison graduated from Colorado State University in 1997 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts with a focus in sculpture. The Rule show is Morrison's first solo in Denver, but his work has been included in a few local group shows as well as being exhibited in galleries in Chicago, New Orleans and Santa Fe. He currently lives in Colorado Springs, where he grew up.

Morrison has written that these pieces are meant to express an imaginary conversation between minimalist masters Donald Judd and Agnes Martin. Deceased sculptor Judd was known for the use of archetypal rectilinear forms, while still-active painter Martin almost always works with the decorative possibilities of the grid. In the case of Morrison's pieces at Rule, Judd apparently has much more to say than does Martin. Morrison mounted rectangular boxes to the walls, creating graphic compositions that function visually as paintings something Judd famously did. But there isn't a grid in sight.

The show begins immediately inside the entrance to the gallery. Hung on the wall facing the street is a triptych, "BGB (R.11.0.4)," made of patinated aluminum. (The pseudo-scientific title is something Morrison often does.) "BGB" is very beautiful and fully lays out Morrison's program; it exemplifies everything else he displays in this show.



For this piece, Morrison lined up three identical flat, oblong, box-like shapes, which he fabricated from aluminum and patinated by repeatedly baking the finishes. He colored the boxes in monochrome the end two are a gorgeous blue and the center box is green and hung them vertically with a little bit of wall showing through to create a horizontal rectangle. The colors are uneven and make the surfaces look painterly, which creates a successful visual tension, because this poetic quality is seemingly at odds with the more prosaic industrial appearance of the boxes themselves.

Morrison's idea of assembling boxes is a simple one, but he gives it a workout by creating a variety of different expressions within this limited framework. For example, on the opposite side of the wall from "BGB" is "LR (R.5.0.4)," one of the most experimental of the variations on his theme. For this piece, Morrison leaned five tall, thin boxes against the wall at a slight diagonal, creating space behind them. The diagonal orientation effortlessly breaks the mold of the rigidly horizontal-versus-vertical orientation of everything else. Although this piece is one of the most clearly sculptural in the show, it's also the one with the most painterly surfaces. The handling of the patination on "LR" is distinct – the centers of the boxes are done in red, surrounded by an expressive border of black along the edges.

Another piece that is clearly sculptural is "LP (R.4.04)." In fact, it's the most sculptural because it's the only Morrison here that is freestanding. "LP" is made up of five tall, narrow vertical boxes placed up on end so that they look like nothing other than a row of fence posts and I mean that as a compliment.

I loved Pard Morrison: Recent Sculpture and Paintings. Morrison's obvious skill and aesthetic consistency are remarkable. But you know what the neatest part is? Until Rule gave him this opportunity, almost no one had ever heard of him. I know I hadn't.

