

# N·O·A·R

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## Mechanical Biota, Chromatic Scales

BY KARL F. VOLKMAR, SPRING/SUMMER 2008

EXCERPT:



**Pard Morrison: *You are so Dreamy*; 2008. Courtesy of the Arthur Roger Gallery.**

THE WORKS OF Pard Morrison are poetically titled chromatic studies that mimic the layout of the ivories and ebonies of a keyboard. Sequences of colors and regular shapes define the rhythm and measure of compositions that could be used as an improvisational composition by a skilled jazz musician. Area, saturation, and juxtaposition mirror the notes, rhythmic patterns, chords, and harmonies of musical scripts.

We can choose to be passive receptors of Morrison's scores, accepting and appreciating the patterns as given. Or active performers as visual experience simulates the motions of the pianist's hands as if the compositions were keyboards. Eyes move back and forth, from side to side, grasping similar colors like chords, finding patterns in a random sequence, discovering new combinations, improvising as we go.

Morrison's chromatic studies remind one of the symbiotic relationship between painting and music. Music uses words from painting like "chromatic" and "color". Painting borrows terms like "tone" and "harmony" from music. Artists like Whistler used "nocturne" and "arrangement" to describe his intentions and the abstractions of Kandinsky were frequently named with using musical terms. The Futurists invented the term "brutism" to give a name to the interchangeability between sounds and color and invented a machine that could play color as colors. Impressionist painter Pissarro compared the contrast between orange and blue to the sounds of trumpets and trombones in a symphony in contradistinction to the sensation of unison. Nor can we forget Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* and his dreams of synaesthesia.

Titles like *Candyland*, *Into Thin Air*, and *You Are So Dreamy* could just as well be the names of popular melodies or the titles of poems. And if we will allow our minds to free associate, perhaps our imaginations can conjure lyrics that follow the chromatic melodies. In an interesting contrast to Emery's work whose motions are real, the experience of movement in Morrison's paintings takes place in our minds.