

MICHAEL COVELLO

The Triangles Through the Leaves

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Rounding the corner into Kutztown University's Miller Art Gallery this installation draws you in: an array of color; a wall of pattern amplified and subverted through meticulous geometry; a pile of process driven debris; a gallery of hovering squares and a space interrupted by forms mimicking their painted forbearers. Is this space a baroque formal garden, inviting an ambulatory stroll through plantings and reliefs and sculptures? Is this space a Dada installation, like Duchamp's 1942 *Sixteen Miles of String*, an homage to the inhibitory power of art? Perhaps, one, the other, both or something different. That is the fun of the installation work of Michael Covello.

Installations traffic in the ambient conditions of place. Those conditions ply their needs upon the artist, who energize place into spaces poised for opportunity. Makers and viewers alike depend upon an awareness of this transformation. This transformation, as a contributing presence carries on from the outset to the completion of the project's viewing. After which, like a dust storm, the work recedes leaving its residue as memory. Michael Covello traffics in this relationship in his work, *The Triangles Through the Leaves*, at Kutztown University's Miller Art Gallery.



The Triangles Through the Leaves presents us from the outset with conflict as a central condition. The designed image of a triangle's sharp corners seem weightier and more urgent than the natural edges of leaves. Leaves shift with wind and sun to capture the sun's energy. They flutter in sequential rhythms and play a part in the swarm of fellow leaves. The triangle's design is of human thought, identified by a Greek sense of order. One wonders at the prepositional support, "through" used by Covello to define this relationship: Is this a gaze or is this a thrust? As a Gaze, the viewer looks through the leaves to the triangle. As a thrust, the triangle pierces the leaves. This ambiguity grounds the complexity of Covello's installation and frames our interpretive play. Is this about sight or power? Light or materiality? Voyeurism or Action? Or a fluttering tweaked by the winds of thought and experience? This we can surmise with out ever actually seeing the piece.

Although the work exceeds the confines of studio practice, Covello comes to this space primarily through the traditions of studio painting. Covello resists, embraces, and depends upon those traditions. This occurs in two ways: through his artistic sensibility and through the process of constructing the work. His artistic sensibility pulse with a resistance: between the physicality of the canvas, the surface and rectilinear form, and the plastic and sensory qualities of his materials, fluid spreadable and spray-able material and overlaying color. Unlike his forbearer Mondrian, whose constrained argument led to a deconstruction of the givens of frame and surface, Covello works through the amplification of action to subvert and rekindle the inherited forms of painting. These subversions include both overlay of processes on the canvas and the extension of the optical painterly forms into sculptural space. In this way he joins artistic concerns that work with the abject,

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the other, and the detritus to reveal and expand their truths. Each painted square panel that he brought to the site radiates outward as the constructed space within the gallery conflates into the panels. A ramble through these "leaves" and "triangles" reveals constructed forms that, like Baroque follies, present themselves unexpectedly to the audience as the webs, walls, and discarded colorful adolescent woodland forts.

His process of construction began with painted squats and canvas panels made in Florida. The elements were then moved on-site where their influence was extended into the Miller Gallery. Once here, Covello worked with Kutztown University students to construct the installation, a process that benefitted both Covello's and the students' experiences. These benefits had both artistic and pedagogical dimensions to them. The work's aesthetic is opened into the social conditions of labor, improvisation, and design. While falling short of collaborations, students complied with Covello's scheme, improvised within explicit and implied boundaries, and

interacted with Covello on segments of the work. *The Triangles Through the Leaves* evolves then as a pedagogical site, in which learning takes place in a project-based constructivist framework, with students both contributing to and learning from the experience. It is here that the consequence of the gallery site fulfills its influence upon Covello's, as a pedagogical place in which the learning took place in dense interactive real time.

Views will emerge from this work with a series of questions and experiences. The Work traffics in an aesthetic awash in the influences of collage, the street, entertainment, camouflage, and this digital age's overlays of signals and signs. It proceeds by doubling down on the mark as a means to divert attention from the givens, the gallery and the square panel's reference to easel painting. Viewers will wonder does this resonance reach some point of sustainability or does it demand a constant supply of energy to avoid succumbing to entropy? This question is one of the mysteries of *The Triangles Between the Leaves* that sustain its memory as a trace within the life of the gallery, the future of the students, the experience of its audience, and the work of Covello.

