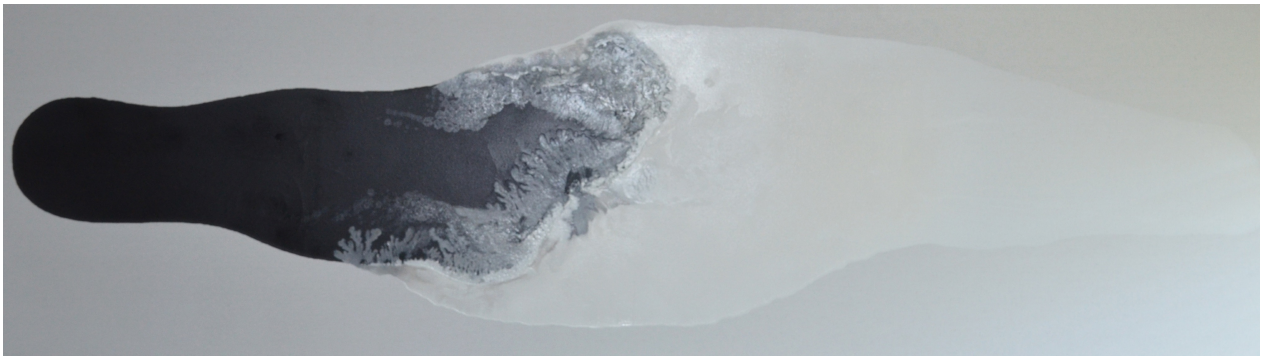


A Response to Julie Bauer's *Merge* (2014)



Julie Bauer's *Merge*, (2014), is a 60-inch by 24-inch painting in acrylic on white canvas. It shows two circles – a black one on the left and a white one on the right -- that seem to melt and expand into the center (the white paint stands out from the white canvas because they are different in tone). The two waves of opposing color meet in the middle, creating a black, grey and white swirl that nearly fills the center of the canvas's frame.

Merge's composition is balanced in design and in the use of positive and negative space. Yet there is a dynamic and rhythmic tension created by the intertwining movement of the black and white colors. It appears to be organized, yet chaotic. When first viewed, the eye goes instantly to the strongest area of contrasting black against the white canvas on the left, then follows the black lines toward the middle, where the stream of white color is discovered to be merging with the white color flowing from the opposite side. The eye keeps moving around the frame, following the flow, returning regularly to the settled place of darkest black. The picture also contrasts with the room where it is displayed. Its strong horizontal rectangular shape stands out dynamically on the square wall – the painting is a picture inside a picture (the wall). *Merge's* forms are simple. They blend to create a whole shape against the white background. There are no ornaments or symbols, which would take away from the overall style and meaning of the image. All the elements knit together in a single, organic form. So, the painting has strong unity.

Merge was made in Shanghai, China, in 2014 by Julie Bauer, a German artist. Her focus, as she states on her website *emotionandnature.com*, is on putting education and painting together and combining different techniques and inspirations. She integrates objets trouvés into her paintings, and paints without brushes - pouring paint directly on canvas and moving the canvas to spread the paint in a spontaneous and organic way. Her work can show the influences of Chinese painting and Australian aborigine art. Her goal is the direct transfer of emotions to canvas in a natural, intuitive way. *Merge* is the first minimalist painting done by Bauer, and represents a major change in her artistic style. ("emotionandnature - paint and open your mind", 2016)

Merge appeals to me for three reasons. First, my mother made it for me, at my suggestion. After watching her paint in the abstract expressionist style for several years, I thought it would be interesting if she presented something simple, with contrast, where the viewer could focus on just one thing. So this painting is quite personal. Second, a room where one lives represents one's character – how one “sells” oneself. This picture, displayed in my room, represents my character. Third, I like modern, minimalist design, in architecture as well as in art, because it is clean and simple; the chaos of life reduced to a clear, stable essence. *Merge* attracts me because it's organized with straight, clear lines but it also has flowing curves and organic forms. It shows both sides of being a human being. It seems structured, but at the same time it seems to have a soul.

Merge fits into the abstract expressionist and minimalist traditions. Specifically, it follows in the footsteps of the mid-century Drip Painting schools, which developed within the Abstract Expressionist movement.

The term "minimalism" was first used in English in the early 20th century to describe "a 1913 composition by the Russian painter Kasimir Malevich of a black square on a white ground," according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica. The movement became popular in the 1960s in New York. The artists who experimented with this new method wanted to create work that was unconventional, less emotional, more structural and anonymous than the then-trendy Abstract

Expressionism. *Merge* uses pared-down design elements, simple shapes and basic colors, as do the major minimalist works of artists like Sol LeWitt, Donald Judd and Robert Morris.

("Minimalism", 2016)

Abstract expressionism was a movement that began in America in the 1940s and includes many different sub-styles. The style uses abstract elements – no human figures – and the images are free in expression and in conveyance of emotion. The paintings appear spontaneous, but require careful planning. Some of the most famous painters of this movement are Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and Frank Rothko. ("Abstract expressionism", 2016)

Jackson Pollock also began the new technique of drip painting -- pouring paint on the canvas. He used flowing lines to create patterns that lead the eye around the painting, or back and forth from one canvas to another. Morris Louis adapted this technique to his simpler, more minimalist paintings, using it to create masterpieces such as the painting *Alpha Iota* (1960). In *Alpha Iota*, as in *Merge*, the artist used simple bands of basic color and contrasted the colors dramatically with the negative space of the canvas (in this case the negative space is in the center of the image). *Alpha Iota*, according to Sotheby's catalog, is considered to be the "pinnacle of Louis's mature achievement." Just as Bauer did with *Merge*, Louis used a "one-shot" direct pour technique to create this work. ("Morris Louis - ALPHA IOTA", 2016)

While *Merge* is not as colorful as *Alpha Iota*, I believe it captures the same dynamic balance between structure and expression of emotion. Its simpler colors make *Merge* more minimalist and less lively in character than *Alpha Iota*. But *Merge* is perhaps even more suggestive of the flowing, organic essence of the natural world.

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