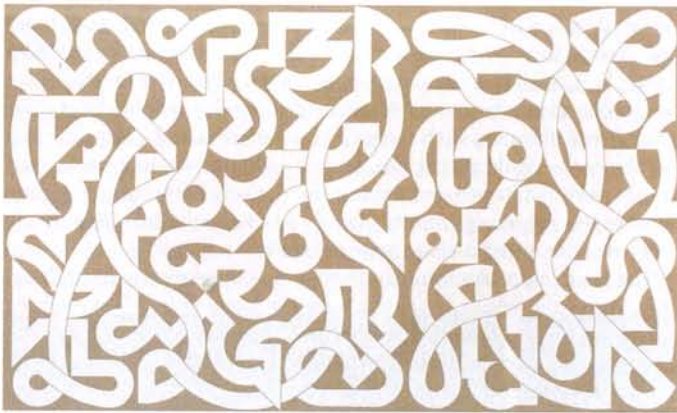


Valerie Jaudon

DC MOORE

"Today it is almost impossible," Valerie Jaudon told an interviewer in 2001, "for anyone to understand the intolerant conformity of the early '70s institutional art world, its museums, galleries, and critics. Not only was the 'mainstream' narrow, but there were no models, art historical or otherwise, to guide one out of the modernist box." By those lights Pattern and Decoration—or P&D, the movement through which Jaudon emerged in the period she describes—was a reactive push back against a deadening history, and as such fell into the subversive tradition of earlier avant-gardes. Yet by a decade later, the early 1980s, P&D was thought disreputable enough that I remember a colleague at *Artforum* at the time saying it could never be taken seriously in the magazine. Most obviously, it was decorative—a word still bruised by a century of abuse—and in some forms its decorativeness took the shape of hearts-and-flowers-type imagery that could be mistaken for greeting-card kitsch. That criticism contains much to be argued with, but in Jaudon's case it's academic since her work has always been firmly abstract, if informed by decorative art of different kinds—most clearly, to me, the arabesque lines of Islamic architecture and interior decor.



In fact what has always been striking about Jaudon's art is its considerable rigor, even if it also often reminds me of those comic-strip labyrinths designed for small children, who have to thread their way through with a pencil and come out the other side. Minus the pencil I hope, you could literally play that game with *Barcarolle*, 2014, a long horizontal linen canvas left partly bare but mostly filled with an intricate nest of white bands, which bend and cross and fold back on themselves, describing points and circles, short arcs and sudden right angles, zigzags and long, even curves. All of these bands are the same width, and there's a reason for that: They're actually not multiple but one, a single band that enters halfway up the left side of the painting and exits halfway up the right (or vice versa). Everywhere else it's contained by the canvas, often nearing the edge, or running tightly parallel to the edge, but never touching it. It actually never even touches itself, for wherever it must pass either above or below another part of itself to go on its way, the over- or underlap is signaled by a narrow gap in the paint, which lets the brown linen show through. In following that principle, the one band becomes multiple again, even while preserving its helter-skelter, loop-the-loop sense of flowing continuity.

Walk into a Jaudon show and look around, and the paintings and works on paper may seem similar: They most often have the structure of a line or lines distributing themselves evenly through a shallow visual space. But as Jaudon constantly experiments and plays with that basic idea, time spent with these works brings out differences as well as ties.

If the white band in *Barcarolle* is a creamily painted positive against the negative space of the bare canvas, *Cremona*, 2014—another painting in which a single line comes in and out of the canvas at left and right and fills the space between—features a narrow black line instead of a wide white one, and sets it against a white ground whose broad, richly painted expanses attract the eye, making figure and ground, positive and negative, tend to flip and reverse. And if *Cremona* divides vertically into two halves, each of which both mirrors and inverts the other, I could be wrong but I don't think *Cadenza*, 2015, repeats structurally at all, even while its like shapes, surely drawn with templates such as French curves and set squares, point constantly to doubling and duplication. Complex in plan, elegant in realization, these paintings relate as clearly to the work of canonical artists like Jasper Johns and Frank Stella as they do to Islamic screens and grilles. Once subversive, they now seem surprisingly classic.

—David Frankel

Valerie Jaudon,
Barcarolle, 2014, oil
on linen, 54 × 90".