

“In my end is my beginning.”

T.S. Eliot, “East Coker,” Four Quartets

Alex Hirsch’s recent works on paper spring from contradiction and reversal. In Explosion I from the Structure Series (2015), the viewer experiences a tumultuous ending in a storm of flying shreds and fragments – has the artist touched a moment of frustration, even despair? Is there nothing left but to tear the paper into a windswept space, throw everything away, and slam the door?

But suddenly (for me, in a split second) these flying shreds find a swirling, delirious grace – the beginning of form. Fragments in flight simultaneously destroy and rebuild, seeking direction in every direction. In Slung, the thinnest boundary is flung, stretched across space – always subject to the storm, but somehow holding its own. There is real work for boundary lines – for the orderly transmission of a message, for courage. Transmittal speaks this determination, at the very moment the message is lost amidst the wires – or is this the moment at which the message ignites, springs along its line, runs like a spark? Noise explodes, lashes, spikes in a tantrum of fury – or is this an ecstatic opening of line into space? The well-drawn, the precise, the contained rushes to embrace the enigmatic cloudy expanse that is the ground of its being.

The Structure Series is classically modernist in its engagement with the essentials of art – line traversing the paper support; the delicate moisture of pigment, everywhere and nowhere. But this exploration is fundamentally metaphysical. Does ending precede beginning, giving the new a chance?

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