

GISELA COLON: GLO-PODS

By Robert Mahoney

In her *Glo-Pods*, Gisela Colon has fused Op Art, Light & Space art, Pop art, and global art world trends in a dazzling synthesis of elegant, contemporary beauty. Though undoubtedly influenced by the Light & Space and Finish/Fetish art of Southern California Minimalists of the 60s and 70s, including artists such as James Turrell, DeWain Valentine, Larry Bell and Helen Pashgian, Colon has reset the terms of the discourse on an organic ground, rooted in concepts of feminism and globalism. While Light & Space as an art movement was contained within the clear boundaries of minimalism, Colon's objects wend their way through a post-pop, post-minimalist cultural landscape that embraces popular-fine art mixing (Colon suggests a memory of her father's Corvette stays with her in this work), as well as decidedly more fractal boundaries between nature and culture, and one culture and another. Whereas the Light & Space artists create immaterial and linear exercises in pure perception, Colon's pods are physical--but of uncertain physicality. The first problem one grapples with, encountering the *Glo-Pods*, is what they are made of, or how they are made; what, exactly, is one looking at? It is not pure perception, but perception of an unidentifiable object with a strange aura that is the issue: in the *Glo-Pods*, Colon twists perception inside the embrace of a question mark.

Colon's shapes are sketched, then blueprinted on shaped wooden frameworks. A clear sheet of acrylic is then cut to the shape. That clear shaped piece is then baked, in a process called pooling, to make it pliable. At that point, it is fixed again to the framework and air is blown into it, in the part of the process called blow-molding, in effect, blowing it up like a balloon, whence it hardens into its current form, drying with a slightly opaque surface. In previous work, the resulting pod was spray painted on the inside by the artist, applying layer after layer of paint. In the *Glo-Pods*, Colon, extending her painting skills, has developed a proprietary method involving lamination and layering of plastics to instill color into the pod. At every level, then, the effect of the process results in a unique piece, marked by the creative act of the individual artist working on an individual piece. The recursive process (revisiting the same sheet several times) has so many imprecisions in it that each piece is unique. These objects are not cookie-cut, they defy any discourse on mechanical reproduction in modernity: each pod is carefully, individually made.

The most distinctly problematic issue related to looking at a Colon *Glo-Pod* is determining where the color is coming from. It is by no means clear. One might be forgiven for thinking that the pod is a container that holds a colored liquid in it, in the manner of a lava lamp, or that a similar inner object with color is placed inside the outer layer of quasi-transparence, like two layers of a Russian doll. In neither case would one be correct: instead, Colon has developed a proprietary plastics fabrication method involving lamination and layering to create the color effect in these works.

Colon is a colorist. Most *Glo-Pods* have three or four colors, and the rain-bowing effect from color to color is achieved by Colon taking the greatest care to ensure that the colors blend or blur seamlessly into each other so that the viewer very often cannot tell where one is situated in the transition from color to color. Colon's seamless colorations defy even the clear-cut divisions of the colors of the natural spectrum in a rainbow: it is this odd, even "unnatural" color flow that may account for the sometimes otherworldly "vibe" of her pods. Colon emphasizes the fact that

the refusal of the color to subdivide into tones forces the eye to all but Platonically take in the multicolored wonder of the whole visual experience. By shifting seamlessly from color to color there is a hypnotic purpose underlying Colon's practice, rendering the viewer slack in front of a presence that, refusing to define itself, still, or only, in the end, registers as beautiful. While such a posture could be viewed as intentional, disarming more accurately describes their posture before the viewer. Colon's work is beautiful at first sight and at last look, in between, it is slippery and hard to get a handle on. In sum, Colon's candy-colored, easy-going presences simply invite one to join in and let them take you where they will.

The color effect is problematized by shape. The combination of the effect of perceptual ambiguity both with regard to color and shape means that Colon's Glo-Pods, however benign, are persistent, they keep coming at you, and squirming away from being nailed down—and as soon as they settle down, they are off and running again. While *Skewed Square Glo-Pod (Iridescent Hot Red/Pink)* is fairly direct and up front, a similarly *Skewed Square Glo-Pod in Iridescent Red* only is more somber and withdrawn. It challenges the eye, between *Rectangle Torque Glo-Pod (Iridescent Hot Red/Pink)* and *(Red)* only, to classify the change in the quality of the encounter with the hues involved. In a variant on the iridescent red there is a bluish flare that spills out in lighter shades across the pod, unseen in others. Positioning also factors in, as it seems likely that nine of ten viewers of *Dome Melt Floor Glo-Pod (Iridescent Orange)* will think the color is shone by a light source.

As a result of these devices, Colon's organic objects simply relocate light and space and finish and its fetish in a different place in the universe. By embedding light in color inside a laminated layered form, Colon reverses the usual dynamic of even an optic piece of art. The color and the light come out at you from inside the work, it is emitted, it takes on the glowing character of light (not paint), all of which is pleasingly disorienting to the viewer. Conceptually, when one imagines all the different ways in which post-minimal painters a generation ago attempted to break free of the Greenburgian notion of the subordination of color and paint to surface (in his construct of post-painterly abstraction introduced in Los Angeles), painting transmuted by an industrial process was not an option that arose: therefore, Colon has also found a new place in the world for coloration in art that lies somewhere beyond painting. That Colon can pursue this stratagem today indicates the degree to which the issue of color has scaled up to include the wider twists and turns of the built world today.

As a result of the indeterminacy of her work, Colon's art, in addition to its relation to minimalism, also partakes of the exploration of perceptual ambiguity by such international artists as St. Clair Cemin, Jorge Pardo and even Vik Muniz, where work far different in physical and perceptual qualities, perhaps enabled by the international art world's embrace of op artists like Jesus Raphael Soto, nonetheless have all problematized formalist aesthetics to accommodate the new visual demands of today's polymorphic global-virtual world. In a world where phones and buildings have "skins" and we will soon all be identified biometrically by pills emitting 'fingerprints' from our bellies, Colon's pods belong.