

Essay on Music of the Spheres exhibit  
by Heather Zises, Editor of *50 Contemporary Women Artists*

Each and every art practice has a certain alchemy to it. Chalda Maloff's role as an art maker is one that embraces the precision of math and the exactitude of computers. As a digital painter, the artist seeks to engage the viewer on an elemental level by tapping into a domain more authentic than our physical world. Employing her signature close-up style, Maloff creates metaphysical bodies of work punctuated with color and form. Hinged upon an electric palette of gestural lines and drop shadows, ecological species and fantastical botanica are woven into an expressive whole.

In her newest exhibition *Music of the Spheres*, Maloff pairs ancient concepts with contemporary issues of ecology. Drawing upon the early philosophical theory *Music of the spheres*, the artist's digital paintings portray movements of celestial bodies as a form of music. This "music", however, is not literally audible but rather a harmonic mathematical or religious conceit. An influential theory throughout the Renaissance, the *Music of the spheres* incorporates the metaphysical principle that mathematical relationships express "tones" of energy which manifest in numbers, visual angles, shapes and sounds that are all connected within a pattern of proportion.

Maloff triggers "tones" of energy in her compositions by implementing two visual elements: the illusion of backlight and symmetrical geometry. Using light and shape as her principal instruments, Maloff's artworks function as a conduit of spirituality and emotion. Inspired by the primal days of fire worship to modern times of screen worship, the artist mixes ancient tradition with contemporary activity made possible only from a digital platform. Within each painting, Maloff wields the illusion of light to create dimensional volumes silhouetted against a flat ground. Opaque forms inherit an inner glow as they reveal an atmosphere of punctuated shapes and geometric angles. Gradient color washes and mosaic patterns work to kindle the imagination, eliciting feelings of pleasure and sensuality from the viewer. Amplifying this surface tension is the appearance of spatial ambiguity within each picture. By counter posing digital splatter with solid shapes, Maloff pushes her forms into a sculptural sphere causing the foreground and background to become interchangeable. Oscillating from hard to soft zones, the picture plane becomes a lens that is constantly refocusing itself.

All of the works featured in *Music of the Spheres* mirror the idea that they are scores like musical compositions. More specifically, their formal aspects imply that things must be interpreted and played out in the viewer's mind. Quite fittingly, several titles in the series reference music: *A Capella*, *Crescendo*, *Improvisation*, *Invocation*, *Prelude* and *Rondo*. Spiked with staccato points and dramatic arcs, each painting reflects clusters of sonic activity.

Maloff's creative process corresponds to the inner workings of her mind: one that is of total control. As someone who studied math and computers, this aspect is vital since precision is her wheelhouse. Maloff begins by creating all of her paintings with various computer software, and then prints them on a large format fine art printer. Once executed, the images are mounted onto museum-grade acrylic with polished edges so that the maximum amount of light may radiate from each tableau. Working digitally allows Maloff to achieve enormous detail and control the image down to the pixel. Administering the software like a brush, she mixes virtual media such as watercolor, pencil, ink and pastel until she finds them aesthetically satisfying. To build up her compositions, the artist employs a digital layering process. This method allows her to override

any obstacles that may occur while painting live such as accidental splatter or the risk of paint drying too fast during application. It is important that the digital layers remain active at all times so she can adjust her palette on a micro level. Interestingly, Maloff's analog background of working in aquatint informs this persuasion, such that it involves a meticulous process of multiple layers (acid baths on plate) and once the layers are set, it is nearly impossible to correct the underlayers.

Maloff chose to work in a digital medium for its power to combine and synthesize various artistic effects. Her preferred method not only provides an arsenal of creative tools but also extraordinary options for developing an image. Through the interpretation of light, color and form, Maloff renders paintings that evoke an immediate response but also reveal more of themselves over time.