



**Title - "1952 Rings"**

**Contemporary Art**

**Artist - Sarah Morris (1967- present) American, born England**

**Medium - Painting**

**Work completed in New York in 2006**

I chose as my “Close-Up-On Art” Study Paper the **1952 [Rings]** by Sarah Morris. This piece is from a series of paintings that Morris created in conjunction with a film leading up to the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, China.

Sarah Morris was born in England in 1967. She was raised in Providence, Rhode Island by parents that were both in the medical field. Her grandmother and mother were artists. She lives and works in New York and London. She graduated from Brown University in 1989 with a degree in Philosophy and Semiotics. She participated in the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program in 1989-90.

This large Contemporary painting was completed in 2006 in her studio in New York. This piece was purchased by the Palm Springs Art Museum with funds provided by Gladys Rubinstein in memory of Sam Rubinstein. It is on exhibit in the Steve Chase Wing on the third floor of the PSAM.

Sarah Morris became known internationally in the mid-1990’s for her complex abstract paintings and films. She has had numerous solo and group exhibitions. The influence of artists such as Piet Mondrian’s 1930’s work as well as Frank Stella’s 1970’s series of “Protractor Paintings” is found in some of her pieces. Her work is part of an art movement known as “Neo-Geometric”. It is abstract, modern and minimalist in its composition.

Morris finds inspiration from architectural landscapes of the world’s major cities. In this painting she uses colors and geometries that she associates with the city of Beijing’s unique character and history. This painting is based on video stills and photos taken by her of Beijing prior to the 2008 Summer Olympic Games. She scans the photos into a computer to manipulate them to produce a grid-like model image of the city as seen from above. This grid is then applied to a monochrome ground and finally colored in section by section. Once this digital process is complete it is ready to become a large scale painting.

I stepped off the elevator on the Museum’s 3rd floor and was immediately drawn to the painting. It is quite large, 7’ x 7’. I paused to look from a distance, then moved closer looking for details. The vibrant colors and the structure of the linked circles and vertical columns was captivating and exciting.

The painting’s **Rings** refer to the Olympic Rings found on the International Olympic flag and to the traffic arteries known as Ring Roads in Beijing. In Beijing, it’s easy to get lost because one is constantly going around in a series of circles on the Ring Roads that interconnect.

The year 1952 refers to the year that the Soviet Union and Israel participated in the Summer Olympic Games for the first time. The games were held in Helsinki, Finland in 1952. The use of the color black is a reference to World War II, while the color blue refers to the city of Helsinki where the 1952 Olympic Games took place.

This painting is composed of a grid of vertical lines of varying length, width and color. A series of 10 interconnected rings in various stages of completion are the primary focus. These rings are repeated from the bottom left of the canvas to the upper right side in a diagonal grid. This repeating of the circle captures the fast pace of the city as one’s eye moves from ring to ring. The vertical columns underneath the chain of interlocking circles give one a sense of order, calm and stability.

Morris's use of color is as important as the linear geometries that form her compositions. The color red is repeated several times and moves our eye from the left bottom corner to the top right corner. The colors black, white and yellow move our eye all around the canvas and balance each other in their proportion and placement. In my opinion, the use of numerous other colors and hues contrast and compliment the four dominant colors.

The **1952 Rings** makes a profound statement about the past and also the future of the Games. Consider the fact that the 1st Olympic Games were first staged in Greece in 776 BC. The 2020 Games will be held in Tokyo. History repeating itself on a global scale.

I would like to close with a question. Would you consider this painting to be an example of "Smart Art"?

Josie Gomez, Provisional Docent  
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Sources:  
PSAM Toor Library Files on Sarah Morris  
Ask/Art Website Sarah Morris File  
PSAM 75 Years 75 Artworks