

LENNON, WEINBERG, INC.

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Richard Kalina

Naves, Mario. "Gallery Beat – Richard Kalina: New Paintings and Watercolors." City Arts NYC, April 2009, p13.

The abstract artist Richard Kalina thinks a lot about painting—maybe too much given the programmatic nature of his art—but he’s not afraid to have fun. His canvases and drawings, on display at Lennon, Weinberg, Inc., combine Minimalist structures, craft reminiscent of vernacular traditions and a wiry strain of Pop. Imagine the love child of Donald Judd and a colonial era quiltmaker who’s been weaned on 1950s design and you’ll have some idea of what Kalina’s quixotic enterprise might look like. Kalina eschews chance, and follows a stringent and fairly unforgiving strategy.

Working on linen, he measures and masks gridded compositions; regulated squares of exposed linen and jagged white lines establish the foundation of each composition.

These grounds are punctuated by segmented ovals, squares and roving diagonal bands rendered in collaged sheaths of rice paper painted in a vibrant range of tones. Shifts in color and scale bring about jarring and sometimes jaunty variations in rhythm and space. “Pearl of the Indies” (2009) and “A Marriage of Convenience” (2008)—Kalina’s titles are allusive, bordering on gnomic— pull and pop at the eye in an aggressively cheerful manner. Brigid Riley meets Daffy Duck. Kalina is most assured as a colorist when his palette is antiseptic: the brilliant field of aquamarine in “A Marriage of Convenience” suits his brainy vision better than the Kleelike range of autumnal tones in “A Western Passage.” Synthetic becomes him. Having said that, whatever color Kalina lays down is invariably saturated, clean and radiates light.

Stained glass windows are an immediate association. The idiosyncrasies in Kalina’s work are more apparent in the drawings wherein he comes across like a PoMo Saul Steinberg dissecting the language of abstraction.

These pieces are dry and witty, but they lack the high-flown pictorial rhetoric of the paintings. Sober he may be and not a little pretentious, but Kalina is whimsical as well. It’s a happy combination.