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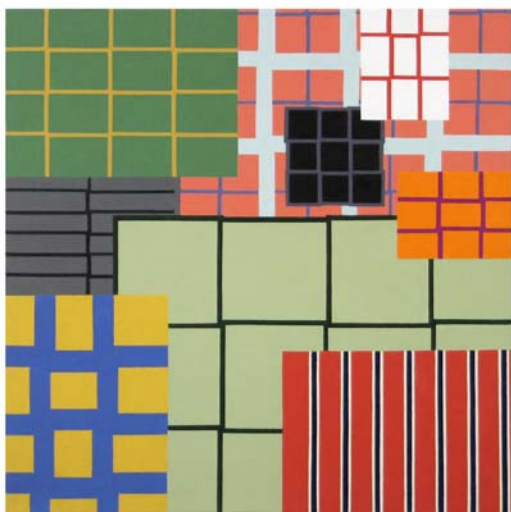
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Stephen Westfall

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Art in America

September 2006



Stephen Westfall: *Orchard Street*, 2006, oil and alkyd on canvas, 24 inches square; at Lennon, Weinberg.

Stephen Westfall at Lennon, Weinberg

For the last decade or so, Stephen Westfall has taken misaligned grids as his signature structure, fondly skewering the modernist visual vocabulary in a stew (a reduction, really) of Minimalism and Pop. During the same period, his color has become richer and more complex, and in 2001 it took something of a conceptual turn that is still in effect in several of the paintings seen in his 14th New York solo show.

In *Jerome* (60 inches square, 2006; all works oil and alkyd on canvas) and the particularly loose-jointed *Kyoto* (36 by 48 inches, 2005), both of them unsteady, six-by-six-unit grids, pattern's implied infinite extension outward is subtly countered by a chromatic loop or circuit. The hue of each horizontal row of blocks functions also as the division between and above the blocks in the next row up. The wan green of the top row of *Jerome*, appearing wintry cool against candy-pink divisions, recurs at the bottom, tropically humid between blocks of a curry-colored ocher. A smart, funny painter, Westfall might be joking

here about the self-referentiality of abstract painting. In this schema, each hue abuts and interacts optically with four others; for example, the baby blue across the center of *Jerome* advances relative to the pink above it, holds its own against its Venetian red and carbon black neighbors, and sails back from the ocher along its bottom edge.

A similar coloristic system is at work in *Winslow* (60 by 72 inches, 2005), which resembles four rows of pennants dangling from a cable against a white ground. They are variations of the primary and secondary hues, plus a tannish neutral. Each pennant is outlined in a contrasting color; its interior hue is repeated in the outline of the pennant to its right.

With so much white, *Winslow* feels a bit arid compared to, for example, *Springs* (36 by 48 inches, 2006), in which abutting subdivisions of the field resemble an eccentrically paned window, its stained-glass colors hinting at the holy. *Orchard Street* (24 inches square, 2006) is rife with overlapping planes, evoking the bustling rhythms of that pushcart milieu. The landscape reading of *Speedway* (48 by 60 inches, 2006) is the closest of these canvases to the representational views with which the artist recently surprised his audience in his last solo show at this gallery's former SoHo location.

The palette in *Look Around* (48 by 60 inches, 2006) is keyed to a rectangular core of saffron yellow and concentric bands of mossy green, lapis blue and earthy red-orange, very close to

the muted but forceful colors of some Buddhist devotional painting. These bands are separated by others of alternating black and white squares, which, because of their syncopated alignment, do not support the eye's expectation that they occupy a plane behind that of the other colors. Yet it is difficult to accept the painting as the flat pattern it is. Phenomenological gamesmanship is the artist's forte; his eagerness to explore a variety of structural formats ensures that he won't soon paint himself into a corner.

—Stephen Maine