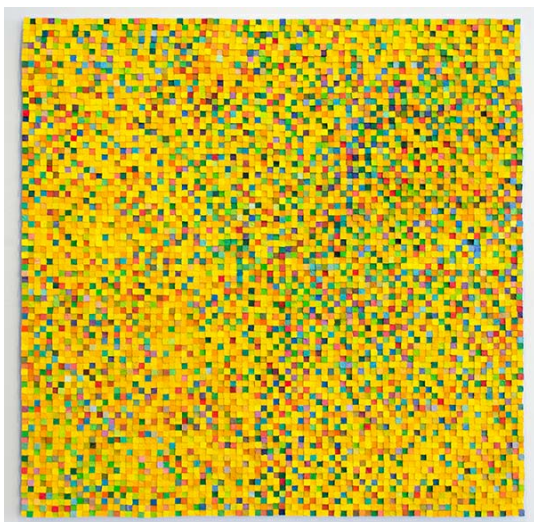


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## Color In Transit: "Building A Painting" At Margaret Thatcher Projects

By Matthew Hassell  
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*Tanganyika*, 2011, Wax, limestone dust, olepasta and pigments on wood, 67.5 x 67.5 inches, 171 x 171 cm)

The matter-of-fact blank stare of the modernist grid peers back out at the viewer, blocking his or her view into image space with an undeniably flat plane, reiterating the two dimensionality of the painting surface. A consistently reoccurring item in painterly discourse, it asks us to investigate beyond merely what one sees and to reach back into our own semblance of painting history. It has become a maneuver that brings with it so much art historical baggage that these days grid paintings are seldom innovative. On the rare occasion that one is able to put a fresh spin on such an aesthetically tired occurrence, the rewards can be boundless.

Such is the case with **Carlos Estrada-Vega**. His show, "*Building a Painting*", on view at Margaret Thatcher Projects through June 23rd, consists of brightly contrasting grid paintings of varying sizes. But look again: these are not your typical fill-in-the-block-of-color value studies.

Instead of painting directly onto a traditional support, Estrada-Vega has created interchangeable magnetized blocks of saturated color. Wooden blocks are painted with pigment that has been mixed with a healthy amount of volumizing limestone powder to emphasize the character of each individual brushstroke. Mounted to sheets of metal, these moveable painting units are arranged in a variation of grid ensembles from intimate hand-sized works to constructions that are large and immersive.

The most exciting, moving aspect of these works is temporality of his brushstrokes; not relegated to one permanent space, his strokes are moveable. Estrada-Vega's painting process allows him to supercede the academic dryness of a straightforward grid by adding an element of performance. In a time when others may be moving pixels around on a computer screen, Estrada Vega has set himself up with a physical paint stroke manipulation system. He can copy and paste actions in and out of place using interchangeable magnetic parts. It's a system of production that invites the viewer to imagine the artist's performance of moving the units from place to place in search of composition; a living Photoshop.

Clearly aware of the New York school of thought, the artist makes work that borrows its visual structure from minimalism, its attention to the importance of painterly intuition from the abstract expressionists, and arrives at a product that displays the physical remnant of a painting performance. While the Ab-Ex generation considered themselves to be barefacedly laying out indelible marks in painterly space, Estrada-Vega can undo any move at any moment.

That is not to say that the parts are haphazardly interchangeable. Sol LeWitt may have placed the onus of creation here on the gallery hand. Although this would have been possible, even sexy, Estrada-Vega's own attention to color selection and placement comes to the forefront when viewing the work. His compositions have been carefully assembled, arriving at the gallery fully composed despite the easily movable nature of their magnetized units.

The playful transparency of process is the key to viewer enjoyment here. In creating his own rules, Estrada-Vega is able to squeeze a healthy dose of magic out of what could have been just another sterile abstract grid. Utilizing an acute attention to material within a self-defined process of mark making, he creates his own aesthetic oasis in what could have been just another dune in a well-traversed painting desert.



*Silent Solitude*, 2011, Wax, limestone dust, olepasta and pigments on wood, 35 x 35 inches, 88 x 88 cm)