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Art Reviews: "All-Too-Human Moments in the Kienholzes' Drawings; Figuring It Out"

By Leah Ollman
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The eye might gravitate to **Carlos Estrada-Vega's** paintings for their vibrant color, but the mind latches on to them as curious puzzles to be figured out, decoded. Their format appears simple enough: All are compositions based on the modular unit of the square. Some squares pair up to form rectangles, some quadruple to form larger squares, set among the smaller.

The basic structure brings to mind Mondrian and any number of other grid-based abstractionists finessing the boundary between system and intuition. But **Estrada-Vega's** work has a serious quirk that sets it apart. The title of his show at Hunsaker/Schlesinger Fine Art, "About 8,000 Paintings," gives it away. Each of the colored squares in these paintings is actually a separate painting in itself, a chunk of wood--some as small as a half-inch square--sheathed in canvas and painted a solid color. **Estrada-Vega** implants a magnetic core into each of the micro-paintings, then assembles anywhere from 25 to more than 1,000 of the small canvases onto a metal panel that, in turn, fastens to a magnet on the wall.

An intriguing conceit, to be sure, and **Estrada-Vega's** paintings derive quite a bit of their vigor from the labor-intensity of this process--but, thankfully, not all of it. Dense with both the purposeful concentration of work and the improvisational spirit of play, the paintings strike a delicate balance between the two impulses. They verge on the programmatic, but never succumb to its predictability.

Estrada-Vega keeps the surfaces alive by sometimes varying the depth of the individual canvases, so that the surface plane of the unified work is actually faceted and slightly discontinuous. His palette is equally jaunty and jazzy, with teal bumping up against brick, eggshell neighboring rose. Khaki, emerald, tangerine, slate, crimson, aqua, pumpkin, royal blue and hundreds more idiosyncratic hues stake their claims to separate squares, but collaborate peaceably, either toward unified harmonies or, better yet, toward spunky, syncopated rhythms.