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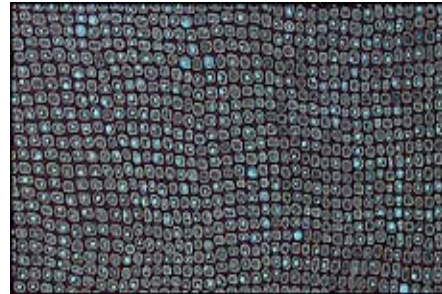
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Connecting the Dots With Meaning

By Michael O'Sullivan

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Something must be wrong with my math. Irvine Contemporary's exhibition of the work of **Teo González**, two of whose obsessive-compulsive dot-patterned paintings have been acquired recently by the National Gallery of Art and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, is called "226,085 Drops," but I can account for only 199,314. Don't be silly, I didn't count them all myself. One of his pictures alone, a 10-by-10-foot square consisting of four panels, contains 90,000 dots in a rough grid, at least if its title -- "Untitled #406 (90,000 clear blue on Prussian blue 75 direct 300 gauge)" -- is to be believed. I merely tallied up the numbers contained on the checklist of the show, whose 12 works are all identified with a similar methodology, and came up short.



Detail of Teo González's "Untitled #406 (90,000 clear blue on Prussian blue 75 direct 300 gauge)." (By Teo González)

No matter. It turns out the title refers to a larger body of work, including pieces not on view.

Despite the braggadocio of the show's title, which simultaneously evokes the fastidiousness of a bookkeeper and the hyperbole of a rap star, González's work isn't about the numbers. His longstanding technique is simple but labor-intensive, painting two series of dots that follow a freehand grid: the undercoat more watery and resembling thousands of cells, the second layer a glossier medium that leaves row upon row of enamel-like "nuclei" within the walls of the original dots.

Because the grids are imperfect and unpredictable (sometimes drawn, sometimes only imagined), as is the behavior of the paint itself, the finished product is more organic than mechanical. González's paintings call to mind the weaving-like textures of some of the Australian aboriginal paintings recently on view at the National Museum of Women in the Arts and the Australian Embassy. From a distance, they look like fabric; close up, like a colony of greatly enlarged amoebas.

The work's formal concerns are apparent. On one level, each painting can be read as the documentation of a kind of performance, a struggle between accident and intention in

which the artist's "mistakes" are to be devoutly wished for, and whose harmonies of color and line are as much the result of chance as of planning.

On another level, González's paintings function as powerful metaphors. The artist, with tongue firmly in cheek, plays with the notion that his pictures can be summarized by titles that simply enumerate and list their component paints. In a similar way, we are reminded, in this time of human genome mapping, that each of us is so much more than the sum of his or her parts.