

# ALEXANDRE

J12 mySA | Sunday, August 9, 2015 | San Antonio Express-News and mySA.com



Steve Bennett / San Antonio Express-News

Stephen Westfall's "The Holy Forest" is installed on a large wall in the McNay Art Museum's AT&T Lobby. The actual painting was done by McNay staff in accordance to Westfall's directions.

## A 'Holy Forest' grows in the McNay

By Steve Bennett  
STAFF WRITER

In an interview with the blog The Arts Section, New York artist Stephen Westfall described himself as a "somewhat poppish, post-minimalist geometric painter."

McNay Art Museum Chief Curator Rene Paul Barilleaux thought he'd be a perfect match for the ongoing installation series in the museum's AT&T Lobby.

### Westfall monitored painting's progress online

The lobby's large back wall serves as the 37-by-16-foot canvas for Westfall's painting "The Holy Forest," a reference to the poetry of the late American poet Robin Blaser, whom the artist admires.

The artist got to see the completed work for the first time when he arrived at the museum for a Thursday lecture.

A hectic teaching schedule at

Bard College didn't allow Westfall time to come to San Antonio and actually paint "The Holy Forest." So he obtained a photograph of the wall and its dimensions, and he designed the work to fit.

The McNay staff painted it on the wall following specific instructions and guidelines sent by the artist.

"It's not that uncommon for

artists to employ assistants to do the work," Barilleaux said. "Sol LeWitt, for instance, never made his drawings. He had a team to do that."

Westfall followed the progress of the piece online.

"Through modern technology, I was able to monitor the process and make adjustments," he said.

"The Holy Forest" is a ma-

trix of diamond shapes in nine Benjamin Moore paint colors, including Baby Chick, Orange Creamsicle, Cornwallis Red and Seaweed.

"Stephen's work is based on geometrical shapes, and he has a strong sense of color," Barilleaux said.

Westfall has exhibited internationally since the mid-'80s. His work is found in prominent collections world-

WESTFALL continues on J13

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Courtesy McNay Art Museum

Stephen Westfall's "The Holy Forest" is on view at the McNay Art Museum.

## WESTFALL

From page J12

wide, including the Albertina Museum in Vienna, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York and the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

He was a Guggenheim Fellow in 2007 and is a recipient of the Award in Painting from the National Academy of Arts & Letters.

Unlike many minimalist painters, Westfall said his work has "multitudes of patterning."

"The Holy Forest" features a variation of a grid he has used "a couple of times in the past."

"But it was an idea that I had, given that space for this particular composition," he said. "It references a motif of the Saltillo design of the Southwest, as well as

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**Video:** Watch a time-lapse video of the installation of "The Holy Forest."

Latin American textiles and ceramics. And I wanted a more tonal palette to sort of have a conversation with the two shadowed doorways on the sides."

Barilleaux said the flat quality of the work echoes the fact that the artist was absent from its actual installation.

"If you get up close, you don't see any brushwork," he said. "You don't see the hand of the artist. It's not meant to be that kind of work. It's about a flat, mechanical, commercial process. In a way, it requires no authorship. The composition goes hand-in-hand with the technique."

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