

# ALEXANDRE

## Art in America

### EXHIBITION REVIEWS



Stephen Westfall:  
*Ariel* (left), 2011,  
acrylic wall painting,  
and *Source* (right),  
2010, oil and alkyd  
on canvas; at  
Lennon, Weinberg.

#### STEPHEN WESTFALL LENNON, WEINBERG

In Stephen Westfall's recent show, a dozen geometric abstractions revealed an artist who finds limitless possibilities in an evolving repertoire of constraints. Concentric diamond structures predominate in the nine canvases (all oil and alkyd), two gouaches and one large wall painting on view. These extend Westfall's earlier investigations of the chevron, further pushing ambiguities of flatness and dimension and the optical effects of color. The diamond motif was also inspired by mosaic floor patterns of churches in Italy, where Westfall recently completed a Rome Prize residency. (Several works in the show were executed in Rome; all are 2010 or '11.)

Many of the canvases share not only compositional elements but also a palette of fundamental spectrum colors: the bluest blue, orangest orange, greenest green and so on. *Source* and *Live for Tomorrow* (both 47 by 59 inches) bear these traits, but the former is comparatively placid, with thin colored stripes isolated (and seemingly purified) by a white that reads alternately as substance and void. In *Live for Tomorrow*, the diamond functions as a whole yet fragments and buckles through the play of compositionally discontinuous colors in quadrants that appear to shift.

Westfall's sensuous touch individualizes and animates every canvas, providing a counterpoint to all the hard edges. Semitransparent ultramarine blues and violets show his hand especially. And no color is truly the same

from picture to picture, due, often, to subtle underpainting, which lends one black a purple character, another a charred essence.

The wall painting, *Ariel* (104 inches square), reverberates in kinship with several similarly composed, diamond-motif canvases. At the same time, it's distinct in Westfall's use of flatter, less saturated, rolled-on house paint, an architectural scale and its location on the recessed back wall, something like a fresco in a church apse.

One of the few paintings not employing the diamond, *Thrum* (48 by 36 inches), displays features nonetheless salient in all the work: compositional tensions and chromatic temperatures that defy expectation. Lapis blue triangles push in from the sides and emerald green zigzags through the center, projecting in front of other zigzags of ochre yellow and Venetian red. Look again, though, and the warm colors leap ahead of the cool.

The title canvas of the show, *Seraphim* (59 inches square), is made up of many segments suggesting diamond patterns. But because the compositional elements share sides, no one unit is complete. The painting remains open, as if inviting the viewer to resolve it. In fact, to view the whole show was to engage—as Westfall must have, to a greater degree—in infinite comparison, relative relationships and myriad interpretations. Perhaps that's a reason the paintings compel as individuals and electrify in aggregate.

—Mary Proenza

291 Grand Street, New York, New York 10002

25 East 73rd Street, 2nd Floor, New York, New York 10021 212.755.2828 alexandregallery.com

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