

ALEXANDRE GALLERY

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Gallery chronicle

by James Panero

On “Stephen Westfall: Seraphim: Paintings and Works on Paper” at Lennon Weinberg.

The summer doldrums are not what they used to be, in art as in everything else. New York now barely takes a break before the September push. Still, it seems the galleries often save the best for late spring. It’s a vestige of an old cycle, one that wanted *big* just before the un-air-conditioned city ran for the water in the dog days of summer. It’s no different this year, with many shows now to see, little time to do it, and (in my case) about 1,800 words left to review them. So here goes.

Stephen Westfall is a patternist who always seems to unlock the dazzle in repetition. A few years ago in these pages, I called *My Beautiful Laundrette* (2008), his work I saw in a group show at Lohin Geduld Gallery, “my new favorite painting.” It’s still up there, but Westfall’s latest exhibition at Lennon Weinberg might give it some competition.^[3] “Seraphim: Paintings and Works on Paper” is the result of Westfall’s year as a fellow at the American Academy in Rome. Clearly the stay was worth it. Westfall says he drew particular inspiration from the tenth- and eleventh-century floors of Cosmatesque churches. The paintings that result have dispensed with some of the subtle brushwork and idiosyncratic pattern placement of his earlier designs in favor of bold patterns on a grand scale.

Wise One (2011) is built from four squares of diagonal bands of color arranged in a diamond. Westfall’s particular knack for variation comes into play in its color program. One can see connections oscillating among all of the color bands, but just as patterns emerge—a spiral here, a mirror there—Westfall mixes it up. *Subiaco* (2010), with its greens and yellows and reds, seems lifted right off the tiles of a Roman wall. Westfall balances this design so well that x-shapes, crosses, diamonds, and squares all emerge from the same arrangement, as though different frames on a flickering screen. Then there is *Ariel* (2011), the largest work in the show, and one that turns out to be latex painted right on the gallery wall. I’m not the first to suggest a comparison here to Sol LeWitt, but considered against the dull, flat work of that conceptualist, Westfall leaves nothing to chance. His lively paintings are the products of a master craftsman.

[3] “Stephen Westfall: Seraphim: Paintings and Works on Paper” opened at Lennon Weinberg, New York, on April 26 and remains on view through June 11, 2011.