

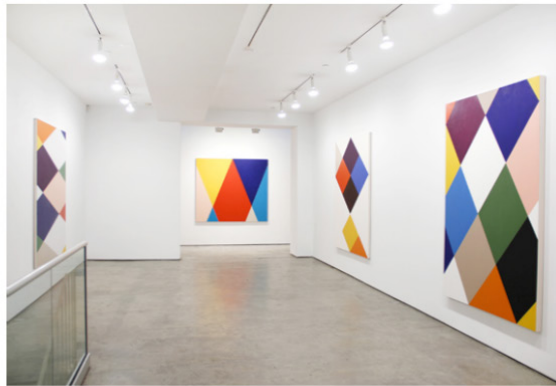
ALEXANDRE GALLERY

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Diamond in the Smooth: Stephen Westfall at Lennon, Weinberg

Stephen Westfall: *Crispy Fugue State* at Lennon, Weinberg, Inc.

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Five medium-sized paintings in the rear of the gallery break with Stephen Westfall's familiar practice. Unlike more characteristic paintings such as *Cortona* (2015), with their coolly satisfying symmetry, the structure of these newer works display a strongly asymmetrical and relational pictorial composition. This exciting departure is a result of the artist's experience of mural scale wall painting completed over the past several years where he has begun to break with pattern, to an extent, and has increased the role of white as a color. The site-specific murals

completed at at Art OMI, Ghent, New York, in 2014 are examples of these.

There is also a faux comical undermining of seriousness, both in the titling of the show and in the deadpan paint surfaces. For a Modernist like Westfall, the strategy of linking high and low cultural narratives—constructivism and graphic signs—proves expedient in deflating grandiosity and productively opening influence to the vitality of quotidian environment. But originality is not dependent on novelty of technology and media. Westfall has achieved a singular style of painting that stands out for all the right reasons—it is compelling, arresting work—whilst not straying from already existing modes.

The diamond shapes, though recalling a harlequin design, represent an ostensible pattern that is broken through changes of hue and value. There is one color per shape, often now with the addition of white diamonds that when adjacent to each other create a context of figure/ground with the chromatically varied diamonds with which they cohabit. These consistent shapes, edited actively at the edge of the paintings' rectangular limits, are converted into triangles of various sizes in proportion to the over all size of a particular painting. In *The Future Advances and Recedes* (2015), a central diamond shape is



Delta, 2016

made up of four smaller diamonds, two aligned vertically, the top one deep purple, the lower one black. The horizontally aligned diamonds are a cadmium red and cobalt blue and can be read as eyes in a Paul Klee-like geometric head balancing on a diagonal of orange and yellow. The orange is a triangle formed by the lower edge of the painting bisecting what would have been another diamond. The orange and yellow flip to read also as a three-dimensional roof-like shape. The remaining triangle, taupe in color and to the left of the geometrical head as I describe it, skews what would have been otherwise a general symmetry of composition.

Color is liberated to function in a kinetic way through the simple devise of geometric shape. Thus articulated, color moves and reorganizes, as we perceive it, like a mobile turning through space. Like Stanley Whitney, an artist who structures color through geometry in a similar way, nothing is static in these works. Pages could be written simply to address what color does as one looks at it, the sensations it causes and the thoughts it elicits. An added quality is the perspectival lean that happens in a steeply vertical painting like *Delta* (2015): the narrow format and large scale of the contained shapes fragment the composition in such a way that there is no complete diamond visible, creating an almost sculptural column. That so much is possible still in the field of an expanded,

inclusive modernism and its visuality is evident in considering this exhibition. Westfall's change in direction only serves to intensify and enlarge his subtlety and range.