

# LENNON, WEINBERG, INC.

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## Richard Kalina

**Naves, Mario. "Gallery Beat – Richard Kalina: New Paintings and Watercolors." City Arts NYC, April 2009, p13.**

The abstract artist Richard Kalina thinks a lot about painting—maybe too much given the programmatic nature of his art—but he’s not afraid to have fun. His canvases and drawings, on display at Lennon, Weinberg, Inc., combine Minimalist structures, craft reminiscent of vernacular traditions and a wiry strain of Pop. Imagine the love child of Donald Judd and a colonial era quiltmaker who’s been weaned on 1950s design and you’ll have some idea of what Kalina’s quixotic enterprise might look like. Kalina eschews chance, and follows a stringent and fairly unforgiving strategy.

Working on linen, he measures and masks gridded compositions; regulated squares of exposed linen and jagged white lines establish the foundation of each composition.

These grounds are punctuated by segmented ovals, squares and roving diagonal bands rendered in collaged sheaths of rice paper painted in a vibrant range of tones. Shifts in color and scale bring about jarring and sometimes jaunty variations in rhythm and space. “Pearl of the Indies” (2009) and “A Marriage of Convenience” (2008)—Kalina’s titles are allusive, bordering on gnomic—pull and pop at the eye in an aggressively cheerful manner. Brigid Riley meets Daffy Duck. Kalina is most assured as a colorist when his palette is antiseptic: the brilliant field of aquamarine in “A Marriage of Convenience” suits his brainy vision better than the Klee-like range of autumnal tones in “A Western Passage.” Synthetic becomes him. Having said that, whatever color Kalina lays down is invariably saturated, clean and radiates light.

Stained glass windows are an immediate association. The idiosyncrasies in Kalina’s work are more apparent in the drawings wherein he comes across like a PoMo Saul Steinberg dissecting the language of abstraction.

These pieces are dry and witty, but they lack the high-flown pictorial rhetoric of the paintings. Sober he may be and not a little pretentious, but Kalina is whimsical as well. It’s a happy combination.

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**Buhmann, Stephanie. "In passionate pursuit of color, line and pattern – Kalina and Riley bring thought and vigor to new works." *Chelsea Now*, April 9 - 22, 2009, p19.**

Among many exhibitions featuring figurative painting these days — think only Lisa Yuskavage at David Zwirner Gallery or Hernan Bas at the Brooklyn Museum for example — it is refreshing to find two contemporary painters dedicate so much thought and vigor to linear abstraction.

The mid-career artist Richard Kalina (who has exhibited regularly in New York since 1969) and the younger Jennifer Riley (who is making her New York solo debut this month) both pursue a form of abstraction that is based on color, line and pattern. Located in Chelsea (Kalina) and the Lower East Side (Riley), both exhibitions offer a good opportunity to experience two sophisticated takes on what mesmerizing expressiveness these "simple" ingredients can behold.

For years, Richard Kalina has been engaged with the issues of abstract art, trying "to create a sort of grammar of abstraction, [to] break it apart and put it together in new ways." Since 2001, he has worked in a technique that combines painting with collage. He paints large sheets of very thin rice paper with translucent acrylic paint, which he then tears into small, roughly rectangular pieces and glues with acrylic medium onto linen that is stretched over board.

The rice paper becomes essentially transparent and according to Kalina the "color is trapped in it." This form of layering is both physical and conceptual. It makes for transparency and, as the artist puts it, offers a "certain quality of instability." While the background is usually a bright white, the semi-transparent pieces of paper are deeply saturated and together amount to elaborate patterns that exude a compelling radiance. There is the illusion of a light source coming from behind the canvas and the effect is similar to that found in stained glass windows or mosaics.

In "Pearl of the Indies" (2007), the collaged pieces of paper create an elegant surface structure, which counterbalances the crispness of the colored shapes. There is a suggestion of a rectangular ground held in light pink, as well as several multi-colored squares that seemingly float above it, but there are in fact no straight lines. Each line is hand-drawn and wavers, leaving the squares to appear like pieces of blankets or textiles dangling in the wind. Kalina states: "my geometric underpinnings are loosened [they are] pulled and tugged, so that the forms are given life, a sense of three dimensionality and space, and a certain lightheartedness and playfulness. [This] allows for drawing, for an intuitive, visceral approach to form, [which] I believe, gives them the warmth and sense of the personal and the pleasurable that their decorative references imply." The only truly geometric shapes are actual voids, cutouts that show small squares of exposed linen. Together with painted white lines that suggest an overall grid, they provide the composition with a sense of order. As is the case in music, Kalina achieves rhythm by establishing an overall measure. In fact, Kalina's titles often contain musical references and in this exhibition, they often refer to imaginary operas of the 17th or 18th centuries.

Kalina's exhibition also includes a selection of new ink and watercolor drawings that were made during his recent fellowship at the Bogliasco Foundation outside of Genoa, Italy. Turquoise and yellow occur frequently, bringing to mind water and sun, and metaphorically reflecting the decorative motifs of Genoa and the surrounding area. Kalina writes: "Color has been an important element in my work, both emotionally and spatially. My goal is to make a painting that is musical and pleasurable – something that carries you away. Intense color seems to have a life of its own and is hard to resist." Much truth can be found in Kalina's distinct colors and forms. There is clarity of thought, which allows each viewer to project themselves onto the works and use them as a point of departure for their own imagination.