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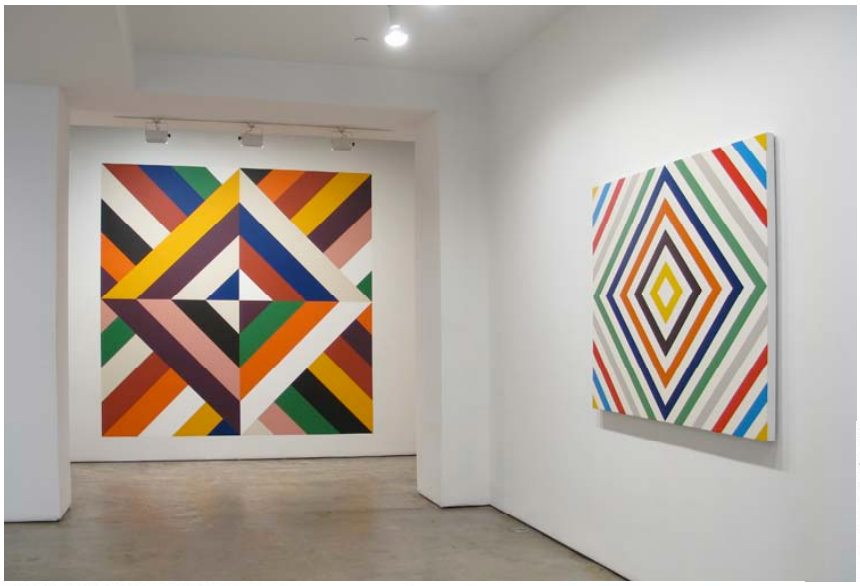
Stephen Westfall

Proenza, Mary. "Stephen Westfall at Lennon, Weinberg." Art in America, October 2011.



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 ocher 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*

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Stephen Westfall

Smith, Roberta. New York Times: Museum and Gallery Listings for May 6 – 12, "Stephen Westfall: "Seraphim: Paintings and works on paper," Lennon, Weinberg, Inc." May 2011.

★ Stephen Westfall: 'Seraphim: Paintings and works on paper' Through June 11. While there are several abstract canvases of interest in this exhibition, the centerpiece is a large wall painting felicitously framed by the gallery architecture and dominated by a tipped (diamond) square whose bold concentric bands change color at every corner. The syncopated progression of hues, which is more intuitive than systematic, creates a wonderful, jangling destabilization, warping space and confirming scale (not size) as the living energy source that it is. You would think that related works by Frank Stella and Sol LeWitt would not have left Mr. Westfall much room to move, but he proves otherwise. Lennon Weinberg Inc., 514 West 25th Street, (212) 941-0012, lennonweinberg.com. (Smith)

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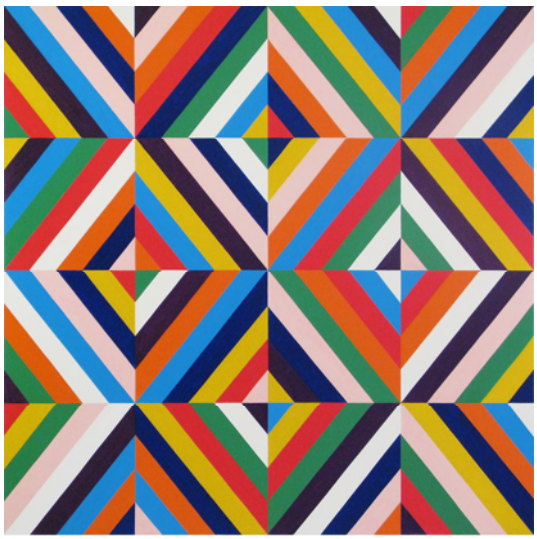
Stephen Westfall

Saltz, Jerry. *New York Magazine: "Agenda: Art," New York Magazine,* May 16, 2011, p. 84
http://nymag.com/listings/art/stephen-westfall/

Off The Floor and Onto The Walls



✓ **Critics' Pick**

Lennon, Weinberg Inc.
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If you've gone to the glorious churches of Rome seeking uplift only to spend all your time staring at the extraordinary mosaics underfoot, Stephen Westfall is your artist. After a year in Rome obsessing over the floors' artisanship, Westfall started painting geometric abstractions that look like game boards, folk art, textile designs, and high minimalism. It feels vibrantly alive, quirky, open, ever-mutating, and popping with color. Patterns jump and overlap, jostle for optical order, and reconfigure. Westfall's work has never felt so free, confident, and his own.— Jerry Saltz

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Stephen Westfall

Cohen, David. "Purism Off Kilter: Stephen Westfall as painter and curator." The Abstract Critical, August, 2011
http://abstractcritical.com/2011/08/purism-off-kilter-stephen-westfall-as-painter-and-curator/

abstract *critical*
for abstract art

August 2011

Purism Off Kilter: Stephen Westfall as painter and curator

Written by David Cohen

Stephen Westfall, Wise One, 2011, 36 × 36", oil and alkyd on canvas. Courtesy of Lennon, Weinberg, Inc.

In the first of what we hope will become a regular quarterly strand , David Cohen, Publisher/Editor of the New York-based artcritical magazine and moderator of the Review Panel, will be taking a look at who he feels to be among the more innovative and influential figures on the current New York scene. First off the work and curatorial activities of abstract painter Stephen Westfall…

The last thing you expect of cognitive dissonance is a harmonious feeling, and yet that is what you get when you consider Stephen Westfall's mode of painting and his way of conducting himself in the world. Rigorous, cool, hard-edged formal abstraction is his painting mode whereas his activities as an educator, critic, essayist

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Stephen Westfall

Panero, James. "Gallery chronicle" The New Criterion, June, 2011

http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/Gallery-chronicle-7064

JUNE 2011
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.

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Stephen Westfall

Wilkin, Karen. "At the Galleries" The Hudson Review, Vol. LXIV, No. 3, Autumn 2011.

At the Galleries
By KAREN WILKIN

GALLERIES OFTEN INSTALL WHAT A DEALER FRIEND calls "a selection of recent works by Mr. Group" during the summer months, as if coasting until the start of the fall's new exhibition season. Yet last summer's array of group shows, far from seeming merely expedient, included some carefully chosen, imaginatively assembled combinations, while a few memorable solo exhibitions and installations enlivened the mix. In Chelsea, the enigmatically titled "The Ghost in the Machine" at Lennon, Weinberg, selected by Stephen Westfall, was typical. (No, I can't explain the title.) The show was an engaging assortment of abstractions by what was described as "historical figures"—John McLaughlin and Nicholas Krushenick—"mid-career painters"—Don Christensen, Harriet Korman, and Don Voisine—and "younger painters and sculptors"—Jennifer Riley, Jackie Meier, Thomas Raggio, and Rachel Beach—plus an imposing wall painting by Westfall himself, originally made for his recent one person exhibition at the gallery. The common factors among the disparate works were crisp edges and often impure or warped geometry, frequently combined, especially among the mid-career and younger artists, with intense color that sometimes verged on raucous.

The work of both the "historical"—i.e., late—McLaughlin and the "mid-career" Voisine was notable for its structural and chromatic restraint, in comparison to the complex shapes and full-throttle palettes of other selections; McLaughlin, especially, pointed to minimalism and alluded to the urban landscape, at the same time, as if paying simultaneous homage to Piet Mondrian, whom he obviously admired, and the California environment in which he lived. Several participants seemed to begin by acknowledging the center of the canvas and then making every effort, by means of shapes and color, to subvert the dominance of that acknowledged center. Others took the grid, metaphorically, if not literally, as a starting point, twisting and deforming it, even disrupting our memory of symmetry and order with unstable color relationships. Others took similar liberties with Euclidian shapes. A street-smart note was added by Krushenick's work, which seemed as informed by cartoons and comic strip conventions as by geometry, while the razzle-dazzle color and cheerful, wonky shapes of Christensen's paintings similarly suggested multiple allegiances, here to both illusionism and flatness as well as to a kind of antic playfulness. Westfall's wall painting, by contrast, seemed at once bold and solemn, with saturated hues used to destabilize a confrontational, symmetrical image of concentric striped bands. The configuration echoed the cosmati work inlays and paving patterns in medieval Italian churches that Westfall studied during his recent Italian sojourn on a Prix de Rome. Like cosmati work, the wall painting was constructed with triangles and diamonds against vertical and horizontal oriented bands, here scaled up and, unlike cosmati work, syncopated by unruly color relationships.

All of the work selected by Westfall seemed generated by the improbable coexistence of the systematic and the unpredictable. Most works appeared exploratory rather than preconceived—something of a rarity, these days—reading not, as so much contemporary abstraction does, as illustrations of known conclusions, but rather as wholehearted efforts to find out what would happen if incompatible or contradictory impulses were brought to bear on a single canvas. Westfall, in an explanatory essay, notes that "All the work here stands for more than one thing: swoony craft, optical dazzle, compression and expansion; and an invocation of geometry's traditional role as giving form to spirituality, expressed here as spiritedness." "Spiritedness" rather than "spirituality" seemed to be the operative word. Cumulatively, the selection reminded us of just how expressive and various color and shape can be, affirming that art that primarily addresses the eye can equally address the intellect and the emotions with energy and brio.

and (this season) an especially busy curator of group exhibitions are marked by ecumenicism: warmly inclusive and boundary-breaking in the people he selects to write about or to exhibit with/together, he often makes unexpected connections across mediums and styles, generations and allegiances. His approach is non-dogmatic, suggesting that pragmatism rather than idealism lies at the heart of his aesthetics.

This season he has been the subject and instigator of three New York shows. His sixth solo exhibition at Lennon, Weinberg, his Chelsea dealer, titled Seraphim for one of the paintings in the show, opened at the end of April and followed on from an exhibition at the American Academy in Rome, where he had been a fellow, in Summer 2010. During his residency in the eternal city, Westfall became mesmerized by mosaic flooring in early medieval churches. The result – an extended series of diamond-shaped bands of color, formats that recall Sol LeWitt, Jasper Johns and Frank Stella but in ways that, to paraphrase Klee, take the grid for a walk – captured praise from the influential husband and wife critics Roberta Smith and Jerry Saltz. For Smith, in the New York Times, Westfall's "syncopated progression of hues, which is more intuitive than systematic, creates a wonderful, jangling destabilization, warping space and confirming scale (not size) as the living energy source that it is." For Saltz, in New York Magazine, "it feels vibrantly alive, quirky, open, ever-mutating, and popping with color… Westfall's work has never felt so free, confident, and his own."

Starburst for N.K., 2009 Oil on canvas 38" x 44"

Ghost in the Machine can be read as a kind of manifesto of "impurist" geometric abstraction in which popular culture and humor are celebrated as extensions of abstraction rather than its enemy. "Some people think that artists deploy geometry as an austerity. It ain't necessarily so." Westfall wrote in a statement accompanying the show. "All the work here stands for more than one thing: swoony craft, optical dazzle, compression and expansion." John McLaughlin, the Boston-born Californian whose proto-minimalist paintings have been the subject of recent rediscovery, might seem closest to a purest aesthetic with its allegiance to Mondrian, Malevich and Zen. Even he allows his color and spatial decisions to be inflected by a Californian aesthetic of gloss and ease. Jennifer Riley, one of the younger artists in the group, and a former student of Westfalls (he has taught for years at Bard College and at Rutgers, both important centers for abstract painting on the East Coast) makes the connection between her crystalline forms and a Pop aesthetic explicit, if extremely coded, in the title, Starburst for NK, (2009); NK is Nicholas Krushenick (1929-1999), also represented in the exhibition and held by many to be the father of pop abstraction.

Stanley Whitney Aix, 2011 Oil on linen 60 x 60 inches

If Ghost is a manifesto, Reverie is a visual poem; in place of the rigorous organizing principle of geometry – whether subversive or subverted – this show allows for greater diversity of touch and process, ranging in its modes of abstraction from monochrome (Julia Rommel) to gestural (Andrea Belag) to minimal (Sylvan Lionni) to organic (Patricia Treib). Its presiding eminence grise was the Paris-based veteran Shirley Jaffe, represented by a monumental, tapestry-like collage of glyphs and decals, while another "lifer" – to quote Westfall's witty euphemism from his supporting statement – was Stanley Whitney, whose gutsy grids are composed of wobbling lozenges of sharply contrastive colors and gently differentiating textures. Whitney's found grid stood in instructive contract to the meticulously preplanned rigor of Westfall, but rather than suggesting an opposition, it seemed that Westfall enlisted Whitney to say that he, too, arrives at his patterns through feeling and whim as much as any formal logic.

Westfall has been known for years for his penchant for cheery, upbeat geometric abstraction that simultaneously registers order and disruption. At first his compositions strike the viewer as well-behaved structures of pattern with decorative correlates in the applied arts, such as plaid, herringbone, chevrons. Good humored populist titles like "My beautiful Laundrette" or "Candyman" and raucous color schemes hint at subversion of prim minimal grids or Color Field-redolent arrangements of parallel stripe. But his visual wit goes beyond mere reference to recent abstract art history. A key element in his vocabulary is the disruptive kink he will admit into his patterning that sets it off kilter; never quite subverting the flatness of the picture plane, he nonetheless allows a breeze or ripple to run across the composition.

Stephen Westfall, Magnolia, 2011, oil on canvas, 72 x 72 inches

The references to other art and the broader culture, coupled with his funky palette, might sound like Westfall belongs simply within the pop or deconstructive camp of Neo-Geo and its derivatives, making him a bedfellow, say, or Jonathan Lasker or Peter Halley. And there are generational connections, as there are with other abstractionist wits like Mary Heilmann. But somehow, in Westfall, the attachment to the positive, energetic, affirmative aspect of pattern and decoration always seems in earnest; the subversion is within pattern, rather than of pattern. He recalls Ruskin's dictum that "All beautiful lines are drawn under mathematical laws organically transgressed." He leaves viewers feeling that his intention is to invigorate abstraction rather than to debunk it. And this makes sense of the community he establishes around himself of fellow abstractionists, and workers within other styles, for whom wit is important but irony is to be avoided.

David Cohen is Publisher/Editor of artcritical.com and Moderator of the Review Panel

Stephen Westfall, Seraphim: Paintings and works on paper was at Lennon, Weinberg, Inc., 514 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001, April 26 to June 11, 2011.

The Ghost in the Machine, Curated by Stephen Westfall: John McLaughlin, Nicholas Krushenick, Don Christensen, Harriet Korman, Don Voisine, Stephen Westfall, Jennifer Riley, Rachel Beach, Jackie Meier, Thomas Raggio is at Lennon, Weinberg, Inc., June 23 to August 19, 2011.

REVERIE, Curated by Stephen Westfall: Andrea Belag, Shirley Jaffe, Alix Le Méléder, Sylvan Lionni, Julia Rommel, Patricia Treib, Stephen Westfall, Stanley Whitney, at Zürcher Studio, 33 Bleecker Street, New York. NY 10012.

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Stephen Westfall

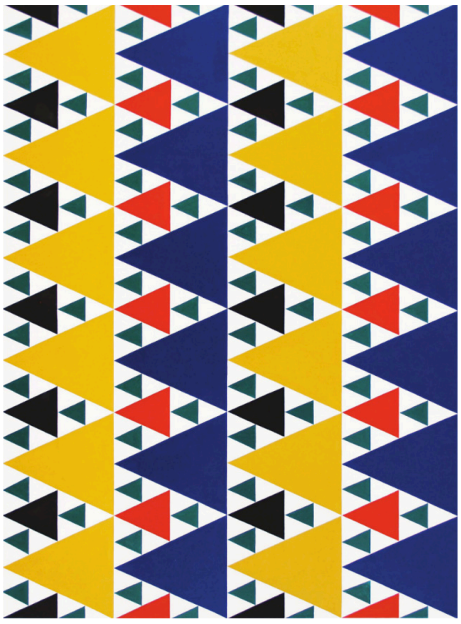
Yau, John. "Stephen Westfall's Breakthrough", Hyperallergic, December 29, 2013.

http://hyperallergic.com/100674/stephen-westfalls-breakthrough/

HYPERALLERGIC

Stephen Westfall's Breakthrough

by **John Yau** on December 29, 2013



"High Plains" (2012),

I went to Stephen Westfall's exhibition, *Jesus and Bossa Nova*, at Lennon, Weinberg (November 7, 2013–January 4, 2014) twice on the same day. The second time I walked through the gallery's long narrow space verified my initial thought, which was that the layout of the exhibition could be read as a narrative that revealed Westfall's movement from pattern and repetition to a far more complex and engaging compositional possibility.

Westfall — who is an eloquent champion of hard-edge, geometric abstraction and Precisionism, and of less-celebrated artists such as Ward Jackson and Ralston Crawford — first gained attention for his use of skewed and layered lattice-like grids. However, instead of settling in and refining this motif into a signature style, he has proved himself to be a probative painter who keeps testing possibilities, pushing against the historical conventions we associate with hard-edge, geometric abstraction, as if it could be opened onto new horizons. This has been Westfall's gambit from the outset of his career and it has paid off. It is something he shares with the older artist, Harriet Korman, whose paintings from the past decade may have inspired him.

"Time Tells Us What to Do" (2013),

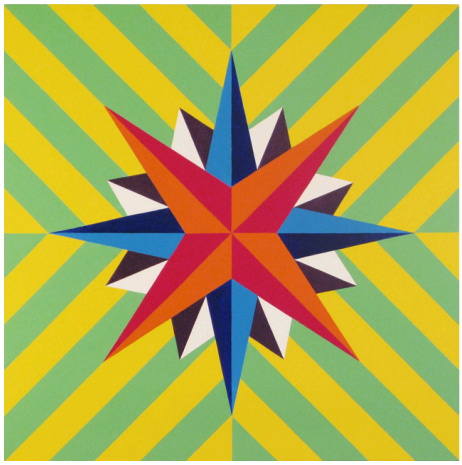
In an interview that I did with Westfall in the *Brooklyn Rail* (April 2006), he described his interest in the skewed grid because it looked as if "the whole thing could tremble and be knocked over." Westfall went on to say: "I like that it flickers back and forth between whole and fragment. There's this back and forth between seeing the whole and then only being aware of fragments and being aware that the whole is made up of fragments."

What happened between this interview and the current exhibition is that Westfall won the Rome Prize Fellowship in 2009, which enabled him to spend a year in Rome. While there, he found the Cosmatesque mosaics that decorate the floors of many of Rome's churches spellbinding. Developed by

the Cosmati family during the 12th and 13th century, the mosaics are made of inlaid marble and glass, but they are different from tessellated floors where the tiles are more-or-less the same size. In Cosmatesque floors, the triangular motifs are made of different-sized pieces of colored glass inlaid against larger, geometric white marble shapes.

"High Plains" (2012) is the first painting the viewer sees on the right wall when entering Lennon, Weinberg. Arranged into four columns, comprised of interlocking small, medium and large triangles, with the first and third columns done in tan, black, green and white, and the second and fourth done in red, blue, green and white, the painting is visually pleasing but not much more. It is modernist abstraction that alludes to Navaho blankets. The problem, as I see it, is that once the pattern is decided, the artist must methodically fill in the color.

In a number of the paintings that follow – but not all – Westfall moves away from what I think of as a coloring book, fill-in aesthetic to a much more complicated and visually engaging possibility, from a stable image to one that is simultaneously stable and unstable — a composition that sustains and complicates the "flicker[ing] back and forth between whole and fragment", he referred to in our interview.

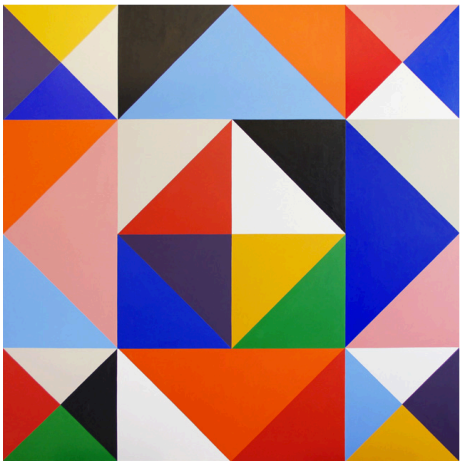


"Star" (2010)

In "Star" (2010), the oldest painting in the exhibition, done while Westfall was in Rome, the artist centers a boldly graphic starburst, composed of two four-pointed stars layered on top of an eight-pointed one, in a field consisting of quadrants of diagonal stripes (green and greenish-yellow) radiating from the center. By dividing each of the star's points along its axis into two flat, distinct colors, he flips the form ambiguously between two and three dimensions.

Both "High Plains" and "Star" are emblematic signs, which in this media-saturated world isn't enough. This is the issue that Westfall has to address: does he want the painting to be a stable, post-pop, abstract image — a geometrically broken up field of seemingly random colors derived from a limited palette (a coloristically aggressive, abstract version of Edvard Munch's "The Scream") — or does he want to open up a reflective space in which viewers see themselves seeing the painting?

"Scheherazade" (2013) is Westfall's breakthrough painting, the one that stands above all the rest in this exhibition. It is the most complex both in composition and color and, more importantly, its overlaid, interpenetrating structures can be assembled and disassembled by the viewer in myriad ways. The other complexity is the color placement, which follows no logic or order, suggesting a newly gained freedom.



"Scheherazade" (2013)

I am reminded of the freedom that Stanley Whitney gained in the 1980s when he established a grid format that enabled him to become unpredictable in his use of color. It is the realm of the random that Westfall has entered, and he has done so by elevating the complexity of "Scheherazade's" geometric composition far beyond anything else he has ever done.

Compositionally, "Scheherazade" is a square painting made up of squares and rectangles, all of which are comprised of differently colored triangles. Structurally speaking, the centrally located triangles group together visually according to relationships of color and value, forming a large square that has been rotated inside the painting's physical square so that it becomes a diamond whose four corners touch the midpoint of the paintings's outside edges. Within the rotated square Westfall has nestled a square whose sides are parallel to the painting's physical square — a square within a square. Within this square there is another, smaller rotated square, with each of its four corners touching the four sides of the square within the square. To

recap, beginning from the center and working our way, “Scheherazade” is a diamond within a square within a diamond within a square. The central diamond is made up of four triangles, each a different color.

There are also four squares nestled in each corner of the painting, which are made up of four equally sized triangles. Between them, along the outer edges of the canvas, are four rectangles that forms the wings of a cruciform whose center is the square within the square. There are eleven colors, with each used at least than twice and one color used four times. The tension, playfulness, structure and freedom running through the painting compel the viewer’s attention to constantly refocus. Sometimes two adjacent areas can be read as a single, volumetric form, but that soon dissolves.

“Scheherezade” is absolutely lucid and completely bewildering, which is one of its many delights. When we put the forms together, discerning how one fits within the other, as it affects adjacent areas, it becomes apparent that there is no key — no dominating structure or image. The placement of colors seems to follow no pattern. The shifts between fragment and whole within a larger whole keeps changing, like a kaleidoscope.
Seeing becomes its own pleasure, especially since there is no destination. It is in this painting that Westfall breaks free of repetition and pattern, and, in authoring a new chapter in his development, becomes a singular artist.

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Stephen Westfall

"Goings On About Town: Art – Stephen Westfall", The New Yorker, December 3, 2013.
http://www.newyorker.com/arts/events/art/stephen-westfall-lennon-weinberg

THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN: ART

STEPHEN WESTFALL

Hard-edged abstraction rarely looks as joyous or as generous as it does in Westfall's paintings, and his new show includes some of the best of his career. In "Scheherazade," an arrangement of right triangles of various sizes counterbalances colors in a joltingly imperfect symmetry. Westfall's canvases, modestly scaled and devoid of evident brushwork, derive their strength from the juxtaposition of colored forms with no outline to restrain their force. "Cherbourg," a tessellation of multi-tinted diamonds, bursts with such light it could be made of stained glass. Through Dec. 28.

November 14 – December 28

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Stephen Westfall

Berlind, Robert. "Stephen Westfall – Jesus and Bossa Nova", The Brooklyn Rail, December 18, 2013.
http://www.newyorker.com/arts/events/art/stephen-westfall-lennon-weinberg

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

ARTSEEN

STEPHEN WESTFALL
Jesus and Bossa Nova

by Robert Berlind

LENNON, WEINBERG, INC. | NOVEMBER 7 – DECEMBER 28, 2013

Now that it has been a full century since the advent of non-representational painting in the West, and after so many styles since its loss of historical authority, what are the chances of an "alternative modernist, abstract vision of plenitude?" These words are Stephen Westfall's in "The Hard-Edge Sign," his *Art in America* article of last April. The phrase referred to the work of California artist Karl Benjamin, but it succinctly signals Westfall's own aesthetic. The bright, snappy designs and colors of his exhibition at Lennon, Weinberg declare an emphatic, optimistic confidence in the ongoing modernist tradition. And they are entirely contemporary.

Stephen Westfall, 'Scheherazade,' 2013. Oil and alkyd on canvas, 72 × 72". Image courtesy of the artist and Lennon, Weinberg, Inc.

Westfall deploys grids, diagonally placed squares and parallelograms, bold stripes, and chevrons in finely tuned formats that contain multiple gestalts. The six-foot square "Scheherazade" (2013), for example, shows simultaneously: two nested, diagonally disposed squares, an upright four-quadrant square within the larger square of the canvas, and a cruciform arrangement leaving four squares at the corners. The whole surface is composed of equilateral triangles. Color interactions further complicate "Scheherazade's" presentation, producing a succession of readings. A signal feature of this and others of Westfall's paintings is that, despite the initial modular, symmetrical format, colors are normally assigned free of any imposed regularity. (There are two exceptions to this general rule in the show). As a result, unpredictable groupings and what I'll call "secondary" and "tertiary"

compositions emerge as you stay within the painting. The palette of intense and subtle hues, always opaque with uninflected surfaces, achieves various effects of translucency, overlapping planes, a Hofmann-esque "push/pull," and alternate or multiple readings that in some cases emerge only after sustained attention. Westfall uses color both to intensify and to undermine the frontal, otherwise symmetrical immediacy.

Color-based geometric abstractions of most artists tend to conform to a consistent formal structure, at least within a given period of their work. Think of the otherwise dissimilar Josef Albers, Ad Reinhardt, Ellsworth Kelly, Gene Davis, and Anne Truitt. Since making an extended series of the cannily off-kilter linear grids for which he first became known, Westfall has produced an extensive array of diverse geometric formats. His various designs may call up Islamic or Italian tile work, Native American weaving, Tantric art, graphic signage, or architectural façades. His precision of execution is in the service of a wide range of cultural references and metaphors. Some earlier works conjured buildings seen through a window, as though to reverse the familiar process of abstracting from an illustrative description of the "real" world. At other times he has gathered several contrasting motifs into one painting, patchwork fashion.

A singular painting, "Star" (2010), stacks two centrally placed four-point stars on an eight-pointed star peeping out behind them against quadrants of diagonal yellow and green stripes that radiate from the center. Each star segment is divided into two colors, giving it the illusion of three-dimensional solids, the only such suggestion in the show.

The exhibition is titled after one of its paintings, "Jesus and Bossa Nova," (2013) evoking a religious orientation and a lively Latino *sabor,* one energizing the other by their conjunction. Or, for some, both terms will be exotic. It and other titles—"Djinn," (2013) "Cherbourg," (2013) "Time Tells Us What To Do" (2013)—may indicate orders of content not immediately evident from the paintings themselves. But the many variations suggest that Westfall is responding to a wide range of imagery, information, art historical awareness, and, of course, personal impulses. Such associations are not a matter of appropriation but rather, of working within a greatly expanded contemporary visual and semiotic frame of reference. If one of his goals is immediacy of impact, another is a subsequent richness of contemplative experience that motivated spiritualists such as Mondrian and Malevich, and the creators of Eastern mandalas. The work moves between a meditative orientation and everyday, vernacular readings. Westfall's paintings, while rigorous in visual concept and exacting execution, are idiosyncratically allusive and expressive. His invention and execution of new work within a field of apparent contradictions is a masterful balancing act.

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Stephen Westfall

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'Stephen Westfall: Jesus and Bossa Nova' at Lennon, Weinberg

By **Will Heinrich** | 11/26

'Persimmons,' 2013. (Courtesy the artist and Lennon, Weinberg)

Stephen Westfall excels at self-effacement. He divided his 2-foot-square oil painting *Djinn,* for example, into six regular columns and each column into 14 broad stripes braided downward into an alternating double herringbone pattern, and then he painted each full or partial stripe its own color. His palette is bright and quintessential—immanent indigo, perfectly moderate yellow and orange with a capital "O," as well as blue, black, orange-red, white, off-white, peach and green—but he applies it in so many monastically painstaking layers that the surface is as plastery as the tomb. But as with the presence of God in the world, if you see it at all, you see it everywhere: It's the harmoniously intuitive *arrangement* of colors that creates *Djinn*'s wit and music, and this wit and music suffuse the whole even as they are impossible to pin down to any one part.

Harlequin diamonds, more broad stripes laid down at a mason's honest angles, supercharged "deformations" as in coats of arms and subtly distinct but equally supernatural variations on the palette continue in the rest of the show. *Rosewood* is darkened, as if with centuries of smoke; *High Plains,* a fractal-like arrangement of blue, yellow and white triangles with red, black and green triangles inset, veers across the Atlantic into the New World; and the 6-foot-by-6-foot *Time Tells Us What to Do,* divided diagonally into exactly 32 squares, demonstrates what it is to see an infinite number of concurrent patterns at once. *(Through Dec. 28)*