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Zak Prekop

Courtney Fiske · 2012 Critics Picks



on the well-worn modernist dramas of surface and support, planarity and depth, expression and containment. Each consists of a series of reactive layers, the form of the first prescribing those of the layers that follow. The precise order of these strata refuses to resolve, yielding images whose flatness opens into interior space, only to collapse again into two dimensions. In the eleven oversize works on view, vivid, vaguely geographic forms at once over- and underlie freehand mappings of the canvas: impressions of its stretcher bars, grids rotated forty-five degrees, and sets of parallel lines, created in relation to the canvas's own dimensions. Prekop's palette is limited, reduced in most cases to a spectrum of whites, blacks, and blues. Brushstrokes, too, are largely absent, as the artist constructs his allover abstractions with a palette knife and stencils.

The show's standouts are animated by simple conceits. Four Colors (all works 2012) consists of a black, Rorschachlike blot, spread across the back of the canvas, which has since been flipped over and restretched. Thus reversed, the shape appears as an erasure or stain, the result of paint's haphazard bleeding through raw fabric. Splayed across the painting's front, this uncomposed form delimits a series of evenly spaced horizontal lines, rendered by hand in two shades of pastel blue. In a variant work, Untitled Collage (with Black Ground), spare geometries of cut paper protrude from behind the canvas, covered in a similarly produced black absorption. Achieving an embossed effect, Prekop's use of paper recalls the wax-covered newsprint of Jasper Johns's flags and targets. Textuality, however, is

here absent, the work a meditation on what painting can accomplish within its own formal parameters, rather than a relay to art’s outsides. The viewer’s attention returns constantly to the canvas itself: at once textural, two-sided object and unsettled surface, poised between compression and expansion.

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