LEAP

Zak Prekop: An Incidental Harmony

Lida Zeitlin Wu · November 17, 2014



Zak Prekop, installation view, Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago, USA. Courtesy of Shane Campbell Gallery.

IF YOU HAVEN'T seen Brooklyn-based artist Zak Prekop's paintings, asking for a visual description won't help you much. Figure-ground reversal, color theory, patterns, and collage—all of these might make you groan, "Not another Digital Age abstract painter with an MFA!" But although the above characteristics might seem generic, Prekop does them differently. He collages the backs of his canvases, not the front, and paints on muslin, not linen, creating an unexpected tension between opacity and transparency. Combining different painterly languages within the same frame, his marks are sometimes gestural, even calligraphic; at other times they seem cartoon-like. In fact, Prekop's paradoxical compositions are like the genetic offspring of real-life artist couple Christopher Wool and Charline Von Heyl, with Wool's penchant for painting through erasure and the geometric vitality of Von Heyl's work. Since Prekop is a significantly younger artist (b. 1979), these references are not unexpected, but his work is also refreshingly original, incidental yet painstakingly deliberate.

Recently, Prekop has been getting a lot of attention in the form of several international solo exhibitions. A show of his recent large-scale works at Chicago's Shane Campbell Gallery closed last week. The nine paintings in the show clearly belong to the same stylistic family, but somehow avoid redundancy. *Two Grids (Red with Green)* evokes peeling wallpaper, with gaps in the composition revealing the canvas's original color. Up close, however, the painting's green elements are not solid, but rather hundreds of tiny, hand-painted lines, similar to islands on a

topographical map or the motherboard of an electronic device.



Two Grids (Red with Green), 2014. Oil on canvas, 35 × 27 in. Courtesy of Shane Campbell Gallery.

Zak Prekop currently also has his first solo exhibition in Japan at Hagiwara Projects, Tokyo. His Tokyo show also features new work—twelve smaller paintings that similarly explore color harmony and intentional randomness. Standing in front of Prekop's paintings, it becomes a kind of game to figure out the order in which they were made—what initially seemed like erasure marks suddenly become the uppermost layer of opaque paint. It's hard to tear yourself away.



Transparency with Five Colors, 2014. Oil on muslin, 96 × 64 in. Courtesy of Shane Campbell Gallery.