ART IN AMERICA

# Zak Prekop

Kyle MacMillan · 2016



The Brooklyn-based artist Zak Prekop has honed a distinctive style with an undeniably contemporary feel, all while employing formalist elements that abstractionists have been using for more than a century. He presented ten of his latest oils in his fifth solo exhibition at Shane Campbell, where he first showed in 2008—the same year he received his master's degree from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. It was his debut in an expansive, open- truss space in the city's South Loop neighborhood that the gallery made its main location in 2015. In response to the venue, Prekop showed more large-scale paintings—many measuring eight feet tall—than he ever has prior.

These compositions, made in the past two years, continue his adventuresome use of color and his emphasis on line as much as form, but they tend to be looser, more layered, and ultimately more complex than their predecessors. Indeed, these works don't photograph well, because their subtleties, such as meandering faint lines, are often lost in reproductions. Part of their appeal derives from the particular techniques Prekop uses. Among them is painting on the backs of his muslin supports, which results in enigmatic, ghostly effects when the works are seen from the front. This approach is especially effective in Ending Pattern, where black dots and saturated red forms and lines sit on top of a very pale red that—hovering like a shadow in the background—has been applied to the verso.

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Perhaps even more crucial to these works' appeal is their insistent and sometimes startling contrasts—hard and soft edges, painterly and non- painterly surfaces, amorphous and exact forms. All these qualities can be found in Edit, essentially a white-on-white painting with traces of black and gray and with two gestural figure-eight swishes in the bottom half of the composition. To make this work, Prekop spackled white paint on the muslin with a palette knife, painted over parts of those sections with black, and then added more coats of white. The resulting overlaps and intersections give the composition a sense of depth. It looks as if there are at least three different shades of white, but the artist used the same pigment throughout. Thin meticulous lines of muslin are visible in some sections, in an impressive display of draftsmanship.

Among other highlights were Four Pairs and Three Patterns (White). The former, a black, yellow, and orange painting on canvas, was among the tidiest compositions in the show, with a less improvisatory feel than others. In the latter, carefully aligned white polka dots appear to bump into irregular red blotches showing through from the other side of the canvas. Overlying both of these are black blobs, with fine white outlines, scattered across the light-gray ground. The playfulness of these juxtapositions of different sets of spots added yet another dimension to Prekop's technically sophisticated updates on abstraction.