



FrontRow

A DAILY REVIEW OF THE DALLAS ARTS



A Geometric Trio: Shape-shifters at Marty Walker, Holly Johnson, and Conduit

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Design District: Various Locations

Apr 2 thru May 14

The rounds through the Design District openings a couple of weeks ago felt at times like that old Yogi Bera cliché: it's déjà vu all over again. Not only did a certain artistic affinity for geometric forms seem to replicate in a handful of the galleries, but a number of the artists themselves seem to be in dialogue not with their colleagues but with early abstractionists. By the end of the evening I was wondering when the [MADI Museum](#) was going to become Dallas' hippest art space.

But now, a week of art deluge later, and I'm more distracted by the fact that this style of work, which not only pops up in the Design District, but finds bedfellows at the Dallas Museum of Art in the [Matt Connors and Fergus Feehily](#) show, wasn't noticeably present in the more than 70 booths at last week's Dallas Art Fair. Something feels out of step.



Ted Larsen's *Past Is Prologue at Conduit* more or less slapped us in the face – both in the show's title and materials – with this intention of delving deep into the bowels of non-expressionist abstraction. Larsen's work here possesses an appealing agedness, sometimes due to the fact that he is utilizing reclaimed metal materials, sometimes because his works are deliberately constructed to feel like they've been sitting on the wall of some forgotten gallery at MOMA for thirty years. An octagon resists symmetry, yet, basking in its off-yellow plainness, claims a certain presence on the wall. Look closely, and the joints of the metal rims that frame the plane don't quite meet in every instance and screws are

visible around the surface's outer edges. There is a constructed-ness to this object, too oblique to be classified as Supremacist, but engaged in the same yearning for structural simplicity, material authenticity that the Kazimir Malevich hoped for in his paintings.

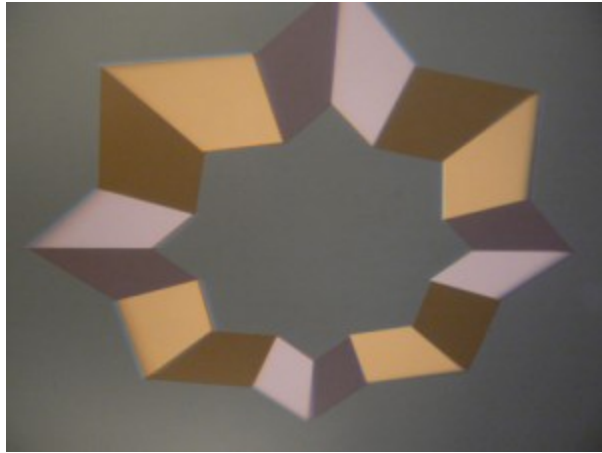
Larsen's shapes don't deviate too far from this simple formality, the work culminating in a series of twelve geometric drawings that are displayed as a series. My mind here drifted to the work of Amalia Nieto, who was included in the last year's Amon Carter exhibition, *Constructive Spirit*, only Larsen pulls apart the geometry, isolating each shape on a regular canvas arranged in a grid. Look, there's Larsen's octagon. Another drawing is similar to a black and white wall sculpture nearby made of intersecting quadrangles. Alone on the plane of white paper, Larsen's oblong geometrics are most formally satisfying. They toy with our expectations for symmetry, volume, and uniformity, while skewing formality to achieve a particular individuality.



You have to check the sign on the door a few times at Holly Johnson to make sure you're not still at Conduit. David Row's *Flat Volumes* mimic Larsen's work uncannily, though with obvious variations on the theme. Here we are dealing exclusively with two dimensional work. The focus is still on the irregular geometric abstractions, but Row harnesses these painted objects to the canvas through the introduction of grids, sweeping curves, and a concern for the color and texture of the canvas. Part of the canvas may feel rubbed away – or faded – other areas emphatically

radiant in color, a bright orange here, a Richter-grey there. Paint drip marks are sometimes self-consciously evident on the painting's face. All this layering, all this obstruction of form – grids, color, swirls, cube-ish

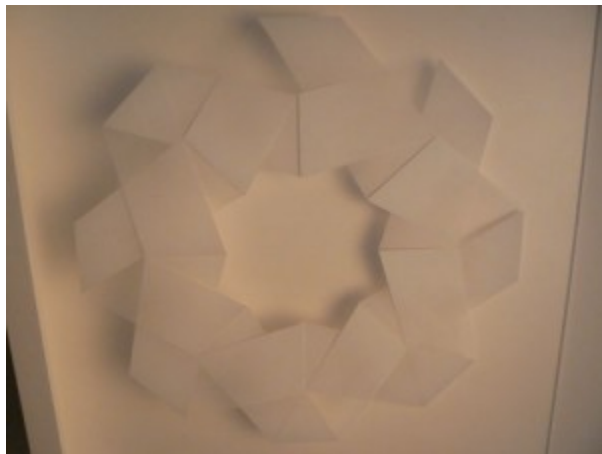
shapes within cube-ish shapes – feel frustratingly cluttered, and it takes away from something brutally appealing about Row's work: the surety of the linear elements.



Over at Marty Walker, geometric shapes are again set to play, but Jay Shinn's nodding to a constructivist past is only half-hearted. His mischievous forms are engaged in all sorts of conceptual games that make them stand out from this current crop of Design District geometrists.

Take, for example, a Shinn wall piece, which consists of a ribbon of planes painted on the wall, forming something like a star, or two intersecting cubes. The image is stretched in space, a kind of trompe-l'œil

suggesting fluid three dimensionality. But the painted planes are only part of the piece. Shinn projects light onto the color pigment with a projector, tracing and filling his object with light in a way that affects our perception of the color tone via the blending of the direct light and the paint. Shinn also allows the projector to color outside lines, so to speak, a bleeding of light that lends the work a kind of constructed, objective individuality. Most intriguingly, the work is neither the paint nor the light, the two coming together in deliberate fashion to create a shape that both lifts its skirt, revealing its elemental causality, while blending into a perceivable, singular whole.



Other works take up this game in various ways. Another wall /light painting that wraps around a corner; light boxes made of frosted glass seem to hold shape-ful objects that are merely the illusion of the coming together of texture, light, depth, and visual concealment. In Shinn's glass panes, squares of glass lean against the wall on shelves, displaying interlacing ribbon shapes on the surfaces. These two dimensional objects are produced through a rubbing or scratching of the glass surface. Thus, the whale-white forms appear only when the artist has robbed the glass of its

transparency, reducing it in a well-composed translucency.

These are the most decorative, easy to swallow works in the show, and they don't participate in the same kind of immediate conceptualism as some of the other pieces. But in light of the rest of the work up in the Design District, they seem to tease the other artists, engaging in a robust conversation with constructivists,

supremacists, geometric abstractionists, and the rest, taking up the challenge of simplicity in a way that is compositionally coherent and intellectually fresh.

Reviewed:

[Jay Shinn, *Centerfolds*, at Marty Walker Gallery: Apr 2 – May 7](#)

[David Row, *Flat Volumes*: Apr 2 – May 14](#)

[Ted Larson, *Past Is Prologue*: Apr 2 – May 14](#)