

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

Dallas

Dion Johnson

MARTY WALKER GALLERY 2135 Farrington Street October 14–November 11

Dion Johnson, *Accelerator*, 2011, acrylic and Flashe on canvas, 40 x 60".

Dion Johnson's colorful paintings are vivid and crisp, composed of tightly compressed contours that jostle each other in overlapping rows and long narrow layers. This sharply focused show consists of five works in acrylic and Flashe on canvas, all from 2011. In some, the forms hang down, like a rack of tools or pots; in others, the shapes stack up in ways reminiscent of layers of sedimentary rock. The colors are auto showroom-ready: phthalo blue and heliotrope purple, apple and lime green, gamboge and brilliant orange. The works gain traction through three basic, generative forms. First is a dominant rectangle or parallelogram, modified by gently sweeping curved edges, which can take up as much as a third of the frame—for example, the bright amaranth red at the left of *Accelerator*, or the arctic blue at the upper middle of *Aero*. Second is a stylus shape with parallel edges that taper together toward a rounded tip. (This can be either solid, as in the rose and gray examples in *Glider*, or left in outline, as in the orange and cyan curves in *Rave*, which resemble Barnett Newman zips making hairpin turns.) The third is an elongated element made of two separate colors that join in the middle with an elliptical or S-curve interface: the light and dark cyan in *Rave*, or the violet and orchid in *Aero*. Each of these three forms sweeps across the surface, implying a range of motion continuing past the edge of the canvas that slices them off.



Compared with canonical LA hardedge painting circa 1959 (year of the landmark "Four Abstract Classicists" show at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and reconsidered in the 2007 touring survey "Birth of the Cool"), Johnson's work has a hectic, frenetic quality; it is in fact much more animated than cool. This sense of motion and energy leads me to think that for Johnson the time-based animations by Jeremy Blake, for instance, count as much toward the history of painting as any canvas does. Johnson's paintings have a hybrid genealogy that invites novel connections.

--Benjamin Lima