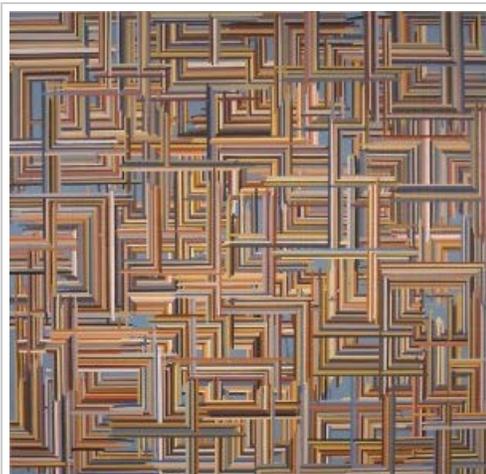




Chicago Artist Matt Irie: Worth a Second Look

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Matt Irie, Department Compartments, acrylic latex on panel 40" x 41", 2011 private collection. Used with permission of artist. <http://ebersmoore.com/irie2011.html>

At first glance it is easy to sense something familiar and rational in a Matt Irie painting, but closer inspection reveals something unfamiliar and even improbable. His solo show *You Are The Vanishing Point*, a group of paintings at Chicago's Ebersmoore Gallery (Summer 2011), proved to be a puzzle like Irie himself. Where to begin with this guy?

Irie, a Chicago based artist, gives versatility a good name by working in painting, site specific sculpture, and conceptual art and by doing it all well. He exhibits at international museum biennials, through public works commissions, and in West Loop gallery shows (see <http://www.mattirie.com/bio>). But what is one to do with the improbability that his rise in the visual arts coincides with his role as vocalist for the Chicago based rock band *Cougars*—now a decade in the making? With two full length CDs released, an EP, and a third full length in process— not to mention the extensive US and European tours —*Cougars* is no fly-by-night band.

The virtue in this plurality is that all his incarnations inform one another and speak to the same aesthetic of the double-take inquiry of what might be possible beyond fixed ideas. Irie's painting *Department Compartments*, arguably one of the best paintings in the Ebersmoore show, is constructed of overlapping grids derived from meticulous placement of precise, painted lines.

"Irie is using formal seduction to lead straight to his philosophy, one of finding space between the possible and impossible."

Do Irie's grid paintings have a familiarity? Yes, if we remember that Agnes Martin has shown us grids for decades and Frank Stella gave us painstaking hard edge minimalism back when Nixon was president. We would be remiss not to acknowledge the nod to Piet Mondrian as well, but history aside we know what architectonics and taped lines look like.

The acrylic latex lines in an Irie do look taped — that is until you get closer and notice that there are no pull ridges and there is a drip puddle at the end of each line. These are running drips that somehow maintain an almost perfect edge and constant width —thousands of them all orienting into grids. Even a machine could not stop the interference that would occur where drip lines intersect. So how do the drip alignments and intersections stay so perfect? That is how I walked away from these paintings, thinking how impossible they were until I could not take it anymore and contacted Irie.



Matt Irie, Department Compartments, Detail

Irie sensing my urgency generously gave following answer:

"I do not use any tape. It is very important that the drips maintain their natural integrity. Using eyedroppers I create the drips by dripping the paint down the

insides of numerous five gallon buckets. After the paint has set up I then extract the drips, one by one, and apply them to the panels. In this way the paintings are technically collages. Because I use interior acrylic latex house paint I can adhere the drips with only pressure and water. Acrylic latex is mostly plastic and it doesn't completely cure right away."

One starts to get the idea that Irie is interested in more than making handsome paintings that



Matt Irie and Dominick Talvacchio *One Clock*, 2006, Microcontroller, 32,768-Hz crystal, binary counter, integrated circuits, circuit board, wire, 7-segment LED displays, LED bulbs, Steel. The ticks occur at intervals of 0.7, 0.8, 1.2, or 1.3 seconds. (Used with permission of artists)

evoke the flicker of daylight in the city. Clearly, Irie is using formal seduction to lead straight to his philosophy, one of finding space between the possible and impossible to get to what he calls a "potentially emancipatory experience."

Irie wants us to rethink preconceived ideas in experiencing his work and that dictum came out of an 8-year collaboration (2002-2010) with fellow artist Dominick Talvacchio. The duo created work that would present a preconceived reality and then have it "misbehave." A hallmark piece of that period was *One Clock*. Channeling a bit of Duchampian mischief, a digital clock was programmed to have extended and shortened seemingly random seconds' ticks, yet ultimately it keeps the correct time. In the work time is both "functional" and "dysfunctional."

A more overt challenge of the ordinary with the extraordinary was *Lamppost*, a site-specific installation that was on display from November 2009 through September 2010 with support from the Public Art Fund at MetroTech in Brooklyn, NY.

In a row of lampposts, one post was created to appear as if it had folded under its own weight, as if reaching to the ground. Improbability was pushed further with the working light making a depression into the earth as if the ground was a trampoline surface. Irie explains, "We wanted to create surreal experiences of the impossible made possible to suggest that anything is possible. By extension we wanted this to relate to how we create our world and reality."

With Irie's interest in malleability of fixed notions it is not surprising that he has an affinity for contemporary French Philosopher Alain Badiou who seeks to reclaim the concepts of existence and truth in a way that is neither postmodern nor simply a reiteration of modernity.

To explore that Irie follows Badiou's imperative from his *Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art*: "The art that is, and the art that is to come, should hang together as solidly as a mathematical demonstration, be as surprising as a night-time ambush, and be as elevated as a star."



Matt Irie and Dominick Talvacchio, *Lamppost*, site specific Installation Brooklyn, NY 2009-2010. Used with permission of the artists. Photo by James Ewing

Irie and Talvacchio will show recent independent work December 2012 at San Antonio's Blue Star Contemporary Art Center.

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