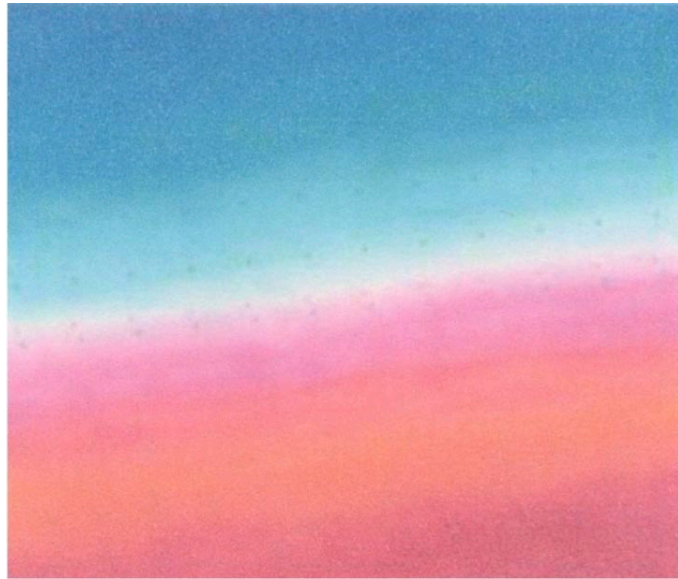


ARTFORUM

Critic's Pick:
Tony de los Reyes
Grand Central Art Center
September 1 - November 14, 2012

Tony de los Reyes's exhibition "Border Theory" is the inaugural show at Grand Central Art Center under John Spiak's new directorship. In a daring foray into nonrepresentational imagery, de los Reyes's fourteen new paintings efficaciously raise the specter of the notably apolitical movement of midcentury American abstraction. They are a brow-raising departure from his eight-year run of representational, Melville-inspired works about Moby Dick.



Here de los Reyes presents visual allegories for border politics and immigration by fusing the formalist bipartisanism of the hard-edge (read: hard-line conservative, usually Republicans) and soft-edge (bleeding-heart liberal, more often Democrats) or Color Field schools of painting (and politics). These paintings create analogies for conservative attitudes about rigid border regulation and more liberal notions of leniency regarding immigration—timely issues, particularly in the southwest quadrant of the United States, as Democratic and Republican platforms are asserted daily in the weeks prior to the presidential election. Inspired directly by satellite photos of the US-Mexico border, de los Reyes's paintings acknowledge the very abstract nature of territorial borders, boasting occasionally discordant bilingual titles that are indices to the varying perspectives on notions of space and territory, as seen from each side. *Border Theory (slumber/silencio provisional)*, 2012, recalls Jules Olitski's stained Color Field paintings, while *Border Theory (second compression/ destellos espectrales)*, 2012, affects a Morris Louis pour painting, but with an uncharacteristically sharp, linear division between two sets of colors.

De los Reyes has long used poured media (enamel, bister, ink) to analogize metanarratives of migration, colonization, fluidity, and seepage. He wields a subtle but consistent hand in politicizing aesthetics, and the election season timing of this show hardly seems coincidental. While de los Reyes has abandoned the fervently representational icons of patriarchy and patriotism (flags, stars, big ships, skulls) that permeated his previous works, in "Border Theory" de los Reyes is himself an artistic explorer, taking up new aesthetics while keeping his eye firmly fixed on the horizon as he continues on a journey through notions of colonialism, conquest, and the yearning to find identity in a connection with place.

--Micol Hebron